ABSTRACT

"Hearing What We Cannot See":
Contradictions and Complications in a Multimodal Community-based Writing Project

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The purpose of this dissertation is to share the results of a case study that analyzes the contradictions that emerge between stakeholders involved in a multimodal community-based writing project in which students partnered with local "community experts" to compose 1-2 minute videos about the General Education Development (GED) test. Since research on service learning tends to overlook the perspective of the community partners, this study investigates their perspectives alongside students' and project sponsors' perspectives in order to identify how each stakeholder evaluates "success" in digitally-delivered community-based writing projects. Questionnaires were collected and follow-up interviews were conducted with community partners, students, and the project sponsor. Final videos and reflections were also collected from the students.

I apply Thomas Deans' adaptation of Activity Theory (AT) to analyze the goal-directed activity systems represented in this project. The community partners assessed the success of the project based on their assumptions about their roles in the project, which

they variously interpreted as "client," "mentor," or "guide." The community partners who viewed their role as "mentor" or "guide" were primarily interested in a process of student growth or moral transformation; the community partner who saw her role as "client" emphasized the quality of the final product. The students primarily assessed the success of the project based on their goals related to technical development and their willingness to practice creativity, flexibility, and problem solving. The sponsors' perspectives shifted as other stakeholders' perspectives complicated our initial assessments. I argue that rhetorical listening allows us to identify the different cultural logics that frame these assessments, which allows us to hear what we cannot see. This research suggests that success in multimodal community-based writing projects is complex and multivalent.

I conclude by providing recommendations for digital writing instructors who advocate mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships. These recommendations include articulating assumptions and clearly defining roles and values; designing ongoing methods of "seeing" the community; discussing the cultural logics of the digital writing classroom; inviting community partners to give feedback at regular intervals; incorporating listening as a rhetorical strategy; and evaluating the risk of publicly sharing the products based on what we hear.

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DEDICATION

To my family

CHAPTER ONE

Writing in the Age of Digital Media

From 2011 to 2014, I taught a Freshman Academic Seminar (FAS) every fall at

Baylor University. These FAS courses are comprised of first-semester freshman students

who have earned at least a score of 21 on the ACT or 550 (verbal) on the SAT. The idea

is that high-achieving students can fulfill core requirements by taking classes that

innovate on the basic curriculum using special themes and more rigorous assignments. To

that end, students at Baylor may take FAS 1302 in place of ENG 1302: Thinking and

Writing, the first course in the Freshman Composition sequence. I called my class

"Writing in the Age of Digital Media"; over the course of four years, this course evolved

from an exploration of issues like the digitization of books and the rising popularity of e-

readers to hands-on involvement composing videos about and for local community

organizations. The transformation was gradual, and, oddly, the result of the textbook I

had chosen to use, *Everything's a Text*.

Everything's a Text is divided into major sections that explore different types of

literacies: personal, oral, visual, digital, popular, academic, and civic (Melzer and

Coxwell-Teague v). What I found was that, though *Everything's a Text* was published the

year before, the chapter on civic literacies was trapped in a pre-digital past. While the

chapter on digital literacies explored websites like YouTube, Facebook, MySpace, and

Second Life, and blog platforms like Blogger, there was little to no mention of how these

sites could be used for purposes beyond entertainment or sociality. Of course, Metzer and

Coxwell-Teague are not entirely to blame. In 2010, social networking sites were relatively new, and people had only tentatively begun to imagine their potential for other purposes. Even as *Everything's a Text* was going to press, increasing numbers of everyday people were starting to use new forms of writing—broadly speaking, through Twitter updates, YouTube videos, and online petitions—"as power in public, political, and community-based situations" (Gabor qtd. in Melzer and Coxwell-Teague 488). And, to their credit, the civic literacy chapter does include an essay from Catherine Gabor in which she briefly suggests the Internet could be a potential "venue for civic literacy" (494). However, digital literacy was not considered a readily available method of participating in civic or community life. The disconnect between the chapters nagged at me. It was then that I asked myself the first iteration of the research question that guides this present study: "In what ways can students use their digital literacies for purposes beyond entertainment and communication with their friends? How can instructors of first-year writing design multimodal assignments that might improve the lives of our 'neighbors' —either locally or in a global, interconnected digital community?"

I made it my goal to supplement the text with a final assignment that asked students to analyze how various digital literacies were being used to provide solutions for social problems like LGTBQ teen bullying or facilitate activist movements like the Arab Spring.
[1] I guided my students to consider the gaps in *Everything's a Text*, and to envision a future that integrated digital technologies for more socially conscious ends. This digital-civic assignment seemed like a success; the student essays were full of what Cheryl E.

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[1] The assignment I ended up creating to fill the gap in *Everything's a Text* can be found in Appendix A.

Ball, Tia Scoffield Bowen, and Tyrell Fenn call "the teacher's happy-dance words," (19) or words that check all of the pedagogical boxes and make us feel that our teaching goals have been met. Though I did not yet know it, this experience was my first lesson that happy-dance words from students provide an incomplete and partial picture of a project's overall success.

I committed to start with my research question firmly in mind the next time I taught the FAS in the fall of 2012. In this course, I still used *Everything's a Text*, but I placed an emphasis on the civic, public, and community-based uses of digital literacies. Throughout the semester, we discussed the efficacy of using digital forms as a method of community engagement. We read Malcolm Gladwell's 2010 article[2] and determined that, yes, maybe the revolution would be tweeted. After all, 2012 was the year that a Change.org petition received over 2.2 million digital signatures and brought the man who killed Trayvon Martin before a federal grand jury (Martin and Fulton). It was also the year Invisible Children's Kony 2012 video reached 100 million views in just six days (Kanczula). And my students came to class thrilled to discuss how President Barack Obama had made history by being the first president to participate in a Reddit AMA (Ask Me Anything) (Hastings). Encouraged by these tangible examples of using digital literacies to engage with communities and issues, students collaboratively composed and circulated their own Change.org petition, participated in microvolunteerism activities for non-profits all over the country, and composed multimodal videos that profiled how local non-profit organizations were addressing needs in the Waco community. In Deans' taxonomy, this last project fell under the "writing *about* the community" category.

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[2] "Small Change: Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted." *The New Yorker.* Condé Nast, 4 Oct. 2010, Web. 12 Dec. 2014.

As I collected flash drives and CDs of my students' final video projects, I experienced a "moment in teaching" that has stayed with me (Stock). It seemed antithetical to participatory culture (Jenkins; Lankshear and Knobel, *DIY Media* 9-12) that all of the time and energy spent on these projects was being zipped into a plastic bag that would end up sitting in a drawer in my office. Since one of my goals was to avoid pseudotransactional forms of writing (Petraglia) and ask students to compose for real audiences, it seemed vitally important to ensure that these audiences actually existed. I began tweaking my approach again, which resulted in three primary changes that I planned to implement the following fall, the semester in which I conducted the present case study:

1. Develop relationships with community partners instead of letting students choose organizations based on their interests. The final videos that the students created were quite often powerful displays of their engagement with the aims of the local community organization; however, the videos had no hope for viewership outside of the classroom since they were unsolicited by the community partners and submitted solely to me.

2. Focus on using digital literacies in response to needs represented in the Waco community. I realized that students value the work that digital literacies can do, but these learning experiences served more effectively as a bridge toward understanding their responsibility to their local communities than as an end in and of themselves.

3. Hone my own skills in multimodal composition and design. If I planned to continue teaching a community-based writing course that harnessed the power of

digital media, I needed a stronger theoretical and technical background. To address this deficit, I attended the Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) Conference at The Ohio State University with Cynthia L. Selfe and Scott Lloyd DeWitt during the summer of 2013.

The Problem:
How to Evaluate "Success" in a Multimodal Community-based Writing Project

It is fall 2013 and I have just finished teaching the latest iteration of this class. I leave for Christmas break feeling proud of what my first-year writing students have accomplished after completing a multimodal community-based writing project in which they composed videos about the General Education Development (GED) test for members of the local Waco community. The students threw themselves into learning new methods of composing, discerned for themselves what a successful multimodal project should look like, taken a ride outside of "the Baylor bubble" to challenge their assumptions about the local community, and developed a more sophisticated understanding of using multimodal composing tools for the purpose of community engagement. One student even took the time to re-work his traditional print essay during finals week so that it could be featured on a local community blog. The woman who runs the blog and helped me design the multimodal community-based writing project, who also happens to hold an administrative position at my university, was pleased, as well. Furthermore, several of the community members we partnered with have reached out to say how much they have enjoyed being involved in the project. It feels like a win-win-win. Students learning how to compose in multiple modes? Check. Students engaged in

the composing process? Check. Students demonstrating rhetorical skill and competencies? Check. Students connecting with needs in the local community? Check.

Imagine my surprise, then, when my victory lap is interrupted by an email from another community partner: "Before I vote on the videos, I would really like to talk with you. I have some concerns. Is that OK?" After later meeting with this community partner and hearing about her perceptions of the project, I am rattled. I experience what Paulo Freire called "ruptura," a disruption that marked a critical juncture in how I operate as a teacher-researcher. I make it my goal to figure out how so many different people could be involved in the same project, view the same videos, and come to such radically different conclusions about the success, or failure, of the project as a whole. When I distribute a questionnaire to all of the community partners, I learn an uncomfortable truth: this concerned community partner is not an outlier. There are others who, since they have not explicitly been asked for their feedback, do not express their thoughts about how the project has failed to meet their expectations in one way or another.

The Need for Multiple Perspectives in Community-based Writing Projects

Community-based writing, also referred to as service learning or community writing, first gained popularity during the "public turn" in composition and rhetoric in which scholars and teachers looked beyond the university walls to participate in civic life. James M. Dubinsky describes service-learning pedagogy as: "*learning* (establishing clearly defined academic goals), *serving* (applying what one learns for the communal/societal benefit), and *reflecting* (thoughtful engagement about the service-learning work's value" (64). Thomas Deans identifies three service-learning models typically used in the college writing classroom: "writing *for* the community, writing

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about the community, and writing *with* the community" (*Writing Partnerships* 17).

Scholars in composition and rhetoric have deepened our field's understanding of the potential of community-based writing initiatives by describing the benefits of student engagement (Deans; Adler-Kassner; Cooper and Julier; Mathieu), service learning as citizen formation (Dubinsky; Cushman, "Rhetorician"; Lisman; Herzberg; Giroux and McLaren), and community literacy, or the developing print and digital literacies of community members (Flower; Hull and Katz; Hull and James; Ulman, DeWitt, and Selfe; Selfe, "Stories"; Selfe and Hawisher; Scenters-Zapico et al.). However, the perspective of community partners, those members of the community who agree to work alongside and be "served" by university students, is often overlooked in the literature (see Mathieu 93-95). Randy Stoecker and Elizabeth A. Tryon call these the "unheard voices" of service learning (vii). And, if the "paucity of recent research" is any indication, there are many perspectives we have yet to hear (Stoecker and Tryon 5). This dissertation project thus offers a glimpse of this absent perspective by presenting the results of a case study of a university-community partnership in a first-year digital writing class.

Achieving Equality by Listening to a Multiplicity of Voices

Every semester, thousands upon thousands of university students participate in projects meant to help the communities in which they live and learn. All too often, the faculty and students involved in these projects reach the 15th week feeling quite optimistic despite the fact that we have not requested feedback in any kind of a systematic way from anyone outside of the classroom. Consequently, we are left with a partial and incomplete picture of the campus-community partnership. Isabel Baca argues that "True community partnerships can only take place when all the parties involved

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(students, faculty, agencies, administration, communities) recognize each other as equal stakeholders" (xv). True "equality," however, ought to extend beyond the service-learning experience itself. Since a key feature of service-learning pedagogy includes reflection in order to determine the value of the service-learning activity (Anson), it makes sense to extend this practice to other key stakeholders. In an effort to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this particular community-based writing project, I sought reflective feedback from the community partners, the students, and the project's "sponsors."[3]

Here I provide a perspective on the "multiplicity of voices" at work in community-based collaborations with the ultimate goal of complicating how teachers who incorporate service-learning pedagogies assess the overall success of these partnerships (Bakhtin).[4] Formal measures of assessment in composition and rhetoric typically focus on student learning, but, as Paula Mathieu argues, "The stakes of public work are broader than classroom concerns. As such, our means for evaluating this kind of public work should go beyond traditional markers of student achievement and evaluation" (93). Instead of limiting our assessment of a community-based writing project to the students, we need to listen to formative feedback from various stakeholders and turn the assessment back on ourselves—the teachers and designers of the project. By sharing the results of rhetorically listening to this variety of perspectives, I hope to

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[3] Though I wanted to include perspectives from a focus group of GED test-takers, I was unable to gain access to this crucial segment of the Waco community for this project.

[4] Mikhail Bakhtin calls this use of multiple voices "heteroglossia," or "speech *in another's language* [that serves] to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of *double-voiced discourse*. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions. And all the while these two voices are dialogically interrelated, they—as it were—know about each other … it is as if they actually hold a conversation with each other" (324).

complicate how we evaluate success in multimodal community-based writing projects so that we may have a fuller and more complex picture of composing for communities in the digital age.

The community partners. The primary goal of this study is to analyze how community members evaluate the success of multimodal community-based writing projects and the affordances of community engagement in networked spaces. As a field, we largely do not know what drives community members to partner with universities in community-based writing projects, how they feel towards the students with whom they are partnering, what they ultimately "get" out of these projects, how they feel about the experience overall, or what suggestions for improvement they might have for these projects and/or partnerships. When it comes to assessing the effects of a community-based writing project on members of the community, we have a great deal left to learn. As Thomas Deans, Barbara Roswell, and Adrian J. Wurr observe in *Writing and Community Engagement: A Critical Sourcebook,*

> most of the published studies on community writing take the form of critical reflections on practice. Few studies, however, draw upon empirical research methods such as ethnography or discourse analysis… In all, we know a good deal about what exemplary community partnerships look like and how to theorize about them in sophisticated ways but relatively little about the effects of literacy collaborations on university students or community participants. Even less is known about the writing itself. (8)

This dissertation is thus a response to calls to conduct empirical research on the unheard voices in university-community partnerships.

The students. Another goal of this dissertation is to examine the broader application of first-year writing students' digital literacies with an emphasis on digital

methods of video production and delivery. We know that composing in multiple modes develops students' rhetorical awareness (Kress, "Gains and Losses," *Multimodality*; Selfe, *Multimodal*; Hocks; Hill; George; Halbritter; Halbritter, Blon, and Creighton; Rice), equips them with a greater range of rhetorical tools to construct texts, (New London Group; Selfe, *Multimodal,* "The Movement"; Kress, "English"; Kress and van Leeuwen; Palmeri; Shipka; Coley; Powell, Alexander, and Borton; Westbrook), increases their critical awareness (Selber; Selfe, *Multimodal*; Takayoshi and Selfe), and presents them with new opportunities to participate in emerging forms of civic engagement, digital activism, and public rhetoric (Grabill, *"Writing Community,"* "Citizen Computing," "Sustaining"; Earl and Schussman; Kahn and Kellner; Kahne, Feezell, and Lee; Muhler; Youmans and York; Vie, "In Defense"; Sheridan, Michel, and Ridolfo; Sidler; Portman-Daley, "Reshaping Slacktivist," "Subtle Democracy"; Britt-Smith; Rheingold, "Using Participatory Media"; Christensen; YouTube Next Lab). However, the application of multimodal pedagogy in the service of community issues is a developing area of inquiry. This study presents the results of asking students to reflect on using digital literacies, such as digital composing and publishing, as a means to intervene on behalf of the local community.

The sponsors of the project. A third goal is to consider the challenges of collaboratively designing a multimodal community-based writing project that values multiple stakeholder perspectives and aims to understand the cultural logics that frame their different claims. Community-based writing scholars propose activity theory (AT) analysis as a way of understanding the generative potential of the contradictions that occur "between and within" the university and community activity systems (Higgins,

Long, and Flower; Deans, "Shifting Locations"). Applying activity theory to this specific

context allows us to nuance our understanding of "success" in campus-community

partnerships. I also present the key themes related that emerged from a reflective

interview between myself, a teacher-researcher, and Phoebe, a community member who

occupies dual roles as a Baylor administrator and a community leader in charge of a local

website and weekly newsletter.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant for three primary reasons. First, this ethnographically-

oriented case study foregrounds the community partners' perspectives on participating in

a multimodal community-based writing project. Various community partners were

involved throughout each stage—planning, researching, drafting, revising, and viewing—

of the community video project. Their input shaped the design of heuristic activities as

well as the contours of the final course project, a multimodal web series of 1-2 minute

videos that promoted adult education and the General Education Development (GED)

Test. Most critically, community partners shared their feedback after the project ended

through surveys and interviews, which revealed the complex and multivalent nature of

"success" in community-based writing projects (Cella). The contradictions present in

these stakeholder perspectives on their roles and desired outcomes demonstrate how any

activity affects and is affected by other activity systems

Second, this study offers a unique perspective on multimodal composition and

community-based writing by asking students to confront their assumptions about

diversity—particularly their perspectives on issues of social class and race. Rhetoric and

composition has explored the intersection of social class and writing by examining

working-class rhetorics and culture (DeGenaro; Zebroski, "Social Class"; Beech; Roeper; Peckham; Sohn; Soliday), working-class literacies (Hoggart; Rose; Lindquist and Seitz; Dunbar-Odom; Bloom; Sohn; O'Dair), composition as a middle-class enterprise (Bloom; Robillard), community literacies (Flower, *Community Literacy*; Knochel and Selfe; Hull and Katz), language-rights (Smitherman and Villanueva; Delpit) and basic writing pedagogies (Shaughnessy; Horner and Lu; Rose). Despite these productive areas of scholarly inquiry, the everyday experience in the classroom is not quite as evolved. In a typical first-year writing class at Baylor, class is often still "the elephant in the living room, the absent presence, the family secret, the tabu" (Zebroski, "The Turn to Social Class" 773). This study presents one less-than-successful attempt to prepare students to empathize with and compose for audiences from different backgrounds based on the advice of a community partner. Case study interviews with students and community partners triangulated with analysis of textual artifacts such as questionnaire data and student work revealed that these "consciousness-raising activities" for students must be collaborative, sensitive, and ongoing.

Third, this dissertation offers a new take on feminist praxis by considering the challenges associated with rhetorical listening and the public distribution of digital work. Rhetorical listening is "a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to *any* person, text, or culture" (Ratcliffe 17). As a strategy for cross-cultural understanding, rhetorical listening has great potential for community-based writing researchers interested in receiving feedback from the unheard voices in community projects; however, the issue is complicated by the methods of digital composition and circulation made possible by twenty-first-century participatory culture. In short, making

these community videos publicly available online makes some stakeholders uncomfortable since they operate within different cultural logics. This study thus makes recommendations in response to some of the challenges associated with the feminist practice of rhetorical listening and being open to competing definitions of success.

Service Learning: Where Civic Duty Meets Community Action

In 2009, the NCTE president Kathleen Blake Yancey invoked "a call to action, a call to research and articulate new composition, a call to help our students compose often, compose well, and through these composings, become the citizen writers of our country, the citizen writers of our world, and the writers of our future" ("Writing" 1). Though Yancey's focus in this address is the development of 21st century literacies, this call underscores a cornerstone of rhetorical education that dates back to classical Greece: that those who teach rhetoric are preparing students to participate in the public sphere as citizens. The civic roots of Composition and Rhetoric date back to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in which he gives instruction on speaking for a variety of purposes for the public good (1.3.3). James Dubinsky traces this historical trajectory in detail in "Service-Learning as a Path to Virtue: The Ideal Orator in Professional Communication," noting that Aristotle believed that learning rhetoric was practical but also had moral purpose (61). The connection of rhetoric to a corresponding moral function continues through the teachings of other classical rhetoricians including Isocrates, Cicero, and Quintilian (Dubinsky, "Service-Learning" 61). In *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian links the two ideas explicitly with the picture of the "good man speaking well" (12.1.3), which reinforces the idea that the true aim of education is the development of good citizens who engage with the duties of community life (12.2.6). Dubinsky suggests that service learning is the direct

descendant of the classical rhetorical tradition and that, "when used with care and reflection, service-learning can be a bridge or a path toward virtue and can create ideal orators in the classical sense defined by Quintilian: orators and citizens who put their knowledge and skills to work for the common good" ("Service-Learning" 62). This form of "learning-by-doing for others" (Dubinsky 261) takes students outside of the classroom and treats them as citizens who have something to offer their communities.

John Dewey and other Progressive-era pragmatists are also credited with promoting the civic dimensions of the educational project. Progressivism in education grew out of "the optimistic faith in the possibility that all institutions could be reshaped to better serve society, making it healthier, more prosperous, and happier" (Berlin 58). More specifically, Dewey viewed education as an answer to address social ills, a "freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims" (83). The belief that the fate of democracy depends upon an educated citizenry is, as Dewey reflects, "a familiar fact" (73). What Dewey added to the discussion was a conviction borne of his pragmatic philosophy that education ought to be experiential; consequently, he stressed that students ought to be trained to participate in the life of the community (Deans, "Service-Learning" 17). The primary aim of education, then, was to facilitate learning experiences that would result in the creation of transformed citizens.

The Benefits of Community-Based Writing for Students

Research on community-based writing focuses on projects that serve local, face-to-face communities using traditional and, increasingly, digital rhetorical resources (Adler-Kassner, "Service-Learning"; Deans, *Writing Partnerships*; Bacon, "Community

Service"; Flower, *Community Literacy*; Mathieu; Coogan; Herzberg; Heilker; Huckin; Cushman, "Rhetorician," "Toward a Praxis"; Cushman and Green; Grabill, *Writing Community Change*, "Community Computing"; Zoetewey, Simmons, and Grabill; Hull and Katz; Hull and James; Knight). Most of these researchers tend to take as their starting point that university students benefit from participating in projects that encourage them to compose for purposes beyond the classroom. Thomas Huckin, for instance, reflects that adding a community component "inject[s] more realism" into writing classes since students are responding to real world needs and exigencies, which can increase student participation and engagement (49). Additional benefits include "helping students realize the power of language, gain broad experience with a variety of genres, and better understand themselves as parts of larger communities" (Adler-Kassner, "Service-Learning" 28). This last point, understanding community participation and civic responsibility, is often promoted as one the primary goals of a composition classroom (Yancey, "Writing"; Dubinsky; Huckin; Herzberg; Greco; Simmons) with roots dating back to classical Greece and continuing on through John Dewey and progressive approaches to education during the first half of the twentieth century (Berlin; Wan).

Community-based writing and service learning serve this pedagogical tradition by providing unique opportunities for students to see themselves and their actions as affecting a greater whole. Some of the typical service-learning projects that facilitate this development in students include writing "research reports, newsletter articles, and manuals for local nonprofit agencies; tutoring children and bringing that experience back to the classroom as a text to be analyzed alongside other texts; and collaborating with urban youth to craft documents in intercultural, hybrid rhetorics" (Deans, *Writing*

Partnerships 1). In this dissertation, I will use "community-based writing" and "service

learning" to refer to literate acts composed for, with, or about communities.

Community-based writing projects typically focus on local, physical communities

since students are a part of these communities by virtue of their residence and their

proximity to service opportunities (Cushman, "Rhetorician"; Flower, "Partners"). These

projects pose a number of tangible benefits for students. It is my contention that a

multimodal community-based writing project like the one I describe in this dissertation

provide a similar function by:

- *Restoring the notion of ideal citizenship* by connecting the academic study of

  rhetoric to civic responsibility (Dewey; Freire; Dubinsky; Cushman,

  "Rhetorician"; Lisman; Herzberg; Hutchinson; Giroux and McLaren). By

  training students to participate in the larger public sphere (Dorman and

  Dorman; Weisser; Greco), students develop civic identities that connect

  rhetorical practice to social justice, causing them to challenge their

  assumptions and confront class, race, and gender biases (Lindquist and Seitz;

  Gilbride-Brown; Vaccaro; Chesler and Scalera). Though some researchers

  criticize cultural studies and critical pedagogy because these approaches tend

  to emphasize awareness and reflection instead of providing students with

  opportunities to act (Smit; Miller; Drew), I propose that a greater emphasis on

  multimodal community-based writing is one way we can begin to address this

  perceived gap.

- *Increasing student motivation towards writing* by connecting writing to

  external exigencies and emphasizing public needs (Deans, *Writing*

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Partnerships; Cooper and Julier; Mathieu). In contrast with theories that critique the "pseudotransactional" properties of school-based writing assignments (Petraglia; Wells), this approach to community-based writing underscores that students can accomplish "real work" with their written work.

- *Enhancing student learning* by improving the quality of their writing (Wurr; Adler-Kassner et al.; Bacon, "Community Service"; Brack and Hall; Deans, *Writing Partnerships*; Dorman and Dorman).

- *Stressing the importance of rhetorical analysis* by responding to specific contexts for specific purposes (Bacon, "Building a Swan's Nest"; Heilker). David Coogan, however, cautions that instructors must first model these rhetorical analyses in the classroom before asking students to compose on behalf of community members.

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First Do No Harm:
Crafting Community-based Writing Projects with the Community in Mind

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While the pedagogical and social benefits of community-based writing projects for students are frequently observed, we have fewer ideas about how these same projects might benefit the communities we aim to serve. We do know a few things, broadly speaking, about the impact of service learning on community partners. For one, we know that service-learning projects give community partners insight into the university structure and its resources—for good or for ill. Gelmon et al. discovered that community partners valued the assets of the university, yet they also viewed the institution as "compartmentalized, political, and fragmented" (102). Additionally, these same community partners expressed frustration about the rigid constraints of the academic

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calendar (Gelmon et al. 102). In another study, Maryann Gray et al. surveyed over 800 community partners over a period of two years. The community partners indicated two primary benefits of partnering with university students: (1) they felt student volunteers enhanced the community organizations' visibility, and (2) student volunteers "were perceived as having positive impacts on staff morale" (38). The greatest weaknesses they identified were related to the students' limited availability due to extracurricular commitments as well as the inflexibility of the academic calendar. These studies, though outside of the field of composition and rhetoric, speak to trends that community partners observe during their participation in service-learning projects and can generally inform our understanding of community partner experiences.

We also know a few things about how to avoid having a negative impact on the community. Scholarship on community-based writing abounds with anecdotal evidence of service-learning "failures," or initiatives that, upon reflection, could be improved upon the next time around (Bacon, "Community Service Writing"; Restaino and Cella; Gottschalk-Druschke, Pittendrigh, and Chin; Dubinsky; DePalma). The most significant lessons that can be extracted from these praxis-based reflections are:

Community Partners Desire Sustainable Partnerships

Scholarship on university-community partnerships addresses the need for sustainable partnerships that can provide stability for communities beyond the academic semester (Mathieu; Cushman, "Rhetorician"). In the epigraph to "Sustainable Service Learning Programs," Ellen Cushman directly speaks to this concern by quoting a community social worker in Richmond: "You all from Berkeley come in here with your hit-it and quit-it attitude. You get the info you want, then leave. These kids and this

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community need a guarantee you'll be around" (40). Eli Goldblatt agrees, arguing that communities need "teachers who are not just passing through and programs that do not appear one year and evaporate the next" (316). Sustainability, however, is difficult to maintain for any number of institutional, professional, or personal reasons, as Jessica Restaino and Laurie JC Cella present in the edited collection *Unsustainable: Re-imagining Community Literacy, Public Writing, Service-Learning, and the University.*

Community Partners Do Not Want Charity

While charity is not necessarily bad (see Morton), this approach to service learning positions students in the position of altruistic "savior" or "hero" instead of cultivating "the analytic and academic skills, the moral acuity, and the social sensitivity they [need] to assess critically and respond collectively to authentic problems" (Kahne and Westheimer 595). James M. Dubinsky draws on Kahne and Westheimer's work to suggest that we need to promote "change" instead of "charity" to transform how our students approach service opportunities. Ellen Cushman also rejects the charity model and draws on Pierre Bourdieu's work to stress the need for reciprocity in university-community partnerships ("Rhetorician" 243). Reciprocity can be as involved as a researcher offering to help a community member write a resume or college applications, as Cushman describes in "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change," or a student offering to give a copy of her final product for a community partner to keep and use. The give-and-take exchange places community partners and the university on a more even plane and "prevent[s] the work from becoming altruistic" (Cushman 247). Reciprocity is thus a key feature of community-based writing project and curriculum design (Herzberg; Cushman, "Rhetorician"; Flower and Heath; Rose and Weiser).

Community Partners' Needs are Local, Situated, and Specific

Ultimately, community partners desire usable end products. This goal can be achieved by developing strong relationships with the community partners and considering how each specific project is rhetorically situated (Bitzer). Paying attention to local contexts, exigencies, and audiences leads to understanding about what the needs are, which is "particularly critical and complex in multicultural and hierarchically organized communities, where different stakeholder groups with unique perspectives will likely perceive the problem in different ways and will recognize different audiences as appropriate" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 170). This process of understanding begins during the project design stage, extends through scaffolding student interactions, and continues after the semester has concluded. Despite our best intentions, this goal is not always achieved (Restaino and Cella); however, instructors can ensure more favorable conclusions by collaborating with community partners to ensure that their needs are being met.

Digital Literacies and Participatory Culture

As we spend more of our time communicating in online discursive environments, we are developing new literacies and discovering new community-based exigencies that warrant our response and participation. Jenkins et al. define new media literacies as the "set of cultural competencies and social skills that young people need in the new media landscape" (*Confronting the Challenges* xiii). New media literacies, as a denotative term, is essentially synonymous with a number of other terms including "new literacies" (Coiro et al.; Lankshear & Knobel, *New Literacies*) and "digital literacies" (Lankshear and

Knobel, *Digital Literacies*). The binding principle is that these terms encompass "the myriad social practices and conceptions of engaging in meaning making mediated by texts that are produced, received, distributed, exchanged, etc., via digital codification" (Lankshear and Knobel, *Digital Literacies* 5). Though these terms are similar, "digital literacies" is distinct in that it describes the locus of the communicative act over the ever-evolving nature of the communicative tools. Cheryl Ball and James Kalmbach see this very "newness" of new media as an advantage, pointing out that the "instability" and "uncertainty" of the term necessitate constant attention and theorizing since what counts as "new" is constantly changing (5). While I see the value in casting a critical eye on technological developments that might lull us into complacency with their ubiquity and familiarity, the boundary-less expanse of new media is too "bleeding edge" for my purposes here. My argument rests upon the notion that we ought to expand how we think about and use our everyday digital literacies like digital video production and distribution. Instead of passively receiving media content, young people who possess quotidian digital literacies are more frequently positioned as active participants, shaping culture and enacting change by producing their own digital content (Anderson; Selber; Getto, Cushman, and Ghosh; Porter; Bruns; Sorapure, "Information").

Henry Jenkins et al. refer to this shift in content production as "participatory culture," which is characterized by "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one's creations, and some type of information membership whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices" (Jenkins et al. 5-6). The types of rhetorical intervention now available to students pose a number of possibilities for instructors of composition and rhetoric. In

particular, this is a kairotic moment for instructors to respond to Howard Rheingold's call to "make use of the natural enthusiasm of today's young digital natives" by teaching them how "to use participatory media to speak and organize about issues [which] might well be the most important citizenship skill that digital natives need to learn if they are going to maintain or revive democratic governance" ("Using Participatory Media" 3).

Though these benefits have potential for student writers in the first-year writing classroom, there is a danger in uncritically promoting participatory culture. These forms of digital literacy undoubtedly display varying levels of technical sophistication, but they also require critical reflection in order to seize the full weight of rhetorical effectiveness (Selber). David Silver cautions that we need to be aware of how "the writeable" web represents both "hype" and "hope," explaining that software applications conflate "community and commerce, citizen and consumer" with the end goal "to consumer the user" (n. pag.). For example, the ad revenue generated by YouTube, the video-sharing site that students in my class used, was estimated to hit $5.6 billion in 2013 (Worstall). As students composed multimodal videos for my class, they were simultaneously contributing video content that ended up being flanked by ads on YouTube's website. Digital networks appear to democratize the communication landscape, making viewership and connection possible, but then that connection is monetized in a process that Jodi Dean terms "communicative capitalism" ("Communicative Capitalism" 59). Regardless of the content, as these digital texts circulate, they generate profits for YouTube (i.e., Google). These issues of uncompensated digital labor or "playbor," the fine line between "play" and "labor" in digital environments, are worth seriously considering when designing multimodal assignments (Scholz; Dean, "Communicative

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Capitalism"; Fuchs, "Labor")—especially since students often do not think of these class projects as "work" in the same way that they tend to view traditional, print-based essays.

Ultimately, no computer program, website, or app is value-neutral, as Cynthia and Richard Selfe argued back in 1994 ("The Politics"). And as we continue to create digital content using widely available technologies, we must be cognizant of the ways in which participatory culture also requires us to participate in "neoliberal capitalism in and through globally networked communication" (Dean, *Blog Theory* 31). Without exercising a "critical technological literacy" (Selfe, "Technology and Literacy") that can expose these realities, students fail to pay attention to the social and ideological forces always-already at work whenever they digitally compose or communicate (Selfe and Hawisher; Sidler; Vie, "Digital Divide 2.0"). Therefore, students also need to be taught to how to look at digital tools through a critical lens. Stephanie Vie argues that instructors of composition and rhetoric ought to design lessons using digital tools with which students are familiar such as "online social networking sites, podcasts, audio mash-ups, blogs, and wikis ("Digital Divide 2.0" n. pag.) with the explicit purpose of teaching students how to use these quotidian tools more critically.

The benefits and risks of participatory culture made possible by digital technologies are worth interrogating in the classroom. Students are not going to stop using YouTube, Facebook, Twitter or Google anytime soon, but we can teach them how to be aware of the ways in which they are participating and for what teleological reasons. As Justin Hodgson argues, "the issue is not a matter of how [students] might be learning to 'write' outside of our rhetoric and composition classrooms but rather what they might be able to do, say, express, create, change, shape, and impact with some expert guidance

in developing more sophisticated, rhetorical new media skills" (n. pag.). The fact that many millennials participate in digital discursive arenas and use their digital literacies to communicate with others is no longer a question; the question of how these skills can be honed to improve the lives of others, however, remains an ongoing field of inquiry.

<p style="text-align:center">*A Praxis of New Media: Multimodal Projects for Communities*</p>

As digital technologies have proliferated, the kinds of service-learning projects in which students can engage have likewise expanded to include new genres and modalities. In additional to basic skills in traditional alphabetic literacy, these projects require a more sophisticated understanding of what The New London Group termed "multimodal design," or design beyond the linguistic mode of print that features multiple modal elements combining "Visual Meanings (images, page layouts, screen formats); Audio Meanings (music, sound effects); Gestural Meanings (body language, sensuality); Spatial Meanings (the meanings of environmental spaces, architectural spaces); and Multimodal Meanings" (80). Some of the multimodal projects that students can create, design, or compose include websites, digital videos, databases, and archives designed for audiences local to the community or university. For example, H. Brooke Hessler has orchestrated a service-learning partnership with the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum for the past ten years in which her first-year writing students create virtual exhibits and digitize artifacts from the Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The community-based writing project that my students participated in during the fall of 2013 is another example of a project that draws on multimodal literacies on behalf of the local community. Though a community-based writing project distributed

<p style="text-align:center">23</p>

through the Internet might reach a broader secondary audience, the primary audience is still the local community partner/s that initially agreed to collaborate on the project.

In this dissertation, I use "multimodal community-based writing" to describe assignments that combine multiple modes to write for, with, or about communities. I will use the term "digital literacies" to refer to the range of practices that make literate acts possible in digital discursive environments, including but not necessarily limited to basic functional literacy (Selber), information literacy (Kuhlthau; Breivik), and social media literacies (Rheingold, "Attention"; Dadurka and Pigg). I use "multimodal literacy" to describe proficiency in composing with multiple semiotic modes (The New London Group; Kress, *Multimodality*; Kress and Van Leeuwen; Takayoshi and Selfe; Selfe, "The Movement," *Multimodal*; Swartz). I use "multimodal composing tools" to refer to specific functions related to audio and video production and delivery through online providers like SoundCloud and YouTube. While multimodal composition is not limited to projects that incorporate digital media (Shipka; Alexander; Kress, "English"), this study will focus on specifically digital forms of expression. I use "students," "writers," "millennials," and "young people" interchangeably to refer to the people who populate our first-year writing classes.

Since the development of digital tools and technologies, scholar-teachers in composition and rhetoric have sought to merge theories of community-based writing with digital literacies. Ellen Cushman, in particular, has developed a "praxis of new media" with the two-fold goal of "1) enhancing civic participation and academic preparedness of students, and 2) addressing issues and problems that community members deem important" ("Toward a Praxis," 114). Cushman enacts this praxis of new media with

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students in her multimedia classes —most notably with her Michigan State University students who develop educational resources, websites, and digital movies for, and in collaboration with, the Cherokee Nation (Cushman, "Toward a Praxis"; Cushman and Green; Getto, Cushman, and Ghosh). As twenty-first-century students develop these core digital competencies both in and out of class, they can become valuable resources at local community media centers (see Johnson and Menichelli, for an overview of Scribe Video Center in Philadelphia; Appalshop in Whitesburg, Kentucky; and the National Alliance for Media Arts and Culture); multiliteracy community centers like the Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth (DUSTY) in Oakland, California (Hull and James; Hull and Katz); community literacy projects like the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives (Ulman, DeWitt, and Selfe; Selfe, "Stories"; Selfe and Hawisher; Scenters-Zapico et al.) and the Hilltop community media project in Columbus, Ohio (Knochel and Selfe); children's programs like the U.S. Forest Service Research Lab's "Kid's Corner" (Sheppard); and social media research centers like Beautiful Social in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Knight).

The potential of participating in webbed environments for the purposes of writing for, about, or with the local community actually has an established history in the field of composition and rhetoric. In 1997, for instance, Alison Regan and John Zuern conducted a study in which students at the University of Hawaii at Manoa "produced print and Web-based learning materials for members of the target community, essays reflecting on their service learning experiences, and formal research papers on topics such as literacy, public access to technology, and social policies relating to computers and the Internet" (177). The successes that Regan and Zuern initially reported—that students gained improved

communication, technology, and collaborative skills as well as greater sensitivity toward issues of social inequity; community learners received job training skills—inspired other teacher-researchers to adapt this model to fit their own local contexts. Cynthia Novak and Lorie Goodman later designed a course at Pepperdine University that asked students to compose websites that included testimonials about their experiences volunteering with local community organizations and links to external resources in order to motivate their viewers to get involved in local issues like poverty and homelessness. Floyd Ogburn and Barbara Wallace provide a powerful example of "writing for" the community by asking first-year writing students to create online profiles for local social service agencies as a capstone project after a year-long composition course. Madeleine Sorapure gave her students the task of improving the design of a campus volunteering website to encourage more students to volunteer in the local community at the University of California, Santa Barbara ("Web Writing"). The success of these projects was largely determined by the educational and social benefits that students received and the community partners' perspectives were not solicited.

Origin Story: The Collaborative Development of the Community Video Project

From a pedagogical perspective, my goals for the multimodal community-based writing project are clear: I want my students to practice using digital literacies as a means for local community engagement. During the summer of 2013, I send an email to Phoebe, a graduate of and administrator at Baylor University known for maintaining a weekly community newsletter and website about local events, volunteer needs, and job opportunities. I have been reading the newsletter for about six months, so I feel I have experienced a crash course in the common issues facing the city despite the fact that I

have been living here for the past five years. Phoebe seems like the perfect person to collaborate with on a community project—one that will meet an actual need and provide valuable instruction for my students as a byproduct of using digital literacies in the service of a local community issue. I have just returned from the two-week long Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) Institute at the Ohio State University, and I am equipped with more technical confidence than I have ever had. I know that I could use what I had learned at DMAC to help address a clear need in the community, but I need help to define what that need was. In my first email to Phoebe, I briefly describ what the class is and what I feel my students should be capable of by the end of the semester:

> In addition to being available to volunteer over the course of the semester, these 19 students will learn how to edit audio and video, create and maintain WordPress websites (and maybe some coding with Dreamweaver), maintain social media presences, draft online petitions, create and/or promote Pass Times /indiegogo/ Kickstarter campaigns, set up microvolunteering tasks through Sparked or IfWeRanTheWorld, etc. They can work in teams or individually --with different organizations or all with the same organization. All that to say, I'm flexible and there are a lot of different ways I can reach my pedagogical objectives. The main thing is to encourage a sense of responsibility to the local Waco community and to connect the resources they can offer to existing needs.

Naively, I hope that Phoebe will have a clear sense of how these students might be used as resources—that maybe she is even waiting for such an offer. This assumption is the first of many that I personally confront throughout this experience of working with community members. In short, the problem is not that I assume there are needs in the local community. After all, there are clear, recognizable needs; however, the problem is that I assume my students could be the solution to these problems. Instead, a more appropriate stance is to listen first and then work alongside the community.

While this observation seems obvious, the learning curve for teachers who assign community writing projects is often just as steep as it is for the students they are teaching. Chris Anson provides an apt overview of service-learning teachers' developmental stages: "they may proceed from initial enthusiasm and commitment (even religious zeal), to a preoccupation with logistics and programming, to the experience of conflict and ideological puzzle, to a realization that the entire enterprise requires ongoing critical reflection and commitment balanced by intellectual skepticism" (177). These stages are not necessarily linear, but they are accurate. My enthusiasm eclipses my critical understanding of how to talk about the affordances of merging multimodal composition with community-based writing.

I first realize that I needed to balance this zeal with humility and critical distance when I meet with Phoebe for the first time to discuss the possibilities of collaborating on the project together. As I discuss some of the ways that students could apply what they are learning to real-world contexts, I casually mention a flyer I have recently seen that advertises a trivia night charity event. Phoebe is excited that she, too, knows about the event and has seen the flyer. I then proceed to explain how my students could take that same information and create a better flyer using basic principles of visual design. Her face falls. I quickly learn that I cannot laud the virtues of visual and multimodal literacies at the expense of the good work already being done in the community. I actually end up attending that charity event, and it is a packed room. It is a lesson I am glad, though embarrassed, to learn early: it is not my place to identify "problems" in the community that my students can solve. Listening proves to be a much more effective strategy.

Sponsorship as Access to the Community

Phoebe ultimately becomes a sponsor for the class project in two primary ways. First, she is a literacy sponsor in the sense traditionally recognized by the field of composition and rhetoric. Deborah Brandt defines these sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (166). Phoebe facilitates the work that my students will do by agreeing to help plan the project and give feedback on the students' videos. Phoebe thus acts as a sponsor by supporting my goals of expanding how writing is taught at Baylor by adding a multimodal element. As a Baylor alumna and, specifically, a graduate of the English department, she expresses enthusiasm for the partnership and is excited to see if any of the videos produced will be of high enough quality to post on local community websites. Though she needs no immediate assistance for her newsletter or website, she brainstorms three or four topics that my students might be able to compose as an end-of-semester video project for other community audiences.

In addition to being a sponsor of literacy in Brandt's sense of the term, Phoebe agrees to be my sponsor to the local community, introducing me to individuals who prove instrumental both to my teaching and to my research process. As David Fetterman notes, "A strong recommendation and introduction strengthen the fieldworker's capacity to work in a community and thus improve the quality of the data" (44). In this second sense, "a *sponsor* acts as something of a 'booster' for the project. A sponsor is someone who goes around and personally introduces you, vouches for your study, and helps you gain access" (Lindlof and Taylor 101). Phoebe is an ideal sponsor to the community since her work with the newsletter and website has made her a respected, well-connected figure.

The day after we meet for Diet Cokes at Whataburger, Phoebe sends me an email with more concrete ideas about creating online resources that will inform various audiences about the General Education Development (GED) Test. She also shared a list of individuals who she can "get to help us relatively easily and quickly." From the beginning of the project, Phoebe and I are partners.

Goal-Setting as Sponsors of the Project

Even though I am the teacher of record for this class, Phoebe and I share a common role as literacy sponsors for the students. We are both committed to ensuring that the project is a success for all stakeholders. While we do not articulate our definitions of "success," our primary goals as the designers of this community video project are to:

- Be responsive to the input and advice of the "community experts."

- Foreground reciprocity and facilitate student projects that could hopefully be of use to community partners.

- Help students see a different side of the local community.

- Educate students about different issues related to the GED test.

- Develop in students a sense of responsibility to the local community.

As a teacher, I have additional pedagogical aims related to the special topic of the course, digital writing. I see my role as a sponsor of multimodal literacy. In particular, after students complete FAS 1302, I expect them to:

- Understand that "literacy" is more than knowing how to read and write print-based texts.

- Approach digital writing projects with creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills.

- Develop an understanding that writing—both print-based and multimodal texts—is a process.

- Be able to evaluate and communicate the components of a successful multimodal project.

- Know how to analyze the effective rhetorical use of modal elements, when used in isolation and together.

- Be able to select the appropriate medium for a message.

- Be able to compose arguments—both multimodal videos and traditional essays—for a specific audience.

- Understand that writing in digital space requires extra awareness of rhetorical concerns, such as audience and context.

- Know how to use their digital literacies to solve problems in local and digital communities.

- Be able to devise a social media strategy and use metadata effectively.

Furthermore, these aims needed to coincide with the stated objectives of the first-year writing program at Baylor. Since I know that these pedagogical goals can be reached through a number of different avenues, I am open to the input from the community partners during our initial planning meeting, which I will discuss in Chapter Two.

Activity Systems: Listening to the Contradictions among Stakeholder Perspectives

At the very beginning of this research project, I have a question: "How can first-year writing students effectively use their digital literacies in the service of community issues?" What I discover, however, through surveys of and interviews with community partners and students, is that the definition of "effective" varies wildly depending on the

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goals of each individual involved in the digital community-based writing project. It is crucial to rhetorically listen to these varying perspectives from stakeholders and to know that contradictions are not a sign of failure. On the contrary, contradictions are vital for avoiding groupthink and maintaining heterogeneity of thought in a democracy. The productive potential of disagreement is not new to our field. Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, and Linda Flower observe the "generative power of *rivaling*, a strategy that asks writers to imagine alternative interpretations of a question, conflict, or problem" ("Community Literacy" 183). Henry Giroux proposes acknowledging and interrogating conflicting student voices in order to locate "languages of critique and possibility" (133). And John Trimbur seeks to "rehabilitate" notions of consensus to create spaces of conflict so that differences may be free to exist (610). More recently, Mark Alan Williams cites Anna Tsing's notion of "friction," or "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (338) to address religious differences. This research project thus builds on these ideas in hopes of revealing the productive aspects of contradiction and the complex and multivalent nature of understanding "success" in publically-shared, multimodal community-based writing projects.

Part of the problem that frames this study is my original assumption that the community partners involved in this project will share many of the same overarching goals since they are members of the same discourse community: people who in some way assist community members with the various stages involved in earning a GED. Though the definition of a "discourse community" has been hotly debated since the 1980's, scholars in composition and rhetoric generally agree that the following brief description

suffices: a discourse community is a group of individuals marked by the same use of language practices, writing conventions, genres, customs, and habits. Even though this community video project includes representatives from the local community college, the technical college, the public school district, and non-profit organizations, I initially assume that they all have similar attitudes about problems related to education and poverty in the Waco community.

These assumptions are flawed for several reasons, but one primary reason is that term "the community" itself is a thorny concept that can hide differences and elide conflict. As Joseph Harris discusses in *A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966*, since community has "no 'positive opposing' term, [it] can soon become an empty and sentimental word" (134-35). He continues, "like the pronoun *we, community* can be used in such a way that it invokes what it seems to merely describe" (Harris 135). In short, communities are complicated. People tend to have warm and fuzzy thoughts about the local communities in which they live and work,[5] but these impressions are often more aspirational than realistic. Consider, for example, the racial tensions made transparent after recent police shootings in communities in Ferguson, MO and Baltimore, MD. Instead of denoting a group of likeminded individuals who share values, practices, and motives, communities are, in truth, fragmented and complex. Though some community members might have shared goals, individuals in the same physical community sometimes do not share much more than a common zip code. Consequently, my first

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[5] See nineteenth-century German sociologist and philosopher Ferdinand Tönnies for the connotations associated with community (*Gemeinschaft*) and society (*Gesellschaft*). By *Gemeinschaft* Tönnies referred to "community" and all of its concomitant associations: family, friendship, closeness, warmth. In contrast, *Gesellschaft* alludes to the isolation, distance, and neutrality assigned to the term "society." In communities, individuals are thought to develop shared identities through common interests, values, and practices, which are often encouraged by circumstances like physical proximity.

problem is assuming that the community partners share similar perspectives on the GED

and the people who might be affected by taking, or needing to take, the test.

Discourse communities, in particular, can be particularly misleading since they

suggest that language practices and writing conventions constitute static and stable values

(Deans, "Shifting" 453). John Swales identified having a "common, public 'goal'" (25)

as a defining feature of discourse communities, yet this point reveals a flaw in his

framework since members of any given discourse community often claim membership in

multiple discourse communities (Bizzell 232). As a result, individuals in discourse

communities do not always share the same goals and practices because their allegiances

are split. Since an individual can belong to several communities at once, Harris thus

suggests "the city" as a more apt metaphor and "public"[6] as a more apt term to describe

these competing discourses (142-43). He further proposes that we "reserve our uses of

community to describe the workings of such specific and local groups" (Harris 144).

However, as the results of this study reveal, the local community is no less fraught with

contradictions.

Activity systems, on the other hand, provide more potential for understanding the

dynamic relationships present in service-learning and community contexts (Higgins,

Long, Flower; Deans, "Shifting"; Chappell). Whereas discourse community theory

proposes a spatial location (e.g., a relocation from a classroom context to a community

context) that houses practices, customs, and ways of seeing that individuals can

eventually adopt, activity theory accounts for the "interactions and contradictions

between two activity systems (the university and the community partner organization) as

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[6] "Public," as a term, is not any less complicated. See Habermas, Fraser, Farmer, and Higgins, Long, and Flower.

they overlap in a third activity system: the service-learning classroom itself" (Deans, "Shifting" 452). Activity theory "assumes that social systems are goal-driven rather than just there, examines tools as they are used to get things done in systems, and attends to the contradictions that emerge both within and between systems" (Deans, "Shifting" 453). As such, activity theory accounts for the differences that might be present among individuals from the same community because it acknowledges that people are motivated by different goals and desired outcomes (Engeström, "Expansive Learning" 136).

Activity theory (AT), or cultural-historical activity theory, has its origins in Russian social psychology in the work of Lev Vygotsky and his student Alexei Leont'ev (Engeström, *Learning by Expanding* 47-59). Vygotsky initially theorized that individual actions are culturally mediated, which Leont'ev then extended to describe collective activity and group behavior (Engeström, "Expansive Learning" 134). For the past 30 years, Yrgö Engeström and others have built on these theories, resulting in the five basic principles of activity theory:

(1) *The first principle* is that the primary unit of analysis is the whole activity system. In order to understand solitary actions within the system, they must be analyzed as part of a greater whole.

(2) *The second principle* is that an activity system is comprised of a multiplicity of voices. Engeström observes that this polyvocality is a "source of trouble and a source of innovation, demanding actions of translation and negotiation" (136).

(3) *The third principle* is that activity systems must be analyzed over a period of time. The historical background provides the context for analysis.

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(4) *The fourth principle* is that the contradictions within and among activity

systems drive innovation and change. In activity theory, contradictions are not

understood as negative but as a source of productive tension.

(5) *The fifth principle* is that activity systems can ultimately be transformed

through the recognition of contradictions that emerge between different

activity systems. Engeström writes, "An expansive transformation is

accomplished when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualized

to embrace a radically wider horizon of possibilities than in the previous mode

of the activity" ("Expansive Learning" 137).

The three most common key elements in an activity system, what Engeström refers to as

"the tip of the iceberg" ("Expansive Learning" 134) are the subject(s), mediating tools,

and object. Since activity theory views all actions as goal-oriented, the *object* of an

activity system is more precisely understood as "motive" (Deans, "Shifting" 454). *Tools*

are "the physical and symbolic instruments by which objects are transformed into

outcomes" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 171). The other three elements are *community*, the

individuals that share a common goal; *division of labor,* the ways in which the goals of a

community are distributed among community members; and *rules*, the governing

behavioral expectations that direct a community's actions (Engeström, "Work as a

Testbench" 67). Figure 1.1 visually represents how these elements interact and, as David

Russell observes, "[work] through contradictions" (531).

Tools

Subject(s)   Object/Motive ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ Outcome

Rules   Division of Labor
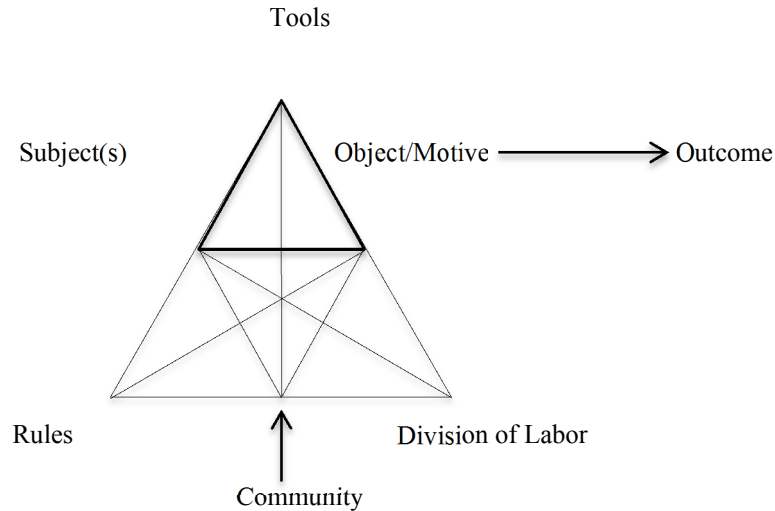
Community

Figure 1.1. The seven elements of an activity system, adapted from Engeström, "Expansive Learning."

This conception of collective activity recognizes the social elements of community as always-shifting and, potentially, a source of tension; however, AT also acknowledges the generative potential of contradictions as a method for achieving expansive transformation. While discourse community theory acknowledges that individuals might occupy multiple roles in different discourse communities, AT actively addresses the contradictions found "within and between" these activity systems (Deans, "Shifting" 460).

AT as a Means for Understanding the Contradictions and Complications in a Multimodal Community-based Writing Project

The present study expands upon Deans' observations of activity systems in service-learning contexts by conducting an activity theory analysis of the three primary stakeholders involved in the multimodal community-based writing project. The multimodal community-based writing project extends Deans' basic tripartite division (university, community partner organization, and service-learning classroom) by

rhetorically listening to a greater number of stakeholder perspectives and nuancing what is meant by "the" community partner perspective. In the chapters that follow, I analyze the perspectives of each of the primary stakeholders involved in this project using activity theory as a way of illuminating the contradictions inherent within each stakeholder's orientation to the project so that we may hear and seek to understand. Chapter Two explains my rationale behind practicing teacher research and describes my research methods. Chapter Three examines the contradictions that emerged between community partner activity systems stemming from their conceptions of their roles as "client," "mentor," or "guide." I argue that these roles influence how they evaluate the overall goals of the project as either product- or product- and process-focused, which affects how they assess its outcomes. Chapter Four presents an analysis of the students' perspectives and discusses their motives in relation to the multimodal community-based writing project. I argue that students adopt roles—in this case, the "novice" and the "risk-taker"—that affect how they practice creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving in the digital writing classroom. I also discuss how students negotiate their understanding of social class as they prepare for and reflect on their videos. In Chapter Five, I bring these perspectives together from the vantage point of the project's sponsors. I provide a rhetorical analysis of the top five student videos[7] and trace the contradictions between and within activity systems that affect how these videos are received. I discuss how these various outcomes complicate how the project sponsors ultimately define success. Chapter Six summarizes the results and implications of rhetorically listening to these various stakeholder perspectives. I conclude with recommendations for feminist teacher-scholars who advocate mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships. These

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[7] As voted by one community partner and the project sponsors.

recommendations include: (1) articulating assumptions and clearly defining roles and values; (2) designing ongoing methods of "seeing" the community; (3) discussing the cultural logics of the digital writing classroom; (4) inviting community partners to give feedback at regular intervals; (5) incorporating listening as a rhetorical strategy; and (6) evaluating the costs and benefits of publicly sharing the products based on what we hear.

CHAPTER TWO

Using Ethnographic Perspectives to Carry Out Teacher Research

> Inspired by a teaching-learning "moment" that surprised me, I began a process that —I later realized—was fairly systematic and consistent— although I didn't recognize it at the time. I shaped the moment in anecdotal form as a problem for study, I reflected on the problem by replaying the surprising moment time after time in my mind's eye, and by sharing it with other teachers interested in the problems of practice, and based upon my own and others' interpretations of problematic teaching- learning moments like that one, I developed "experiments in teaching."
> —Patricia Lambert Stock, 2004 NCTE Presidential Address

> [K]nowledge and truth in education are not so much found through objective inquiry as socially constructed through collaboration among students, teachers, and researchers.
> —Ruth Ray, "Composition from the Teacher-Researcher Point of View"

This study adopts ethnographic perspectives in order to carry out a teacher

research case study of a single classroom and the members of the community who agreed

to collaborate with students on a community video project. Ethnography typically refers

to the process of researchers fully immersing themselves in the "daily routines in the

everyday lives of the communities being studied" with the end goal being "to describe a

particular community so that an outsider sees it as a native would and so that the

community studied can be compared to other communities" (Moss 155). An

"ethnographic perspective," on the other hand, refers to "a more focused approach … [of

studying] particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group"

(Green and Bloome 4). To this end, I used the ethnographer's tools to analyze data

collected over the course of a semester to generate what social anthropologist Clifford

Geertz calls "thick description" of the perspectives of two students, three community partners, and a project sponsor.

Teacher research "borrows" from ethnography, but my role as the teacher prevented me from "fully adopt[ing] the outsider's or fieldworker's point of view" (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 95). As the teacher of this class and co-designer of this project, I examined this data from the unavoidable perspective of an insider, yet my ultimate goal was to get a sense of the multiple insider perspectives involved with my classroom (Fetterman 20). Teacher research, as a methodology, is characterized by systematically collecting and analyzing classroom documents (e.g., syllabi, student work, etc.) and/or artifacts (e.g., transcriptions of interviews, field observations, reflections, etc.) in order to discover answers to specific, contextual research questions (Lankshear and Knobel, *A Handbook*, 33-39). Teacher research transforms research questions that spring from anecdotal moments into knowledge that can be used to improve practice through "sustained conversation" (Stock 115). These forms of "*praxis-oriented* research" (Stock 118) result in insights that have meaning for individual teachers and students in specific contexts, to be sure, but this knowledge has value across various situations, as well. The benefits of context-dependent research lies in the "vicarious experience" of identifying the common "social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender circumstances" and transferring them from one research setting to another (Guba and Lincoln 114). Well-designed teacher research is a valuable methodology because of its "collaborative spirit, its emphasis on the interrelationships between theory and practice, and its interest in bringing about change –in the teacher, the student, the school system, the teaching profession, the field of study, and the practice of research –*from within the*

classroom" (Ray 183). Teacher research thus enabled me to learn from our collective experiences, which provided a fuller picture of the classroom context and ultimately served to improve my classroom practice (Nickoson).

Teacher research is an appropriate methodology for this study because of the unique nature of the FAS that I had designed and the relationships I had developed with members of the community. The teacher-research methodology enabled me to focus on specific classroom contexts in which I could hone my approach to practicing digital community-based writing. More importantly for the field, teacher research enabled me to gather contextualized data to understand how students respond to specific assignments designed to challenge their received ideas about the uses of digital literacy. This approach also allowed me to gain insight into an often overlooked demographic in community projects: the community partners themselves. Additionally, this approach to case study research granted me access to a range of perspectives that refuse neat resolution. I "allow [these] discordant voices into the account" (Newkirk, "Narrative Roots") in an attempt to provide answers to the following research questions: "How do multiple stakeholders experience and evaluate the success of a multimodal community-based writing project?" And "what does 'productive failure' look like?"

Methods

The purpose of this two-phase, sequential mixed methods study was to obtain statistical, quantitative results from first-year writing students and community partners and then follow up with a purposive sample of individuals to explore those results in greater detail. The rationale for mixing quantitative and qualitative data to address research questions was that the triangulation of questionnaires, interviews, and textual

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artifacts provided a more comprehensive picture of how various stakeholders experience a multimodal community-based writing project (MacNealy). The Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved these data sources: (#390505-6).

Sampling and Site Selection

The site was chosen based on my role as the instructor of the course, but the fall 2013 semester was specifically chosen after conducting a pilot study during the previous semester. Findings from the fall 2012 study revealed that students desired more involvement with the local community. As a result, new relationships were forged to establish partnerships between students and the community members. In this case, the site was chosen to assess the outcomes of these structured partnerships. Sites are typically selected because "what goes on there" is thought to be "critical to understanding some process or concept, or to testing or elaborating some established theory" (Schwandt 128). Since this study focuses on a limited number of participants from a private, faith-based university, the findings might not be representative. Consequently, the claims made in this dissertation need to be understood within this context.

Students. Approximately 18 students from one section of FAS 1302: Writing in the Age of Digital Media at Baylor University were selected purposefully (MacNealy 157) based on their participation in the course and invited to participate in this research study.

Community partners. Approximately ten community partners, including the community video project sponsor, were invited to complete the same questionnaire based on their participation in the community video project during the fall 2013 semester.

Data Sources

In addition to field notes, data were collected from students and community partners from three primary sources: questionnaires, transcribed interviews, and textual artifacts (e.g., written reflections, multimodal projects, and email correspondence).

Field notes. Reflective notes were taken after meeting with community partners and teaching. Robert Brooke's model of "selective description" guided my note-taking practices. He suggests that a researcher ought "to describe what occurs, but at the same time [choose] which features to record based on some motivated sense of what might later prove significant" (Brooke 15). These field notes were used to record details as well as to link ideas across data sources.

Questionnaires for community partners. In an effort to determine community partners' perspectives on the community video project and to identify potential interview subjects, an online questionnaire was emailed to all ten of the community partners who participated in the project. The project sponsor also received an email to this community partner survey since she occupied dual roles as a community member and a designer of the project. The questionnaire was comprised of three major parts. The first section solicited demographic data and asked multiple-choice questions about the community partners' comfort levels with technology. Part two presented statements on social media, the GED community video project, and the students themselves and asked community partners to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a four-point Likert scale. Using an even-numbered scale prevented neutral or ambivalent responses. The questionnaire also asked the community partners to rank the most important quality that

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students could bring to a community video project. In the third section, community partners were asked open-ended questions about their overall impressions of the project and their suggestions for future projects. See Appendix B for an example of the community partner questionnaire.

Questionnaires for students. In order to analyze how first-year writing students evaluate the potential of using digital literacies in the service of community issues and to determine potential interview subjects, a questionnaire was distributed to students in a Freshman Academic Seminar (FAS) called "Writing in the Age of Digital Media" at Baylor University during the fall 2013 semester. On the last day of class, students completed consent forms and filled out questionnaires. The questionnaire responses were not read until after the semester had ended and final grades had been assigned. The purpose of this questionnaire was to assess what students take away from community-based writing in digital contexts. The student questionnaire was comprised of three major parts. The first section asked for demographic data as well as posed multiple-choice questions about students' interests in civic issues prior to taking the course, their comfort levels with technology, and their previous experiences with volunteering and working with others. Part two presented statements about digital collective action and multimodal course assignments and asked students to indicate their level of agreement with each statement on a four-point Likert scale. In the final section, students were asked to rate their overall levels of investment in each of the major course projects and complete a series of open-ended questions related to digital and civic literacies. See Appendix C for an example of the student questionnaire.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with three community partners from two different community affiliations, two FAS 1302 students, and the project's sponsor. Each semi-structured interview lasted approximately one hour. Unlike unstructured interviews, which are more accurately described as "conversations with a purpose" (Clandinin and Connelly), semi-structured interviews begin with a list of questions that the interviewer uses as a general guide for the conversation. Rather than "tying interviewer and interviewee to a fixed schedule that can limit opportunities to enrich spoken data and gain insights into how interviewees 'see' and understand the world" (Lankshear and Knobel, *A Handbook* 201-02), a semi-structured interview leaves space for the interviewer to ask for clarification on any unclear responses and to follow up on any promising new areas of exploration. Despite the fact that "Data collected in interviews are always partial and incomplete" (Lankshear and Knobel, *A Handbook* 199), the semi-structured format allowed us to pursue questions meaningful to both of us in the moment. See Appendix D for a list of interview questions. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. One of the community partner interviews was not successfully recorded, so only her quotations from other data sources are used. In an effort to let the participants speak for themselves, transcription included long pauses, verbal tics like "um" and "well," non-verbal elements like laughter, and gestural descriptions like "shrugs" and "dances to music." For the sake of readability, I have removed instances of verbal repetition (e.g., "I, I, I") in the transcripts presented here.

Community partner interviews. Three community partners were selected to interview based on their willingness and availability to participate in a one-hour

interview. Additionally, these community partners were chosen because their questionnaire responses reflected a range of perspectives on the project's success or failure. Two interviews took place at the school district building and one interview took place in the offices of the GED testing center at the technical college. Interviewing, as Ruth Ray describes it, is a process of "interviewer and interviewee co-constructing data" (Lankshear and Knobel, *A Handbook* 199). As a result of this collaborative interaction with community partners, these interviews created an opportunity to triangulate data from a number of sources by "[accommodating] insider narratives with outsider analysis, personal concerns with academic ones, and classroom data with explanatory theory" (Fishman and McCarthy 7).

Student interviews. Interviews were conducted with three students to follow up on patterns discovered by analyzing the numerical and discursive data from student questionnaires. Three students were chosen for interviews based on the range of perspectives as expressed in their final reflections, their interest in being interviewed, and their availability. Additionally, these students were chosen because their final videos elicited very different responses from their peers, the community partners, and the project sponsors. There was reason to believe that conducting interviews with these students would reveal contradictions worth exploring in greater detail. Prior to the interview, students completed a follow-up question in which they ranked the most important qualities a student could bring to a multimodal community-based writing project. This follow-up question was added based on information gained from the community partner interviews. Interviewing students had the added benefit of stressing the collaborative nature of a classroom informed by a feminist pedagogy, treating students as "co-

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researchers" (Ray) instead of confining them to roles as research subjects or study participants. During these interviews, the students also re-watched the videos they composed for the project and conducted retrospective protocols on their rhetorical and design choices (Kuusela and Paul). Data from one of the student interviews was eliminated from the present study in order to conduct a deeper, more detailed analysis of two of the case study participants.

After the community partners and students were interviewed, a reflective interview with Phoebe, the sponsor to the project, was conducted and audio recorded. Seven key themes that emerged from my analysis of the other interview transcripts were discussed. These themes were "overall satisfaction with the community-based writing project," "perceptions of roles," "community partners' perceptions of students," "product-/process-focused," "student identity," "students' rhetorical awareness," and "student growth." Based on the reflective interview with Phoebe, an eighth theme emerged, "contradictions between activity systems," which I used when I coded the data a second time.

Participants

Five community partners, one project sponsor, and 13 students from FAS 1302 contributed data to this study in the form of questionnaire responses, interviews, and textual artifacts.

Community partners. Five community partners completed the online community partner questionnaire, which consisted of multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, Likert-type scales, and rank order on their experiences working with students

during the community video project. All community partner participants were affiliated with either a nonprofit organization or an educational institution. Of the five community partner participants, four were female and one was male. Table 2.1 shows a breakdown of the community partner gender and affiliation.

Table 2.1

Community Partner Gender and Affiliation Information

Gender	School District	Technical College	Nonprofit Women's Organization	Total
Male	1	0	0	1
Female	1	2	1	4
Total	2	2	1	5

Phoebe, the project sponsor also completed the community partner questionnaire, but her results were analyzed separately since she played a different role in the project.

Students. 13 first-year writing students completed the student questionnaire, which consisted of dichotomous questions, multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions, and Likert-type scales on the productive potential of various forms of digital civic literacy. All participants were traditional freshman students and either 18 or 19 years old.[1] Table 2.2 shows the breakdown of student gender and ethnicity.

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[1] Students in the classes who were younger than 18 years old were unable to participate in the present study due to difficulty obtaining parental consent within the necessary timeframe.

Table 2.2

Student Demographic Information

Gender	African-American	Hispanic	White	Total
Male	0	0	3	3
Female	1	2	7	10
Total	1	2	10	13

The students involved in this study represented a range of majors but were self-selected into FAS 1302: Writing in the Age of Digital Media based on their academic and/or personal interest in the topic. Consequently, their comfort levels and proficiency with technology and social media might not have represented the general population of students in first-year writing classes at Baylor.

Textual Artifacts

Textual artifacts were collected from the community partners in the form of email correspondence and qualitative data from the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. Students also contributed their final multimodal community-based writing projects, written end-of-project reflections, email correspondence, and qualitative questionnaire data. Emails, public blog posts, and qualitative questionnaire data were collected from the project sponsor.

Coding and Data Analysis

The data sources were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods, and the questionnaire results were triangulated with the textual artifacts (e.g., transcribed interviews, written reflections, and student video projects) for more robust data (MacNealy). Qualitative data from the open-ended questions on the questionnaire and

from the textual artifacts were initially analyzed and color-coded based on specific events such as "Waco Public Transit Project," "technical training/finger exercises," "meeting with community partner/student," "feedback," "retrospective protocol" and "final assessment." The data was coded three times. The first round of analytic and descriptive coding identified seven major themes. The data was coded a second time after conducting a final reflective interview with the project's sponsor to identify additional areas that fell under a new category, "contradictions." The data from each stakeholder was coded a third time using activity theory (AT) to identify the seven elements that might be present in an activity system: subject, object/motive, mediating tools, rules, community, and division of labor (Engeström, *Learning by Expanding*, "Expansive Learning").

My experience as the teacher of this class gave context to the data that cannot be neatly replicated by another researcher. This aspect of teacher research is unavoidable. However, the notion that any individual is capable of documenting and coding qualitative data from a purely objective perspective is challenged by a range of subjective factors. As Lawrence Sipe and Maria Ghiso note, "All coding is a judgment call" (482) colored by "our subjectivities, our personalities, our predispositions, and our quirks" (483). Additionally, some of these factors are further influenced by the method chosen to report the data. As Thomas Newkirk suggests in "The Narrative Roots of Case Study," a researcher ought to "look reflexively at the discourse community the researcher works in and explore the ways in which narrative conventions predispose the researcher to account for data in a particular way" (132). Narrative in qualitative research is sometimes criticized for being too clean, for "smoothing" over the details to make the events seem seamless, effortless (Connelly and Clandinin 8). By triangulating narrative elements with

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quantitative data from the questionnaires, I hope to provide a more accurate picture of the tensions communicated by the various stakeholders involved in the project.

Questionnaires

The questionnaire data was analyzed to determine major trends in both student and community partner perceptions of multimodal community-based writing projects. Multiple-choice questions and Likert-scale questions were assigned numerical values and used to find the mean, median, and standard deviation. The questionnaires were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative procedures. Discursive data from the questionniares were first coded by hand to identify patterns and then consolidated and analyzed. Analytic memos were written to identify themes across coding categories (Bishop 117).

Textual Artifacts

Interviews were first transcribed and coded by hand to determine major patterns that emerged from each individual interaction. The resulting analytical coding categories were then cross-referenced with other interviews to identify areas of confirmation and contradiction among the different stakeholders. Constant comparison was used to follow emergent themes to determine which research artifacts (e.g., documents, follow-up interview questions, etc.) held the most promise for further analysis (Urquhart). Codes generated from these artifacts were then triangulated with the interviews. Discursive data from the questionnaires, written reflections, interview transcripts, and student video projects were analyzed using these codes. Visual data were analyzed and coded for their

rhetorical features and triangulated with the textual data from interviews, written

reflections, and emails.

CHAPTER THREE

Community Partners' Perspectives:
Activity Systems of the "Client," "Mentor," and "Guide"

> We are advocating for a method of narrative refraction—not treating
> stories as foundational, but as complex, meaningful, ongoing events that
> can be told and retold to keep learning and teaching in motion.
> —Tracy Hamler Carrick, Margaret Himley, and Tobi Jacobi, "Ruptura"

According to an ancient Indian parable, if you get enough people groping around an elephant in the dark, you are not going to get a very accurate description of what it looks like. Each perspective is partial and incomplete. "I've got a rope!" one guy yells. "No, it's more like a wall," says another. Only after you have pieced together every perspective from every angle do you begin to have a sense of the big picture. You need all of the parts in order to form a cohesive whole. The multimodal community-based writing project was no different. Taken on its own, each stakeholder perspective seems reasonable, whole. "This project is about taking risks and achieving high technical quality," say the students. The project sponsors think it's more about rhetorical awareness and helping the community by using digital tools. Meanwhile, the individual community partners are thinking something else entirely. Activity theory can help us understand the contradictions that emerge from these partial observations. Beginning with the activity systems of the community partners in this chapter, I hope to construct a more accurate picture of what this particular elephant looks like.

While I had known that the community partners involved with this project each worked with a different segment of the Waco population—some worked directly with

GED test-takers or offered support to their families, others helped people find employment after earning the GED, and still others worked with at-risk K-12 students to ensure that they would avoid the GED entirely— I had assumed that each community partner shared common goals and sentiments. And they do—broadly speaking. They are committed to improving the lives of individuals in Waco. What that looks like in practice, however, is shaped by their unique perspectives, their affiliations with different organizations/institutions, their understanding of the audiences with whom they work, their interpretation of their roles in the project, their values, and their own specific goals.

Ultimately, I discovered that asking community members to share their perspectives revealed the complex and multivalent nature of "success" in publicly shared, community-based writing projects. While community partners collectively desired a usable product as the end goal of the project, they individually assessed the success or failure of each video, and the project overall, based on different criteria. By practicing rhetorical listening, the feminist teacher can take time to hear competing claims to find the productive spaces of tension. In this chapter, I conduct an activity theory analysis to explore the contradictions that emerged among community members related to their goals, roles, their assessments of the students' rhetorical awareness, and final assessments.

Aspirations for Waco

Waco is a city with a rich heritage and an optimistic view of the future. Waco is also a city beset with a high rate of poverty and families challenged by financial instability. According to the United States Census Bureau, nearly a third of families with

children under the age of 18 in Waco are living at or below the poverty line.[1] The Texas

Education Agency reports a considerably higher number, citing that almost 90% of the

families of students in the school district are "economically disadvantaged." In an effort

to address the problem of poverty in Waco, an ad hoc group of Waco citizens began

meeting in 2009, calling themselves The Poverty Solutions Group. They came up with a

list of 12 aspirations for Waco that ended up being adopted by the more formal Poverty

Steering Solutions Committee (PSSC) in 2012:

1. Improve the health of our children and support healthy lifestyles for all.
2. Prepare our children for success in school and beyond.
3. Launch our young people into productive working lives.
4. Gainfully employ our working-age population.
5. Care for our elderly population.
6. Support residents who face special challenges.
7. Empower our residents.
8. Align our social services efficiently and effectively.
9. Strengthen our neighborhoods.
10. Upgrade our shared spaces.
11. Energize our economic base.
12. Enjoy life together. (Poverty Solutions)

The community partners involved in this project facilitate these goals to reduce poverty

and improve the lives of all Waco citizens through their individual organizational and

institutional affiliations. In particular, their work with educational programs in Waco

creates opportunities for them to address needs related to numbers three and four. The

report that the PSSC prepares in response to the Waco City Council's request notes that

the GED is a critical piece in helping working-age adults pursue increased job

opportunities and work towards achieving financial security. To that end, this study

focuses on individuals in the community who have insight into some part of the GED

process.

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[1] Data taken from the U.S. 2013 Census.

Activity Systems of the Community Partners

Though the community partners involved in this study were all involved with

some aspect of the GED in Waco, each of the community partners occupied a place as a

"subject" in different organizational/institutional activity systems that influenced how

they approached the activity system of this community-based writing project. Activity

theory is predicated upon the understanding that all human practices take place within a

social, goal-directed system (Engeström, "Expansive Learning"). David Russell provides

an easy-to-grasp example by analyzing the actions of a toddler (the subject) who wants a

toy on a shelf just out of her reach (the object/motive). The child might pull a chair (a

mediating tool) over to the shelf or cry out to her father (another mediating tool) to help

her accomplish the task. The methods of reaching her goal might differ, but the

"functional system, the activity, is the same" (Russell 54). In activity theory, the whole

activity system is the unit of analysis, but "activity systems can be analyzed from

multiple perspectives (of the various participants) and at many levels (from the individual

to the broadest cultural levels)" (Russell 56). Thomas Deans draws on activity theory to

explain the contradictions that surface between and within three different activity

systems: the university, the nonprofit organizations, and the service-learning classroom

("Shifting" 453). Deans persuasively argues that contradictions emerge between the

genres (tools) and motives of the first two activity systems, which result in the creation of

a third activity system, the service-learning classroom itself ("Shifting" 455). Each of

these activity systems privileges different objects/motives and works toward these goals

using different subjects and mediating tools. In this chapter, I extend Deans' analysis by

considering how partnering with multiple community organizations and institutions

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revealed additional contradictions that complicate an oversimplified understanding of "the community partner activity system."

The Planning Meeting: Clarifying the Project with the Community Partners

We meet on a Wednesday in August before the fall semester begins. The community partners agree to come to the university campus. It is not really neutral territory, but Phoebe[2] works in this building and, as she says, "the parking is not bad this time of year, and it is about as central as anything." Phoebe has made some popcorn and brings out bottles of water and cans of Diet Coke, our favorite soda. The conference room is in an administration building on campus—one with a gold-plated dome. When Baylor wins an athletic event, the tower twinkles with green and gold lights. The tables are arranged in a rectangle so that everyone faces each other. I set up a tripod in the corner of the room to record the meeting, but I do not end up turning on the camera. It never feels like the right time to ask for permission, and I want to create a space of openness, a place where people feel comfortable to speak their minds. The community partners enter the room, in pairs and one by one, and start talking to each other. Some of them, it seems, know each other well. They laugh and catch up. People from the same school or community organization look like they are sticking together. A little like a junior high dance, the public school district representatives sit on one side of the tables while the success coaches from the local community college sit on the other. Phoebe takes charge. She thanks everyone for coming and expresses how fun it is being "in a room full of people who are making such a tremendous difference in our community." We share our names and affiliations, and then I describe why we are here.

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[2] Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identities of the community members and students.

I begin by setting up the context and outlining the limitations of the "writing *about* the community" project that I had assigned the previous year. Pretty good videos. Not enough collaboration with community partners. No real audience. No real "problem." The community partners nod in agreement. I pass out a few handouts that describe the general plan that Phoebe and I have come up with to have students create a "web series" of videos focused on the GED. The videos will be visually linked with a common intro and appear on the same YouTube channel. The best videos, hopefully, will be featured on local websites to which Phoebe has access or influence. The idea is that each video will focus on a specific audience as determined through an informative interview with a "community expert," one of the people in the room. We see these videos as connecting people to information about existing local resources with which they might not be familiar. Phoebe and I want their feedback to add to or amend our list of potential video topics:

- What are the benefits of getting your GED?

- How does it help our community for more people to get their GED?

- Tips for success for getting your GED (or common pitfalls and how to avoid them)…

- How does the process work? (e.g., How long does it take? What do I have to do? How much does it cost? Who do I call?)

- Crossing the bridge from GED to MCC or TSTC

- 3-5 things to know to make your first semester at MCC/TSTC a success (conversely, pitfalls to avoid)

They like the list, but one of the needs that is immediately mentioned is some kind of announcement about the upcoming revamped GED test.

In January 2014, the GED Testing Service is implementing a new test that they have spent "5 years and tens of millions of dollars" to revise ("A Fighting Chance"). The community partners from the GED testing center at the technical college, Kim and Diane, are particularly concerned about this issue for two reasons: (1) the new, four-part test is rumored to be harder to better prepare test-takers to go on to college, and (2) test-takers who have not completed all five parts of the GED test prior to the 2014 switch will not be able to carry over their passing scores. Individuals who have started the testing process need to finish so that they do not lose out on the time and money they have already invested in earning the GED; furthermore, the new 2014 test will be about twice as expensive, so the incentive to take the GED now is more urgent than ever before. The community partners start agreeing that this announcement would be a huge help to them, and then one of them notices the project timeline on one of the handouts. "If the students aren't finishing these videos until December," she notes, "then that won't give people enough time to take the test before the new year."

This moment was the first, but not the last, time that the academic timeline would grate against the needs of the community. Deans observes that the goals of the classroom activity system are different from the goals of the community partner activity system (figure 3.1). In figure 3.1, he visually represents the activity system of the composition classroom based on Engeström's seven elements. In a classroom, the community interaction is bound by the semester-long academic calendar.

Tools
Academic genres, books, lectures,
classroom practices, etc.

Subject(s)
Student as individual
achiever, teacher as
expert

Object/Motive
Show subject mastery,
learn, satisfy teacher

Outcome
Knowledge, grade,
advancement in
curriculum

Rules
School regulations,
classroom decorum,
grading system, etc.

Division of Labor
Student/teacher hierarchy

Community
Students in class together for a semester,
cooperating for learning and competing
for grades; class embedded in larger
college community

Figure 3.1. The basic structure of the typical first-year composition course activity system
(source: Deans, "Shifting").

The teacher establishes the parameters for the learning experiences and works within the

constraints of the time frame. This issue of the video project timeline is just one example

of a "contradiction" that emerged between the activity systems of "the university" and the

"community partner," but this general community partner context will serve as a baseline

for understanding the various activity systems at work among specific community

partners. Deans does not provide an illustration of the community partner activity system,

but it is useful to compare the structure of the composition course with the structure of

the community (figure 3.2). Figure 3.2 depicts the activity system of the community

partners, broadly speaking. Almost immediately, the community partners' goals (i.e.,

"Create a video about the new GED coming in 2014") are subordinated to the constraints

of the classroom community because of the university context (i.e., "The video project will conclude the course at the end of the semester").

Tools
Meetings, interactions with community
   members, business cards, workplace genres,
   brochures, websites, interviews with students

Subject(s)   Object/Motive   Outcome
Community partners as   Receive assistance   Product for use
   experts   Have needs met   Needs fulfilled
Students as   Contribute to students'   Relationships developed with
   novices   learning experiences   students/university

Rules   Division of Labor
Workplace habits   Student/community partner hierarchy
Hectic schedules   Interact with teacher as needed
Stretched staff

            Community
            Ongoing schedule
              Community ethos

Figure 3.2. The basic structure of the community partner activity system (adapted from Deans, "Shifting").

Since students need a semester to learn about the context of the GED, to practice rhetorical analysis, and to develop digital skills, the project cannot be completed any earlier; as a result, the ongoing schedule of the community partners cannot be accommodated and this specific object/motive could not be fulfilled.

Instead of examining this contradiction during the planning meeting and attempting to address the tension between these two activity systems, we move on and brainstorm other needs. One community partner likes the idea of telling the success stories of people who have completed the GED and found well-paying jobs. Another reflects that she just attended a GED graduation ceremony and wishes that more people in

the community knew what a special event it is. A community partner who prepares students to take the GED mentions that she has photographs and video footage of these graduations and would be happy to share these resources with students. Someone else mentions the different reasons that people do or do not pursue the GED—common motivations, common misconceptions. We talk about the tone: "These videos need to be uplifting! Hopeful!" I describe the genre of these videos as "motivational how-to videos," a description that is met with great interest. "We want these videos to show people that they can get their GED and explain how to do it and why it matters," Phoebe affirms.

We discuss the community partners' time commitments and their willingness to be interviewed by the students. Jamie, a success coach at the community college, expresses concern that her schedule won't permit her to be involved in a mid-semester focus group and others agree. They say they don't have the time to meet with students more than once. It's a productive meeting. Phoebe and I are pleased with the community partners' enthusiasm and happy that everyone is willing to commit to the project. Of the eight community partners present at this meeting, five will complete the questionnaire after the project has concluded. In response to the statement, "I left the initial planning meeting in August feeling optimistic about the goals of the GED Community Video Project," two of those surveyed "strongly agreed" and three "agreed." The results were the same in response to the statement "I left the initial planning meeting in August feeling like I could express my concerns about the GED Community Video Project."

Understanding of Goals: Goal-Setting with the Community Partners

During the planning meeting, we discuss two broad goals: (1) to end up with videos that could be used on local websites to promote the GED, and (2) to connect the

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Baylor students with needs in the Waco community. These two goals are different sides of the same coin. The first goal is "product-focused": this view of the project defines the main purpose of the multimodal community-based writing project to be the creation of a quality product that will raise awareness about the GED. The second goal is "process-focused." Instead of stressing the composing process itself, this conception of the project focused on the inner transformation of the student-composers themselves. However, the five community partners who complete the questionnaire place different emphasis on these goals. When asked to describe their understanding of the goals of the GED Community Video Project, two community partners stress the success of the end project while three community partners also mention the learning process of the students. Table 3.1 shows the community partners' individual perspectives on what they understood to be the goals of project and what they hoped the project would ultimately achieve. While two of the community partners surveyed understood the overall objective of the project to be the final products that the students created, three of the community partner respondents were hoping that the project would benefit both the community and the students. The differences between these two goals underscore some of the contradictions that surfaced after soliciting feedback from the community partners.

Understanding of Roles: The Client, the Mentor, and the Guide

The goals expressed by the community partners provide some context for the different ways that they approached the GED Community Video Project, such as their understanding of the roles they were to inhabit as community partners. This understanding of roles ultimately affected each community partner's final assessments of the project's success, which I will discuss at the end of this chapter.

Table 3.1

Community Partners' Understanding of the Goals of the GED Community Video Project

Product-Focused	Product- and Process-Focused
"I understood that the students would attempt to create videos that could be used as PSAs in the Waco community that would raise the awareness and the availability of local GED programs." "To raise awareness for the need to get an education"	"I hoped the videos would be created an [sic] reach a new audience of individuals that would be served by the GED services available in our community. A second goal, was for the Baylor student's [sic] themselves to see possibly a different side of the Waco community and how they could serve and become more involved." "I was hopeful to broaden the understanding of why many people take the GED and what they are able to achieve upon earning their GED." "I was hoping the students would hear the stories of the GED candidates and translate what they learned into a video that would inspire other GED candidates."

Though Phoebe and I did not provide any guidelines for how the community partners should relate to students aside from being available to participate in at least one interview, the community partners defined roles for themselves according to their own objectives and anticipated outcomes. Since I only interviewed three of the ten community partners who participated in this project, the claims I make in this section are not necessarily representative of all of the community partners' perspectives. These three community partners were selected based on the contradictions that emerged among their questionnaire responses and their availability and interest in participating in an interview.

In this section, I introduce the three community partners that I interviewed within the context of how they interpreted their roles as community partners as "client,"

"mentor," or "guide." These roles are not neat categories because the community partners often share similar goals. However, the roles present a framework for understanding how each community partner might emphasize a different approach to achieving these goals. I conclude each community partner biography and role description with a visual representation of the activity system with which they are associated and reflect on the contradictions that appeared among these perspectives. Many of the contradictions among the different community partners grew out of the roles they felt they needed to adopt in order to achieve their understanding of the project's primary goal.

Community Partner as Client

According to Thomas Huckin and other writing scholars, service-learning projects differ from other kinds of client-based projects in the sense that they incorporate "(1) formalized reflection about the service experience, and (2) examination of the social problems that the partner [nonprofit organization] addresses" (Chappell 38). Even so, community partners in service-learning projects are indeed clients who share their needs with university students in the hopes that they will end up with a final product that they can use. While community partners who interpret their roles in a community project as "clients" do not devalue the students' learning process, this outcome does not take precedence over their immediate material needs. In this conception of the community partner role, the success or failure of the project primarily rests upon the students' ability to deliver a usable product.

Kim. The technical college lies just a few miles outside of town. The testing center is located in a blue-roofed building that is home to the campus bookstore and other

student services. This building is also where future students can start the admissions process once they have successfully passed the GED in the testing center. Kim's office is located off of a hallway past the waiting room, just before you get to the testing center's computer lab. Kim describes herself as a homebody who doesn't get out much, but you would never guess that by talking to her. She talks fast and has a big laugh that spills out into the hallway. I find myself wondering if the test-takers can hear her while they are in the lab. Kim is particularly proud of the testing center. She tells me that the GED used to be on paper, but now it's all on computer. She takes me on a tour, describing where students are when they take the test and where they are when they find out their results.

Kim is the community partner who contacted me to express her concerns about the videos before voting. She and Diane, her colleague at the technical college, were both surprised that the videos the students produced were so different from what they expected. Kim is especially surprised that Daniel, a student who composed a video called "Why are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And How Does it Relate to Pie?" was the same student who wrote a thoughtful blog post about his experience meeting a homeless man as part of a different assignment for my class. When I meet with Kim to discuss her thoughts about the videos, she names a few more videos that she found offensive or inappropriate. She describes videos featuring single moms and drug addicts. She shakes her head and laughs loudly, awkwardly. She is quick to affirm that some of the videos were not that bad, but her overall assessment is negative.

Though Kim does not explicitly tell me that she saw her role in the multimodal community-based writing project as a client, it is clear that her disappointment with the videos stems from her expectations of what she thought the final products should have

been. For Kim, the purpose of this multimodal community-based writing assignment is to create videos that would appeal to the specific demographic with which she works: people in the community interested in taking the GED. What she sees, instead, are videos that reflect narrow-minded stereotypes about the people who take the GED. In response to a question on the community partner survey that asked participants to rank the most important qualities that a student can bring to a community-based writing project,[3] Kim ranks "knowledge" first. During our interview, when I ask Kim to explain this choice, she explains that you need to know what you are talking about in order to be effective.

Kim's critique of some of these videos reflects what Catherine Prendergast calls "the absent presence of race" in composition studies (36) and what Irvin Peckham plainly calls "the absence of class" (16). It is sometimes difficult to isolate the influence of these status markers, but, as Peckham argues, "the social structure that feeds off marginalized social groups is our problem" (16). While Kim does not explicitly cite the students' misunderstanding of race or class, she is clearly uncomfortable with the assumptions that these Baylor students are making about people who take the GED. And these assumptions are deeply embedded, an "ingrained sensibility" (Prendergast 37) that reveals as much about my students as it reveals about me for not noticing these problems with the videos sooner. The culture within which we operate at Baylor—a culture of faith-based liberal education that promotes the value of the whole person—seems to inoculate us against these kinds of insensitivities; yet, as Critical Race Theory makes clear, "the American mainstream" often "treat[s] the exercise of racial power as rare and aberrational rather than as systemic and ingrained" (Crenshaw et al. xiv). Consequently,

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[3] The options were honesty, openness, patience, listening, relevant skills, transparency, empathy, tact, and knowledge.

White students tend to look to clear examples of injustice as evidence of race- or class-based prejudices and fail to see other instances of everyday acts of racism or classism. Some of the final drafts of the videos actually contain what could be considered racial microaggressions, or "the brief, commonplace, and daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental slights and indignities directed towards Black Americans, often automatically and unintentionally" (Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder 329), in the form of stereotypes about the people who take the GED. The "absent presence" of race in these videos is made even more palpable since one of the videos that Kim cites as "bad" is a video titled "Why are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And How Does it Relate to Pie?" The reference to the boys' "whiteness" is not even an absent presence in this case, yet we, and I include myself, do not see race in this video even as we are referencing it. In hindsight, there is no way that these videos can meet Kim's needs as a client.

However, Kim, a Black woman who works at a technical college, does not point out these obvious problems to me, a White woman who works at a private four-year university. And, I, operating within a power structure that benefits me so I often fail to look beyond what I see, do not even think to ask her how race or class might play a role in her assessment. Instead, I accept what Kim tells me: that the top five videos[4] created by the students do not accurately represent the people who actually take the GED. Kim says that she wishes more of my students had come to the campus to take a tour of the facility. She thinks that would have really helped them see the actual people and understand the context more effectively. Kim explains that she works with people who are highly motivated to get back on track, but she assures me that people get off track for

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[4] As ranked by the students, the two community partners who responded to my request to vote on their favorite videos, and myself.

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any number of reasons. Life is complicated, and the people who take the GED are not stereotypical high school dropouts. For example, sometimes people drop out because a family member gets sick and they need to take care of the household. By failing to demonstrate accurate knowledge of the situations that might require someone to pursue a GED instead of a high school diploma, the students did not deliver products that she could use. In other words, if these students had been hired as consultants or freelancers, people "with special skills who will provide requested services" (Chappell 40), they would not be hired again. By not confronting issues of race and class directly, I missed a significant opportunity to listen to the contradictions that emerge between our activity systems and provide Kim with videos that she can actually use. Instead of avoiding conflict, I should have accepted that struggle is unavoidable. In some cases, as Derrick Bell argues, the struggle is the whole point.[5]

Kim's expectation of her role as a community partner was determined by her understanding of the project's object/motive (i.e., to create a high-quality final product) and the roles of the subjects (i.e., clients and consultants/freelancers) involved in this goal-oriented activity. Figure 3.3 depicts how this belief affects other elements in the "Community Partner as Client" activity system. In an activity system in which the community partner sees her role as a client, the primary motive is to have the expressed needs met.

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[5] In "Racial Realism," Derrick Bell argues that "the struggle for freedom is, at bottom, a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome" (308).

Tools
Library research, field research, interactions with community
members, websites, focus group interviews

Subject(s)
Community partner as
    client
Student as
    consultant/
    freelancer

Object/Motive
Primary: Have needs met
Secondary: See students
    transform what they know
    for a wider audience

Outcome
Primary: High-quality final
    product that raises
    community awareness
Secondary: Student
    growth facilitated

Rules
Knowledge precedes
    project
Community partners
    get what they want
    when they want it
Students depict reality

Division of Labor
Students educate themselves vs. community partner
    shares expert knowledge
Students defer to community partner needs
Students enact their own growth

Community
Ongoing schedule vs. academic calendar
Technical college community vs. 4-year university community

Figure 3.3. Activity system of the "community partner as client" (adapted from Deans, "Shifting").

A byproduct, or in some cases a secondary goal, of this overarching motive is that students will also learn by transforming their knowledge into a suitable product. The outcome of a client-based understanding of community project is thus twofold: first, a suitable product is created, and, as a byproduct of the first outcome, student growth (i.e., the internal process) has occurred.

Understanding the motives and outcomes of this activity system has important implications for students and instructors. When a community partner views her role as a client, students need to prepare themselves to be treated, first, as a consultant or a freelancer and, second, as a student. Additionally, students need to be aware of—and, to a certain extent, adopt—the "social motives" that correspond with working with a

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community partner that values productivity and efficiency over the individual learning processes of students (Deans, "Shifting" 457). Failing to step into the role that has been created for the student can be "trouble" when a student "holds fast to school motives, which keep the student focused on what he or she thinks the teacher wants rather than on what the community partner needs, on getting a good grade rather than on getting the job done well, and on individual learning rather than on the collective contribution to the community partner" (Deans, "Shifting" 459). This type of university-community configuration also affects how instructors should approach course content. While service-learning projects ought to be scaffolded with texts and discussions that facilitate student knowledge on the issue at hand, these community partners' expectations necessitate a higher level of engagement with these topics in order to ensure that students have mastered this knowledge prior to interviewing the community partner. In this model, the informative interview is not as much of a fact-finding mission as it is an opportunity to verify, nuance, or complicate what a student has already discovered through other forms of research.

Community Partner as Mentor

Another type of activity system at work in campus-community partnerships is the "Community Partner as Mentor" model. These community partners see themselves as responsible for managing the students' learning experiences in addition to seeing to their own service needs. Deans says these partnerships tend to be more successful because the teacher and the community partner prioritize the same motive (i.e., student learning), viewing students as "learners-in-development rather than as miniature professionals" ("Shifting" 458). Though students may not explicitly articulate this belief, this service-

learning relationship is what many students expect from community-based writing experiences. Traditional schooling leads them to believe that every learning experience will be "facilitated" by an experienced teacher (Freedman and Adam). Students carry this expectation to service-learning contexts and assume that the community partner will fill this role. And, in many cases, they do. Furthermore, this understanding of the campus-community relationship often goes both ways. In their survey of service-learning outcomes for students and community members, Gray et al. discovered "many service-learning practitioners place a higher priority on promoting student growth and learning than on serving community needs" (39). While this kind of mentor-mentee relationship can tax an already-overworked staff at a service organization, some community partners naturally adopt a stance towards students that places them in the role of co-teacher, or mentor.

Cassie. Cassie grew up in and around Waco and graduated from high school in West, Texas. After completing two years at the local community college, she transferred to Baylor University. When Cassie talks about the volunteer opportunities available in the Waco community, she gets animated and excited. She has a long history in this area and loves figuring out how to solve problems by connecting people to each other and to available resources. Part of Cassie's everyday job is managing various activity systems in the local community. For instance, she is the person who explains to the nonprofit "Keep Waco Beautiful" that they cannot disrupt students' instructional time to hold a mid-morning recycling program at the elementary school. "Oh, no, that's something for *after* school programs!" she laughs. She understands the value in the motives of both activity systems, and reduces conflict by acting as a liaison between the two and coming to a

mutually beneficial solution. At the time of this study, she is the Community Resource Coordinator for the school district. As she describes her job, "49% of my time I am loaned out to … a non-profit that raises money for classroom grants for teachers." The rest of her time is spent working with the school district's Communications department, securing and allocating donations and non-traditional "gifts" and handling media relations. Cassie's experiences with people in the community who might need to take the GED are mostly restricted to the parents of the children in the public school district.

Like Kim, Cassie does not consciously identify her role in the project, but she demonstrates her commitment to the "mentor" role through her own volunteer experiences, her ideas for structuring student learning in future community-based writing projects, and her belief that "openness" is the most important quality that students can bring to projects like this. One very concrete example is how she shares her experiences as an actual mentor for young women in Waco through the LEAD program sponsored by the Greater Waco Chamber. The LEAD program partners local high school students with professionals in the local community "to foster mentoring relationships that educate and expose students to various business fields [in order to] expand their goals for the future" ("Leadership, Education and Development"). The students involved in this mentoring program have a 100% high school graduation rate and have all continued their education by going to college. Over the years, Cassie has worked with multiple young women through this program, and she tells me how much she enjoys this mentoring experience.

Additionally, she demonstrates her student-learning focus by brainstorming different learning experiences that would prepare students to understand issues related to

poverty in Waco. She mentions that we could bring in a speaker who recently spoke at a

Leadership Waco series hosted by the Chamber of Commerce:

> People are like, "Waco is so weird!" because there's like so much poverty
> and that's all you hear about and then there's so much wealth and then,
> like, all of the middle ground is more suburban and the [speaker] came in
> and talked about it and he was like, "Well, the reason we had lower
> socioeconomic on this side of the river versus that one is that's the side
> that would flood, and the more money that you had and the more
> prosperous your family was … you could afford higher ground that didn't
> flood." … even living here my whole life I didn't know that … but it
> would be a neat way to like introduce the students to be like (pause) this is
> how [Waco] evolved.

Cassie's concern that students understand how Waco evolved is not directly related to the

end product of the videos; however, this knowledge would likely complicate how they

approach the process of understanding systemic economic problems in the community.

Cassie does not expect students to learn this information before they meet with her; she

thus embodies principles of "guided participation" by thinking about how to scaffold

learning experiences for students (Rogoff).

In fact, Cassie lists "knowledge" as the least important quality that a student could

bring to a community-based writing project, a position that stands in stark opposition to

Kim's perspective in the "Community Partner as Client" model. Instead, she believes that

"openness" is the most important quality. When I ask Cassie to explain why she

privileges openness, she reflects that, "especially with, like, this subject —sometimes

coming in with this preconceived notion that you already know the topic or know, um,

what's going on or even like being competent enough to like create —this isn't the most

important thing." She continues, "I kind of feel like sometimes people are like, "Oh,

yeah, yeah. You should go back—you should drop back into school, you should get your

GED. Like, I already know what I'm going to tell [the audience with this video], but that

doesn't mean that they're open to putting themselves in that person's (pause) life." According to Cassie, the students who interviewed her, Paige and Amanda, had the right orientation towards the project. They came to her saying, "We don't know what it is that we're doing … help us!" Rather than expecting them to know anything, Cassie appreciated that they were cognizant of their lack of experience and knowledge; they needed her help and she was willing to give it to them because she interpreted her role as a community to be a mentor to the students.

Though Cassie gravitates toward the role of mentor during the GED Community Video Project, she also expresses that the project itself would be more successful if students in the future are assigned a formal "client" or one primary organization to work with. She is concerned that the videos are not as effective as they could be because the students did not create videos branded for a specific "customer." "Unfortunately," she says, "I kinda feel like … we told you [at the planning meeting], 'Help get the message out about [the importance of taking] the GED and going back to school are important' … And then now you have all of this work, and where is it going to be shown?" As a result, she suggests that, if I assign a similar project in the future, I should "Allow each set of students to promote a service or service provider specifically. Instead of pushing a broad topic like GED services, why not now create specific videos for each community partner. Videos could possibly include more contact info, logo, details..." Ultimately, pursuing the primary goal of facilitating student learning is only a part of the service-learning puzzle. Even community partners who understand their roles as mentors recognize that, at the end of the day, the project could be more successful with a greater focus placed on the final products (see figure 3.4).

Tools
Meetings, interviews with students,
    videos, Facebook pages, workplace genres,
    brochures, websites, interactions with community members

Subject(s)
Community partner as
    mentor
Student as
    mentee/
    novice

Object/Motive ⟶ Outcome
Primary: Facilitate student   Primary: Student growth
    learning and community   achieved
    engagement   Secondary: Usable final
Secondary: Successful product   product

Rules   Division of Labor
Openness precedes   Community partner facilitates learning vs. students
    project   learn on their own
Community partners   Students and community partners work together
    ensure understanding   to achieve student growth

Community
Ongoing schedule, learning process/relationship is valued, similar to
    traditional student/teacher relationship

Figure 3.4. Activity system of the "community partner as mentor" (adapted from Deans, "Shifting").

Being aware of this community partner orientation towards service-learning projects is important for instructors during the assignment design stage. Since these community partners are typically more invested in the students' intellectual and emotional development over time, they are more likely to make time to meet with students multiple times. In fact, Cassie tells me meeting more frequently would have benefits beyond a strong partnership between individuals because the secondary outcome would likely be a stronger final product that the community partner could actually use. Thus, knowing that a community partner saw her role as a mentor from the earliest stages of the project would enhance both the student's learning process and the end product.

Community Partner as Guide

The third community partner role that emerged during the multimodal community-based writing project is similar to the "Community Partner as Mentor" model in that the learning process of students is privileged over the final products created for the community organizations. However, this role differs in one key respect: the "Community Partner as Guide" is concerned with students literally developing a ground-level understanding of the community. The "mentor" seeks to instruct students on a theoretical level whereas the "guide" advocates immersive, hands-on experiences to structure the process of student learning and transformation. The experience-based learning approach has its roots in John Dewey's educational philosophy, most notably in his book *Experience and Education*. W. Wilbur Hatfield, a contemporary of Dewey, reinforces these ideals in *An Experience Curriculum of English*. He argues:

> Experience is the best of all schools. And experience need not be a dear school, if it is competently organized and conducted by a capable teacher who illuminates each situation in prospect and retrospect. The school of experience is the only one which will develop the flexibility and power of self-direction requisite for successful living in our age of swift industrial, social, and economic change. (Hatfield 3)

The "guide" serves the educational goals of the traditional school by facilitating learning experiences outside of the "dear school." This interpretation of the community partner role also incorporates elements of Lave and Wenger's principles of "situated learning" to create opportunities for students to participate in field research.

Peter. Peter was a pastor in southeast Texas for over 20 years before moving to Central Texas and working for Waco Public Transit for a brief period. He has a slow, easy manner of speaking, which lends a certain softness to what could be perceived as a

no-nonsense exterior. Peter is now in charge of student attendance and drop out recovery for the local school district. His responsibilities include ensuring that students get to school, stay in school, and, if necessary, recover lost credits so that they can return to school. What this looks like on a functional level is a variegated and creative approach to student retention. Peter leads an attendance program, an initiative designed to award students for good attendance by offering incentives like entering their names in a raffle for iPads and other top prizes. Students can assist their perfect attendance goals by signing up for recorded wake-up calls from national and local celebrities.

If the goal is getting students to school, Peter is willing to try anything. After learning that some students were legitimately missing class because of transportation issues, he pushed for and established a program that allows district students to ride the Waco public bus for free. They can take any of the nine routes to one of the district campuses for class, which was the original intent of the program, but Peter is excited to report that they can also take the bus to or from other destinations like after-school jobs or extracurricular activities such as sports or band practice. He hopes that these additional opportunities will increase student involvement in constructive activities, which will further encourage student engagement and classroom attendance. His role in the GED landscape, then, is mostly concerned with persuading students to avoid that outcome entirely.

Throughout the span of this project, Peter took on a role of a guide for the students. He did not act like a client and he did not seem to have any expectations at all for the final products. He is more concerned with facilitating a personal change in the individual students. Even as he is discussing the goals of the project (i.e., create a video

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about the GED), he reveals that there are other goals that need to be achieved first.

Primarily, he aims to cultivate in students a kind of openness to learning about other

people. Peter explains,

> Well, again you are aware that my perspective was that [students]
> experience a different part of what Waco is all about (pause) to help them
> … I mean, your project was to create a video about the GED. My
> perception was that none of them really have any knowledge about that
> whatsoever … I mean —they're kids who it was understood from birth
> "You're going to college" … And, for a lot of them, "You're going to
> Baylor."

Peter assumes that Baylor students have been on a predetermined path to earn a college

degree since the day they were born. For many of our students, this is true. Thus, for

Peter, a crucial step in creating these videos starts with students being open to

recognizing the limitations of their own perspectives.

Peter steps into his role as guide before the semester even starts. At one point

during the initial planning meeting, he says what I'm sure other people in the room are

thinking: "These Baylor kids don't know anything about the GED. They don't know

anyone who has taken the GED. They probably haven't even left campus. How are they

going to make videos for people they don't understand?" He proposes a solution so

simple that I instantly decide it's going to become one of the major assignments in the

course: students need to take the local bus around town and reflect on their experiences.

Stepping into the community and "riding the bus," Peter says, is "an easy way" to make

students aware of their privilege. After they realize that they are some of the fortunate

few who grew up with support, resources, and open doors, he reasons, they will be better

equipped to understand the audience for their videos. I discuss the implications of this

exercise in encountering social class in Chapter Four.

Consequently, Peter treats his role as a community partner as an opportunity to guide students toward a greater understanding that requires them to look outside of themselves and their own experiences. In his community partner survey, Peter also rates the most important skill that a student could bring to this project as "openness" and the least important as "knowledge." When I ask Peter why he emphasizes the importance of openness, he says that Baylor students likely do not have requisite knowledge about what it must be like not to graduate from high school and need to pursue the GED. However, he reasons they could develop empathy and understanding by approaching the project with a spirit of openness: "[T]hey had no knowledge and so they need to have an openness towards a different perspective —a different view on life … So that's really where that came from … If they're open to sort of see what that's about, then (pause) the knowledge will, you know, as far as what that's about, the knowledge will come." For Peter, openness is the key to perspective shifting, which seems to be his personal objective through participating in this project. In order have these experiences, however, students need to first be guided out of the "Baylor bubble."

For Peter, seeing Waco is linked to public transportation. When he first moved to Waco, the first job he could easily find was driving for Waco Transit. He was an employee of the Waco Transit System for approximately seven months. This prior experience shaped how he saw Waco, especially since he, like the students in this study, was new to Waco. He describes learning about Waco on the street-level: "you drive through every part of town. When you begin to drive then the first thing you gotta do is learn all the routes, all nine routes, so you gotta learn every which —all the turns and all the stops … So you get you get a crash course in Waco." This knowledge can also be

described as gaining a literacy of place, or gaining an understanding of a new place through talking (and/or writing) and reflecting on observations made through hands-on experience.

Peter also describes how working as a driver for the Waco Transit System exposed him to the relational aspect of place. Bus drivers follow consistent routes, so they develop relationships with the people who regularly take the bus. Peter explains that he learned about the broader Waco community through the microcosm of the bus: "[A] lot of good people work for Waco Transit and they care about their people. I mean, there's a lot more um (long pause) relationships formed on the bus than what you might what you might imagine 'cause there's the same lady or man drives the same route on a daily basis and they pick up the same people going to work or coming home from work, and, you know, they know each other." Peter recognizes that individuals on the bus are not isolated; they are a part of a network—a community in their own right.

This level of care in the Waco Transit System is not obvious to people who typically drive around town in their own cars. Peter thus wants to guide others toward what he saw of Waco during his time as a driver: "I want to encourage people, 'Hey, go and ride the bus for an hour or, better yet, on a Saturday go on and ride the bus for a day … you see you see a lot of parts of Waco that you wouldn't normally go into or whatever … [and] you meet a lot of people." For Peter, seeing Waco leads to meeting people, which leads to seeing Waco from an entirely new perspective. The experience of riding the bus is not just an exercise in getting into town and learning how to navigate the streets; it is an opportunity to get a crash course in Waco that often results in moments of connection with others. Peter desires to share this vision of Waco with others, which is

one of the reasons that he proposes this bus trip idea during the initial community partner focus group. Since many people in McLennan County, from a variety of backgrounds rely on public transportation, riding the bus becomes a lens through which Baylor students can grapple with the truth of how many Waco citizens live and work.

The community partner who understands his role in the project as a guide is able to guide both instructors and students to a deeper understanding of heuristic activities that scaffold student learning in real, situated practice.

Tools
Public transit, field research, interactions with community
members, interviews with students

Subject(s)
Community partner as
guide
Student as
newcomer

Object/Motive   Outcome
Primary: Get students to   Primary: Students gain
  "see Waco"   new perspective
Secondary: Students undergo   Secondary: Students are
  transformation   more engaged in
                                        community/compose
                                        more thoughtful
                                        products)

Rules
Openness precedes
  project
Guidelines for riding bus
Students develop empathy

Division of Labor
Students experience for themselves vs. community partner
  shares expert knowledge
Community partner structures learning experience

Community
Microcosm of Waco community on bus, relational aspects of place

Figure 3.5. Activity system of the "community partner as guide" (adapted from Deans, "Shifting").

Lave and Wenger's "community of practice" is traditionally described as learning experiences that occur within specific contexts and social environments. Conceiving of the Waco public bus as a "community of practice" expands this community-based writing project beyond the walls of the participating organizations and literally out into the

community. The impact of Peter's role as a guide leading students to experience "a crash course in Waco" adds a new perspective to the "Community Partner as Mentor" model of community partner roles (see figure 3.5).

In sum, the community partners' individual interpretations of their roles had a tremendous impact on the goal-directed activity system of each community partner. Their different conceptions of their roles as community partners created additional roles that they expected the students to inhabit (e.g., "consultant/freelancer," "mentee/novice," and "newcomer"). Furthermore, their understanding of their roles as community partners affected how they determined their desired outcomes and ultimately evaluated the success of the project. While no stakeholder involved in the project ever explicitly articulated any of these roles during the course of this community-based writing project, the Subject(s) element of the activity system emerged as a primary area of contradiction among the various community partner activity systems.

Community Partners' Assessment of Students' Final Products

Despite some of the community partners' decisions to subordinate the importance of the final products, the videos that the students created were still the stated aims of the project. Table 3.2 shows that the community partners had contradictory responses to the outcomes of the final products, including the technical quality of the videos as well as the students' rhetorical awareness. In particular, the community partners expressed concern that the students failed to understand the specific audiences they were trying to reach.[6] In this section, I analyze the contradictions that occurred among the activity systems as they relate to the outcomes of the final products.

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[6] Phoebe and I provided the students with a list of potential audiences for these videos, and we discussed different methods for reaching these audiences in class.

Table 3.2

Community Partners' Perspectives on the Outcomes of the Final Videos Composed by
Students during the GED Community Video Project

The student videos I watched…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
met or exceeded my expectations of the GED Community Video Project in technical execution	0	4	1	0	5
met or exceeded my expectations of the GED Community Video Project in the quality of their messages	1	2	1	1	5
seemed to demonstrate a clear understanding of audience	0	2	2	1	5
met community needs I had expressed at some point in the process	0	4	1	0	5

Community Partners' Perspectives on Students' Technical Ability

Overall, the community partners felt that the technical quality of the videos was

adequate in spite of the fact that these student-composed videos were not of

"professional" quality. The multimodal community-based writing project is the final

project in a 15-week-class. Since the first week of class, students have been

experimenting with digital projects by working on low-stake "finger exercises" in audio

and video editing. While 15 weeks does not come close to the 10,000 hours of "deliberate

practice," a theory popularized by Malcolm Gladwell and complicated by a recent study,[7]

that a person needs to become an expert in an activity, students have had many

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[7] See Macnamara, Hambrick, and Oswald. While this study still finds that deliberate practice is important, other factors are also found to influence expertise in music, sports, and games. Moe Folk's dissertation specifically discusses deliberate practice within the context of digital composing.

opportunities to practice multimodal composing. That said, the final videos that the students upload to YouTube display varying levels of skill. I define "technical ability" as the overall quality of the editing of images, video, and audio, including the use of visual transitions and the duration of slides.

The five community partners who completed the questionnaire all watched at least 6-10 of these videos. Based on these viewings, four of the community partners agree with the statement "The student videos I watched met or exceeded my expectations of the GED Community Video Project in technical execution." The remaining community partner disagrees and finds these videos lacking in technical ability. In part, this generally favorable assessment of the videos' technical quality could come from the community partners' estimation of their own limited technical abilities. If the text is superior to what an audience could achieve on their own, then they tend to be lenient towards their assessment of a multimodal project's technical quality (Folk 218). Moe Folk observes that "the style often becomes the text in the eyes of the audience who cannot make it— and in many cases the actual technical style ends up being valued above content by the composer and thus becomes the marker for the audience" (218). Peter notes that "4, 5, or 6" of the videos were "the best," but he thinks that the technical quality overall was fairly good. He reflects, "several of the videos were really well thought out and well done. It was clear that some students spent a good deal of time working on their concepts and producing their videos. It was equally as clear that some did not spend as much time." For Peter, the issue of technical competency is related to time and effort, not necessarily facility with digital tools or previous experience with digital modes of composing; some

students invested more energy into this project than others, and the results were clear in the final videos.

Though Cassie feels that the technical quality of the videos met her expectations, her primary concern is that some of the contact information for the organizations is not displayed on screen for a long enough period of time. As she watches one video she exclaims, "Oh! If we could add one more second of that screen!" She also sees completing these technical edits as adding value to the community partners' organizations since "they don't have the time or the money or the resources or somebody that could [make those changes]." Additionally, some of the videos did not display thorough proofreading and included small typos and misspelled words. Though these changes are small and do not require a significant amount of technical skill, these elements ultimately affect the overall usability of the final products.

Community Partners' Perspectives on Students' Rhetorical Awareness

Despite Folk's claim that viewers tend to conflate technical and rhetorical concerns, the community partners in this case study do not privilege the technical style of the videos at the expense of the quality of the messages. The community partners are relatively satisfied with the technical quality of the final products, but they radically differ in opinion when it comes to the quality of the videos' messages (see table 3.2). The contradictions in rhetorical awareness that the community partners note most frequently are related to issues of context and audience. These contradictions are consistent with the various organizations and institutions represented in each of the community partner activity systems.

Since each community partner works with a different segment of the Waco population (e.g., current and potential GED test-takers, GED graduates looking for employment, at-risk high school students, etc.), they each see the issue of education in Waco through a very specific lens. Lorraine Higgins, Elenore Long, and Linda Flower identify similar dissonance in their discussion of community literacy in an urban settlement house. When people come from such diverse backgrounds, "any *one* group's perspective on a problem will always be partial—both limited and biased towards its own interests" (Higgins, Long, and Flower 170). As a result of these different interests, each community partner had very different ideas about the messages they wanted the students to communicate through these videos. When students compose videos with one community partner's context and intended audience in mind, they inadvertently ignore the needs of other community partners who do not work with these same issues. While this critique is not entirely fair to the students, this is a good example of how digital delivery enables access for diverse secondary audiences. I will discuss the problem of digital delivery at greater length in Chapter Five.

Context. Writing scholars have long observed that rhetoric is situated and context-dependent. Lloyd Bitzer observes that "rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem" (5). Charles Bazerman notes that rhetoric is both "strategic and situational, based on the purposes, needs, and possibilities of the user, the resources available then and there to be deployed, and the potentialities of the situation" (15). Kenneth Burke refers to a similar concern with his use of "scene" in the dramatistic pentad, referring to the "background of the act, [and] the

situation in which it occurred" (xv). Thus, the power of a rhetorical act derives from the particularities of the situation to which it responds. The appropriateness of any given text is directly related to the context to which the text responds as well as the context in which the text is received.

The community partners involved in this project are accustomed to the contexts in which they work every day and therefore view each student video with a particular set of concerns in mind. For example, Liz, the associate director of a nonprofit women's organization, works with women in the Waco community who want to improve their lives and the lives of their families. In this context, it is not uncommon for Liz to encounter women who discuss the challenges of raising children alone. When she sees a video about the kinds of interventions that can be made in a single mother's life to guide her towards better opportunities, she is pleased because she is intimately acquainted with this context. For other community partners, these same issues can signify narrow-minded stereotypes about the people who take the GED.

Additionally, community partners express concern at various points that Baylor students are ill equipped to understand contexts outside of their own personal experiences. To that end, Cassie explains how she is mindful of how she talks to students about sensitive issues, like poverty, that affect the local community. She stresses that it is important to be accurate while accentuating the positive:

> I'm always very careful –I don't like for us to always talk about like Waco has so much poverty and *none* of the parents do anything and *none* of the parents are involved —Like, I feel like sometimes we overgeneralize and it makes people feel like either the situation is so out of hand, like it isn't going to work. Or it's really (pause) being disrespectful to the people that are involved or are, you know, trying … And even if they don't ever go back to school or get their GED, that doesn't mean that they can't be good parents.

Again, Cassie's perception of her community partner role as a mentor is evident. Rather than expecting students to know how to talk about potentially risky topics before coming to a service-learning experience, she structures productive ways of thinking through unfamiliar contexts with them.

Despite efforts like Cassie's to nuance how students approach sensitive topics, the issue of context is complicated by the public distribution of these videos through a common YouTube channel. Once the videos are made available online, they are divorced from the context in which they were originally composed. The YouTube channel flattened the individual situations to which the students are responding and created a new context that displays each of the student videos side by side. The community partners cannot tell which videos are composed by the students who interviewed them since the students vote to post their videos anonymously. Also, the common "We Are Waco" introduction that the students designed brands these videos as a unit. When some of the community partners view these final videos online, what they see is not innovation in design but insensitive visual images. Not rewarding messages, but damaging stereotypes. The context, as it turns out, is vitally important to the success of their final products.

Audience. An additional element that affects the community partners' overall perception of the final products in this project is "audience." The notion of audience, one of the three parts in the rhetorical triangle, has undergone significant shifts over time— from the physical audiences of rhetorical oratory in classical Greece to competing ideas of invoking or addressing audiences (Ede and Lunsford; Ong) to more recent discussions of the relevance of the concept of "audience" in digital discursive environments (see

Weiser, Fehler, and González). In "Rereading 'Invoked' and 'Addressed' Readers Through a Social Lens: Toward a Recognition of Multiple Audiences," Mary Jo Reiff refers to the Protean nature of audience as a concept, explaining that "audience is an unstable referent, a floating signifier" (407) that variously refers to invented, imagined, and real people. She suggests that traditional conceptions of audience fail to acknowledge the reality that audience is actually always-multiple—"chaotic and fluid" (Reiff 414)— and makes different demands on the writer based on all of the expectations of the specific individuals that may encounter a text. Reiff's social perspective of audience is particularly useful for discussing audience within the context of a multimodal community-writing project that not only shifts the primary audience from teacher to community partner but takes an additional step by making this work available online for any number of potential audiences to view and consume. I will discuss this issue further in Chapter Four.

The community partners involved in this project had different audiences in mind as they spoke with students about the kinds of videos they should compose. Some of these audiences include:

Prospective Students

- Individuals who are considering going back to school or trying to get their GEDs
- Individuals with low-income who are trying to get some additional education in order to better their income prospects

Current Students

- Individuals who are currently working on a GED

- Individuals who are making the transition from getting their GED into a post-secondary program

- First Generation college students

Student Support System

- People in the community who might know someone who would be a good candidate for a GED

- People in the community who might be willing to contribute resources to "back to school" efforts in town (e.g. scholarships for GED recipients, etc.)

- People at non-profits who work with people who might need to go back and get a GED or go back to school

- The community in general—specifically to build enthusiasm around the topic of getting a GED

The audience for the GED Community Video project varied depending on the individual community partners with whom the students were working. Some of the community partners share stories with the students about parents who want to earn the GED to make their children proud or to show them that they care about education while others talk about the high-earning technical jobs that are possible after earning the GED. Based on each community partners' advice, students composed videos for women and men in Waco who do not graduate from high school for any number of practical, financial, social, physical, and emotional reasons.

The community partners acknowledge that the students they meet with during the interview phase of the project demonstrate a desire to reach their intended audience, yet

the videos the students produce ultimately fall short of their expectations. All of the

community partners either agree or strongly agree that the students "appear to be

motivated and engaged," "ask good questions about my organization and/or my role in

the community," and "appear to demonstrate a concern for reaching their intended

audience" (see table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Community Partners' Perspectives on Students' Motivation to Communicate Effectively

The Baylor student/s I met with…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
appeared to be motivated and engaged	3	2	0	0	5
asked good questions about my organization and/or my role in the community	3	2	0	0	5
appeared to demonstrate a concern for reaching their intended audience	1	4	0	0	5

Kim, in particular, strongly agrees with each of the statements in table 3.3. Cassie, too,

expresses that the students who met with her, Amanda and Paige, demonstrate a genuine

desire to understand the people that she works with. She describes that they start by

asking her basic questions:

> "What services do you provide? Who are your customers?" And just
> listening … they were so open … And then like you started seeing them
> [ask questions] like, "Well, why is that?" Or "what do you mean? Why
> wouldn't somebody have already graduated?" Or, you know, "How is that
> hard for them? You know, to get to a testing site or why don't they have
> their own car to get themselves to work? How hard is that?"

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The interview is thus an important heuristic for these students as it shapes how they approach the task of planning and composing their videos. Peter also shares that the three students who met with him were open to learning through the interview process, so he encouraged them to "step out of your own shoes and try to, you know, try to contact a different perspective and that'll –that'll sort of guide what you think and what you want to do or what you want to say."

In spite of these positive interviewing experiences, two of the community partners express that the rhetorical awareness of audience in the videos is not what they expected, which damages their opinions of the final products. Table 3.2 shows that community partners' level of agreement with the statement "The student videos I watched seemed to demonstrate a clear understand of audience" is mixed: two people surveyed agree and three disagree. In short, the majority of the community partners felt that the videos (1) were not racially diverse enough or technically accurate (i.e., not tired enough to be a mom), (2) were rooted in negative stereotypes, and (3) contained messages not applicable to their target populations.

Most of the videos that the community partners see feature photos and video clips of young, college-aged white people. In fact, some of the videos depict college students wearing shirts that were clearly purchased in the Baylor bookstore or from a Baylor Greek organization. After watching one video, in which the student-composer has clearly cast his college-aged friend as a young mother buying diapers at the grocery store, Cassie comments, "Well, where's the diversity? She needs to look a little more tired … maybe her outfit wouldn't be put together as much as it is." Cassie reflects that affiliation with the school district affects what she expects from the videos. Since the young woman in

the video does not look like the mothers she works with, Cassie is unable to bridge the disconnect and see the message behind the video. She is too distracted by what this student is missing about the racial and economic realities of the audience she envisions—whether or not that audience is the one that the student intended.

Kim does not address the issue of diversity directly, but she brings up another concern related to the assumptions that students seem to be making about the audience of GED test-takers: too many of the videos seem to be based on stereotypes of people who do not finish high school with their diplomas. Kim works with people who did not complete high school for any number of reasons. These reasons from "I was homeschooled and I need some sort of formal certification to go to college" to "My mom is sick and I need to help out at home" to "I thought I wanted to get a job and start working" to other causes such as pregnancy or health issues. Experiences like this—including attitudes and life events that result in a break from traditional schooling—are largely unfamiliar to Baylor students who encounter few disruptions to their college plans.

Consequently, Kim can understand why some of the students would have drawn on stereotypes and she does not blame them for the limitations of their perspective. However, she says that they need to push beyond these initial assumptions in order to communicate effectively with their intended audiences. "Some [videos] were good," she says, "But in my opinion, many students seem to have had a general stereotype of who they thought GED candidates were and made their videos based on those stereotypes. A running theme of GED candidates being drug abusers, criminals, hopeless and without self-respect." Kim stresses that, in her experience, these stereotypes are just not true.

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The stereotypes depicted in the videos are troubling for a number of reasons, but Kim is particularly bothered because they limit how other people in the community will perceive people who are pursuing the GED. Diane, one of Kim's co-workers at the technical college, confirms this assessment:

> My concerns center around the perspective that the students brought to bear on some of the videos. Some just did not represent the person I see working hard to earn their GED. In addition, if I was new to Waco and saw some of the videos, I would have a very skewed perspective of the typical person in Waco and especially of a GED student.

These stereotypes also account for the negative tone Kim observes in many of the videos. "These people are not hopeless!" she repeats over and over during our interview. The focus on stereotypes in some of the videos restricts the possibilities for more positive—and, in Kim's mind, more accurate—representations of GED test-takers. The images and messages that she sees in the videos necessarily exclude others, forming a "terministic screen" that filters how an audience can interpret reality. According to Kenneth Burke in *Language as Symbolic Action,* the language we use "directs the attention to one field rather than to another" (46); thus, the terms we use shape how we see the world. In a similar way, the visuals we use also structure a particular way of seeing (Burke; Berger). As Burke describes it, "[a] way of seeing is also a way of not seeing—a focus on object A involves a neglect of object B" (*Permanence and Change* 49). David Blakesley extends this idea of terministic screens as ways of seeing in his edited collection *The Terministic Screen: Rhetorical Perspective on Film*. The visual signs and symbols in a film direct the attention toward certain perspectives. Though the videos the students compose for the GED Community Video Project are not "films," they are rhetorically shaped visual arguments that "say as much about the attitude of the director and viewer

as they say about their referential subject" (Blakesley 3). The emphasis on stereotypes, then, limits what can be known about the GED test-taker, but it also suggests a great deal about the kinds of internal transformations that did or did not take place within the student composers throughout this process. In Chapter Five, I will reflect on the discussion that Phoebe and I, the project's sponsors, had as a result of this critical feedback about the stereotypes portrayed in some of these student videos.

By relying on stereotypes, students do not demonstrate the same level of care and concern for their intended audience that they demonstrated during their interviews with community partners. Both Kim and Cassie tried to stress that not sharing the same schooling experience as a typical Baylor student does not mean that a person lacks family support or comes from a necessarily disadvantaged position. Cassie also reiterates how important it is for students to withhold judgment when they communicate with audiences who might have experiences different from their own: "[N]ot that every Baylor student is from like a cookie cutter thing … [but] it's not strange for some of our [district] kids to live in a house with like five or six siblings … and also have, you know, maybe an aunt or an uncle or a cousin there, as well." She sees this stance of openness as a crucial element of audience awareness. Students should be "willing to learn, like, how you can convey messages to everyone regardless of what's going on." For these two community partners, the audiences that some students choose might be too narrow to be effective at all.

The narrow focus of some of these videos speaks to the last point I would like to make about audience. Some community partners felt that, if the messages were not directly applicable to their organizations and institutions, the videos failed. Cassie, for

example, explains, "if the student was [working with the nonprofit women's organization] the single mom PSA makes sense … but the need for each organization is different. Even if they do serve a lot of the same people." She observes that the tensions that appeared during the voting stage of the project derived from the fact that each video was made in response to a specific community partner's needs but each community partner felt like her target population was the sole audience. She continues:

> I think that's probably why you get mixed reviews or somebody saying, "Well, this didn't represent us" or "It's not only this [issue]." —'cause they all serve different—some people specialize in just serving elderly people … And then if you did that for [the testing center], they'd be like, "We only see, you know, five or six people a month over the age of 80."

Since all of the videos—regardless of the intended audience— are made publically available on the #WeAreWaco YouTube channel,[8] each community partner viewed each video through a lens relevant for their needs. If the message did not apply to the audience that their specific organization served, then they viewed that video as either "offensive" (i.e., "a failure") or "irrelevant." As one community partner comments, "Overall the videos were good. There were a few that I would not choose to use because they do not address my audience."

Peter, however, has a different perspective on the issue of audience, which further complicates the issue and reveals a contradiction between community partner activity systems. He shared with the students who interviewed him that drug use is a reason that a student might drop out of school. Peter agrees that this situation is a stereotype, but he says it is "a stereotype based in reality." Whereas Kim and Cassie, generally speaking, aim to promote a more positive outlook on education in Waco, Peter wants to shock at-

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[8] The community partners were asked to visit YouTube to vote for videos so that the favorite videos could be featured on local websites.

risk high school students into staying in school. He admits that he does not have "data or actual information to say 'This is why they're dropping out of school.' But yeah. It's an issue." As a result of Peter's perspective, one of the students who interviewed him creates a video called "Drugs to Diploma" that ends up being one of the most divisive videos in the project.[9] However, Peter maintains the specific approach can be an effective strategy for the specific audience to whom this message applies:

> [I]f you think you have a message for a specific audience, I mean … you might not reach everybody, but there is a pretty broad segment of the population that may identify with that perspective … it's a problem. Especially in the poverty communities … Whether it's a parent or student or whatever. Often it's —it can be both … But it's real common for the parents … One parent, well, when my wife was principal at [a Waco school] as many as 30% of the students had one parent incarcerated. A fairly high population had *both* … And those are often drug-related, for instance … So, are there kids dealing with that? Without a doubt … Are they prone to that based on where they're growing up and that kind of stuff? Without a doubt.

For some community partners, the stereotypes present in some of these videos—the single mother, the recovered drug user—are too narrow and too negative to be effective acts of communication, yet this assessment is not consistent across all of the community partners.

The Success of the Project: A Contradiction between Activity Systems

The contradiction that emerges between the activity systems of these community partners reveals a central challenge in asking multiple community partners to participate in a publically-shared multimodal community-based writing project: how to evaluate a project's success when community partners' activity systems have competing objects/motives and desired outcomes (see table 3.4).

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[9] "Drugs to Diploma": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeCT6od7jN0

Table 3.4

Side-by-Side Comparison of the Object(s)/Motive(s) and Outcomes of Each Community
Partner Role

Role	Primary Object/Motive	Secondary Object/Motive	Outcome/s
Client	Have needs met	Transform knowledge for wider audience	(1) High-quality product (2) Student growth
Mentor	Facilitate student learning and community engagement	Successful product	(1) Student growth (2) Usable final product
Guide	Get students to "see" community	Student growth	(1) Students gain new perspective (2) Students are more engaged in community/create more thoughtful products

In effect, the community partners have different definitions of success because, despite

the fact that we set goals collectively during the initial planning meeting, they define the

goals of the project differently and adopt different roles to achieve these goals. If one

community partner privileges the students' learning process and another community

partner privileges the final products that the students create, then this contradiction

creates a gap that has implications for all stakeholders. I will discuss these implications in

Chapters Four and Five. In this section, I present the perspectives of the community

partners to explore the metrics they used to assess who truly benefits from the GED

Community Video Project.

Overall Assessment of the Project's Benefits

   The community partners had varying opinions on which people benefit from the project.

Table 3.5

Community Partners' Perspectives on Who Benefits from the GED Community Video Project

The GED Community Video Project benefits…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Baylor students	3	2	0	0	5
the broader Waco community	1	2	1	1	5
everyone involved	1	2	2	0	5

Table 3.5 shows that all of the community partners surveyed either strongly agreed or agreed that the GED Community Video Project was beneficial for Baylor students, but their agreement ends there. The statement "The GED Community Video Project benefits the broader Waco community" had a high standard deviation, which indicates that community partners disagreed about how much of a positive impact this project would have on the local community. Since this criterion is essential to the goals of community-based writing pedagogy, this result is very revealing. The statement "The GED Community Video Project benefits everyone involved" also had a relatively high standard deviation, but this result suggests that the benefits community partners themselves had a slightly more positive experience.

Competing Definitions of Success

The community partners involved in this project each have different ideas about what a successful project should look like. To that end, they each use different metrics to determine the success or failure of the community-based writing project. Community partners who emphasize the student learning process have more positive assessments of the project while community partners who privilege the final products are disappointed with this attempt at writing *for* the community. These contradictions point to tensions that underlie the goals of different organizations and institutions in the community. Despite the fact that "tensions are thought to have a negative valence, that is, tensions are something to be avoided or smoothed over" there is productive potential in "understand[ing] tensions in a more relational way" (Clandinin et al. qtd. in Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin 16). Tensions can be a "way of creating a between space" (Clandinin et al. qtd. in Huber, Murphy, and Clandinin 16) and a way of bringing to the surface issues that affect everyone in the community. Ultimately, all community partners indicate that the project has potential as a mutually beneficial project and provide recommendations to improve future attempts at enacting a multimodal community-based writing project in a first-year digital writing class. I include their suggestions at the end of this section.

Community partners who emphasize the process of student growth. The community partners who prioritize student growth and transformation were satisfied with the project and feel that their goals are mostly met. Even if just one student appears to have grown or changed through her participation in this project, then the community partners who took on roles as mentors or guides seem to be pleased. Cassie, for one,

notices that the students cared about the work that they completed. She notes, "You could tell that the students not only wanted to complete the assignment for credit, but were emotionally invested in the project and the outcomes. Their heart made the difference." This element, heart, is impossible to quantify and has little bearing on the quality or effectiveness of the final products. However, through her interaction with students, Cassie is able to assess that they had "heart" that made the project and outcomes successful.

For Peter, who adopts a role as a "guide," the impact of the video project is solely measured through how it affected the students in the class. He seems indifferent to the intended aims of the video project: "Even if the digital message … has a limited impact, you know," he shrugs. The metric of success is the personal change that occurs within the individual student. In particular, Peter cites an example that came from the Waco Public Transit Project as evidence of the impact of the video project and the class: "I think it impacted these kids, so if that's it, that's enough for me. The one who wrote the piece on meeting the guy. I mean." Peter is referring to Sam, one of the students who wrote a blog post for the local website that chronicles the change he experienced as a result of riding the bus and meeting a homeless man named Cody. Peter reflects, "So that, like I say, for me was a success … One of the kids, he wasn't quite the same after [seeing the Waco community]." Peter's observation about the byproducts of stepping out into the community and participating in this project underscores the transformative experience of learning. By stepping into the community, students "see life a little differently." Peter acknowledges that some of these benefits might be a slow burn, but the experience could change how students think about poverty and privilege:

> [M]y thought is that most of the kids grow up –most of the Baylor kids
> grow up as pretty protected and, you know, privileged, which is fine —I
> got nothing against that. My kids probably did, too … But um not all the
> world is like that … And doesn't mean he won't grow up and raise his
> kids the same way, but he may see it a little differently … when he sees
> the guy on the corner or across the street or whatever, waiting on the bus
> and, you know. "Yeah, I know a little bit more about what his life is like
> than I did before" so that's worthwhile.

While this long-term benefit might not address the immediate goals of a service-learning

project, it does suggest success is marked by change in the individual instead of what the

individual produces as a result of a 15-week college course.

Community partners who emphasize the final products. Broadly speaking, the

community partners who privilege the production of the videos are dissatisfied with the

final videos as a whole; however, they observe that some of the final products are

successful. Various community partners refer to at least some of the videos as "really

well thought out and well done," "good," "a great youthful approach to media and social

media messaging," and "overall, good." However, the concerns that Kim and her

colleague raise are legitimate. Some of the videos do not accurately represent the people

who earn the GED. In fact, Kim feels so strongly about some of the videos that she says

she would never show them to any of the test-takers she works with because she does not

want anyone to think, "Is that what people really think of me?" And, in some cases, the

answer is, unfortunately, "yes." The final products that the students create reveal this

tension. However, the issue is more complicated than that, as we will see in Chapter Four

when I discuss the perspectives of the students; this impression is not always for the

reasons that a community partner might think. Ultimately, there is no one method of

determining the success of the final projects. Each video has the potential to appeal to the

specific audience for which it was created, but the videos *en bloc* cannot succeed. I will discuss the problem of digital delivery in Chapter Five.

Regardless of the community partners' conception of their role in the project as client, mentor, or guide, they each have certain expectations for students throughout their participation in this project. A certain level of inner transformation needs to take place in order for a final product to be successful. If a student starts at Point A, she cannot create a successful video without undergoing some sort of action that leads her to approach the content with sensitivity, humility, and self-awareness, which means that she ends at a Point B. The community partners who emphasize both the learning process and the final products are aware that this development needs to happen and work with students to facilitate this change. Thus, the student growth process and the final products can be seen as having a dialectical relationship; each informs the other and each requires the other.

Looking forward: feedback for improvement. Community partners offer their advice about how to improve this project in the future, and their comments reveal five primary areas of improvement (see table 3.6).

Table 3.6

Community Partners' Suggestions for Improving Future Projects

Issues	Suggestions for Improvement
Students' maturity	Incorporate a similar project as second or third year projects so that the kids have had time to mature more in their college life. I think it would bring up the quality of the videos.
	I believe projects like this are great and require courage on the part of the instructor. Maybe the students will need more boundaries due to their age.
Students' knowledge	The idea is a good one and I am hopeful that it will be used again. Possibly having more information on the topic and the parameters could be beneficial to the students and the community.
	Maybe it would be helpful to have the community members and GED candidates be on a panel and students can ask questions of the group.
Scope of project	Allow each set of students to promote a service or service provider specifically. Instead of pushing a broad topic like GED services, why not now create specific videos for each community partner? Videos could possibly include more contact info, logo, details...
Lack of diversity in videos	The only thought would be if they wanted to use real photos that they took. And maybe that's why there was some disconnect … Waco people like to see Waco people.

Table 3.6—Continued

Issues	Suggestions for Improvement
Not enough face-to-face interaction	Maybe make [community partners] come into the classroom, like, if there was a day you had them come in … And maybe that's a way that the nonprofit can come into the Baylor world and the Baylor world can go to the nonprofit. Although you could still do it electronically. I just think it's really easy to hide behind email and [critique] without seeing the person who created it … They didn't have anything invested in it. They had nothing to lose.

In Chapter Five, I put these suggestions into conversation with other observations that

Phoebe and I make from our perspectives as the project's sponsors.

Conclusion

The perspectives of community partners might be overlooked in the scholarship,

but the reason is obvious: there is no "one" community partner perspective. Each

community partner brings to the project a different perspective, a different understanding

of their roles and obligations, a different understanding of their goals and the tools that

should be used to achieve those goals, and a different method of evaluating success.

Rhetorically listening to the community partners reveals the complex activity systems at

work when multiple community partners are invited to participate in a service-learning

project. Activity theory can make these contradictions more visible and give us a foothold

for discussion. In the chapters that follow, I present the perspectives of two of the other

stakeholders involved in this community-based writing project: the students and the

project's sponsors. By examining these perspectives alongside the "unheard voices" of the community partners, we can begin to understand just how complex community-based writing projects are—particularly when they are made available in online discursive environments.

CHAPTER FOUR

Students' Perspectives: The "Novice" and the "Risk-Taker"

> Creativity – the ability to use novel approaches for generating, investigating, and representing ideas. Creativity is fostered when writers are encouraged to take risks by exploring questions, topics, and ideas that are new to them; use methods that are new to them to investigate questions, topics, and ideas; represent what they have learned in a variety of ways; and evaluate the effects or consequences of their creative choices.
> —*Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*

When first-year students enter a writing class on their first day of college, they do not often have "transformation" or "growth" on their minds. In some cases, they might not even explicitly think about "learning" at all. Instead, they might be excited about meeting new people and being in a class small enough to know everyone's names. They might be concerned that their high schools have not prepared them for the kinds of writing they will be doing in college. They might be nervous, unsure of what to expect. As Leigh Jones notes, "the [composition] classroom is disorienting for everyone … We are trying to figure each other out, assessing our audience, stepping into new mental and physical space, performing in new ways" (75). And, in a digital writing class, the worries compound—even if students choose to take a class that explicitly states additional goals of learning to communicate using multiple semiotic modes. In every class I teach, I ask students to fill out index cards with personal information and responses to ice-breaker questions about their favorite television shows or which actors they would want to play them in a movie. I also ask them to rank on a scale of 1-5 how prepared they feel for the class and their answers range from the absurdly self-possessed to the avowedly unsure.

The bottom line is, in spite of countless think pieces on the millennial[1] generation's love affair with social media and digital forms of communication, the students who walk into a digital writing class display varying levels of confidence, skill, and self-awareness.

Students entering FAS 1302 encounter risks at every turn. They are new to the local community, new to digital writing, new to college, new to learning how to discuss complex issues like social class. Quite often, they have experiences that challenge what they think they know. Freire calls this process ruptura and argues that "there is no creativity without ruptura, without a break from the old, without a conflict in which you have to make a decision. I would say there is no human existence without ruptura" (Horton and Freire 38). There are many opportunities for the first-year writing student to encounter ruptura, and each of these opportunities requires a certain level of boldness and risk. The students who participate in the multimodal community-based writing project often feel disoriented or uncomfortable, but they can decide to see these moments of ruptura as fuel that urges them towards new risks, new challenges.

This semester, for the first time, I decide to incentivize students—novices, risk-takers, all of them—to practice out-of-the-box, innovative thinking and create a new grading category on the course syllabus called "Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving."[2] This evaluation category is worth 15% of the total course grade. Instead of assessing students on the "success" of their final products, I want to evaluate them on

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[1] According to the Pew Research Center, the Millennial Generation is the first generation to come of age at the turn of the 21st century, beginning with those born after 1980. The end date is less clear, although most accounts consider the youngest millennials to be those born before the year 2000 (see Taylor and Keeter).

[2] Two of these qualities, creativity and flexibility, appear on the list of "the eight habits of mind essential for success in college writing" in the 2011"Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." The other habits of mind are curiosity, openness, engagement, persistence, responsibility, and metacognition (Council of Writing Program Administrators 4-5).

how much, how intensely, and how creatively they *try*. "Will you, or will you not, roll with the punches when your laptop crashes or your video doesn't save correctly?" I explain to the students on the first of class. "Are you willing to try something new—even if it means you might 'fail'? And what does it even mean to 'fail' if 'failing' is not tied to your final grade?" It is worth noting that, while some students might feel comfortable taking creative risks or solving problems in their work, they are often less motivated to take risks when it comes to seeing their own privilege or looking more critically at issues of social inequality.

I begin this chapter with a description of what students might see or fail to see when they first come to Waco and introduce the exigence for the Waco Public Transit Project, the field research assignment inspired by Peter's community partner role as a "guide." I also present the perspectives of students through the lens of two identities that students adopt in the first-year digital writing classroom: the novice or the risk-taker. These orientations to multimodal composing technologies alter how students approach the course content and thereby affect the ways in which they demonstrate creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving skills. In this chapter, I trace the development of two students as they unevenly work through issues related to creativity, flexibility, and problem solving as they participate in the GED Community Video Project.

These students are not meant to be representative of all students in FAS 1302 or in digital writing classes, but their perspectives on the class do provide an opportunity to understand the particularity of their experiences. These two students were selected because their final videos represent the greatest contradiction in audience reception: one was entirely disregarded by her peers and praised by the community partners while the

other was loved by her peers but did not appeal to the majority of the community

partners. I found this complexity compelling, so I chose to dig more deeply into the

contexts surrounding these two videos. By presenting a view of the project from these

students' perspectives, I hope to offer a more complex picture of the activity system of a

classroom involved in a multimodal community-based writing project.

Description of Baylor in Waco

Most people traversing the state of Texas on Interstate 35 are typically on their

way to or from Austin and Dallas. Waco is the midpoint, a hiccup really, between these

two major cities. When you are driving north or south on I-35, you might see the outline

of Waco's one-building skyline and the historic suspension bridge, but you don't really

see Waco; you see Baylor University. Baylor rises on either side of the 35—a tall, gray

administration building on one side and, on the other, an impressive set of mostly

matching brick buildings with spires. You pass through a sea of billboards about Baylor

Nation, Baylor athletics, and Baylor values. "This is Bear Country." "Creating

Knowledge." "Building Leaders… and Heisman Trophy Winners." Then, as you crest a

slight hill from either direction, you see it: McLane Stadium, the $266 million-dollar

crowning jewel of the Baylor campus, which was under construction during the time of

this case study in the fall of 2013. Before you know it, you are traveling out of town.

Your glimpse of Waco lies behind you, and all you really saw was Baylor.

Baylor students often experience Waco in this way. Waco is Baylor, and

everything else in this city of 129,000 people is just a backdrop.[3] If students do venture

into Waco, it is to get to the restaurants and coffeehouses and grocery stores and

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[3] Data taken from the 2013 U.S. Census Bureau.

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churches. Even then, many of them do not "see" Waco. They might see what Waco is missing—mostly superficial destinations of consumption like a Whole Foods, a good mall, and the kind of nightlife you might expect in a college town. And they might see remnants of the vibrant city Waco used to be in the vacant storefronts and empty lots downtown. Students see other sights, though. Neighborhoods not far from Baylor's campus are run down and neglected. Sometimes you can see people looking for cans in the dumpsters near the apartment complexes. Baylor students see these signs of poverty. For students, a rash of robberies near campus means frequent email blasts and text message alerts from the Baylor Police Department, warning them to travel in pairs, avoid running the Bear Trail at night, and exercise caution at local gas stations and convenience stores. Baylor students see these news stories. Without any reason to pay attention or get involved in the community outside of Baylor, this limited view is what students often see when they see Waco.

And for those who choose to see beyond all of these things, they can see other sights. A church that meets under a highway overpass near campus, offering food and comfort to the city's homeless. If a student cares to venture past the highway and across the river, she would find a recently painted community mural on the wall of the East Waco branch of the city library. The mural, which was part of the Mid-America Arts Alliance, was designed based on input from the residents of East Waco and depicts meaningful moments in the history of this largely African-American community. She would see pictures of food, since this building used to be a grocery store servicing an area that some would now call a "food desert." And she would see paintings of books, since the public library is now offering sustenance of a different kind. If she traveled even

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deeper into the heart of the city she would find a shopping center in a dilapidated area converted into a community theatre, a restaurant, and a fair trade market. And there are countless other corners of Waco that represent the level of care, redemption, and hope at work in this community. It takes time and it takes effort, but Waco is more than what the casual passerby can see from I-35. And it is quite often more than what most Baylor students can see from the university campus.

After four years at Baylor, students will leave with degrees that cost more than $200,000—a figure that is roughly ten times the annual income of families living at or below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau).[4] Classes at Baylor are thus populated with people who often come from families with considerable financial resources. A walk through the student parking lots is adequate evidence, but a brief example will help illustrate my point: when I ask students to purchase noise-cancelling headphones—a decent pair will set you back about $30—as one of the required course materials, I am stunned to see how many of the students come wearing Beats by Dre, headphones that easily sell for over $200 each. I am reminded of a student from another class who was writing a paper in which he was giving advice to a fictional friend who wanted to get a credit card to pay for things he couldn't afford, which he would then pay off by working during the summer. My student's solution for this problem? He would buy his friend whatever it was that he wanted and spot him whenever he needs cash. Simple. For many Baylor students, money is like air: it is relatively plentiful, so why think about it?

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[4] According to the Baylor University website, over 92% of students receive financial aid though it is unclear how many people receive substantial assistance. A 2014 study from New America, a nonprofit, non-partisan public policy institute, revealed that, in an attempt to attract top students, Baylor University offers award packages of approximately $13,000 a year to affluent students. Meanwhile, students at Baylor receiving the Pell Grant are paying a greater percentage of their families' income on the same education (Burd 15-16).

Social Class and the Composition Classroom

Discussions of social class, like discussions of other cultural categories such as gender, race, or sexuality, tend to make us uncomfortable. However, social class is inextricably woven in the project of teaching literate discourse. How can we talk about how to learn the writing conventions and linguistic features of an academic or professional discourse community without also simultaneously promoting certain values of upward mobility and markers of belonging in a particular social stratum? Students sometimes demonstrate what we might perceive as a lack of sensitivity regarding social class because they are confused, drawing on pieces of their own limited experiences to make sense of a complex issue. In part, this confusion stems from a general discomfort with talking about class in America. We tend to feel we are a "classless society" despite visible disparities of wealth and privilege (Samuel 8). Though the problem of class blindness exists today, ignorance about the edges of class boundaries is nothing new. In 1989, *The New York Times* and CBS took a poll and found "85 percent of those contacted said they were middle-class, 13 percent said they were poor and only 1 percent claimed to be rich. Another 1 percent said they were confused" (Kaufman). Of course, today we hear more arguments that the middle class is "disappearing" or "devastated," yet many of our students still assume that everyone on campus is more or less a member of an amorphous middle class.

Students do not often know how to talk about social class in the classroom because (1) they do not think about it, and (2) they are not sure what class categories are supposed to mean or which factors (e.g., annual income, education, family background, zip code, taste, etc.) delineate class boundaries. In "What Makes a Social Class," Pierre

Bourdieu explains that this fluidity is a natural element of socially constructed categories: "[o]bjects in the social world always involve a degree of indeterminacy and fuzziness, and thus present a definite degree of semantic elasticity" (13). Even the CCCC Working-Class Special Interest Group has not settled on a definition of what it means to be "working class" (Roeper). It is little wonder, then, that students are confused and their attempts to engage these issues can appear stilted, superficial, or offensive.

One way to have productive discussions about social class and how issues of poverty affect local citizens, is to facilitate experiences for students from more privileged backgrounds to, as bell hooks, says, "come to class consciousness." Coming to class consciousness starts with first acknowledging that class differences are real. hooks narrates her own process of coming to class consciousness in *Where We Stand: Class Matters*. Though she grows up aware that her family cannot afford certain things, she does not confront the realities of class until she enters college and learns that race is only one of the axes by which she is defined in relation to her peers. She describes how she learned to hide certain parts of herself because they were uncommon, and thus shameful, in academic environments. She calls this discarding of the past "the price of the ticket" of earning her degrees and gaining access to the elite circles of academia (hooks 36). A similar flattening effect is sometimes at work at universities like Baylor. We know that students come from all kinds of economic backgrounds, yet, in many cases, they leave their histories behind and "pass" as the kind of students who can afford to pay for a Baylor education on their own. And when they do hold onto their pasts, they often struggle with their peers' ignorance and insensitivity. Sometimes, as hooks argues, this struggle is too much: "Students from nonprivileged backgrounds who did not want to

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forget often had nervous breakdowns. They could not bear the weight of all the contradictions they had to confront. They were crushed" (37). In an attempt to circumvent these outcomes, teachers of writing can structure learning experiences that encourage students to learn that class exists to make them aware that their reality is but one perspective. Once students are able to see these differences instead of eliding the power of their influence, they can begin to consider how class infiltrates all of our social interactions.

This kind of "consciousness-raising" is vitally important for community-based writing projects in which students are "writing *for* communities—especially because the community partners believe that Baylor students are too far removed from the lived experiences of the audience we are hoping to reach. The following example of a scene from this class shows, unfortunately, how right the community partners are in this case. During the first few weeks of FAS 1302, I am teaching a lesson on visual rhetoric. I use a variety of photos—both iconic and unconventional—to demonstrate how and when an image becomes an act of communication (Hocks; Foss). I also use a few advertisements, one of which depicts a bowl of tarantulas on kabobs to evoke the adventurous nature of Land Rover drivers. As we discuss this ad, I ask my students what they can assume about the intended audience. "Land Rover might be targeting people who feel bored with their everyday lives," one student ventures, so we discuss mid-life crises and city traffic. We discuss cultural dietary differences and the exoticized Other. One of the topics no one mentions, which I realize I am going to have to point out, is that the target audience has money. Two students fall into hysterics. "But that's not even an expensive car!" they laugh.

Students from privileged backgrounds often find it difficult to step outside of their

own experiences.[5] The visual rhetoric exercise triggers a warning that these students need

to learn how to repress their immediate reactions when they interact with people who

might differ from them. That said, this experience is nowhere near as troubling as the

students in Lisa S. Mastrangelo and Victoria Tischio's class openly "whin[ing] and

moan[ing]" about assignments and "lash[ing] out at [the instructors] with their

complaints" about service learning (36). Mastrangelo and Tischio cite their students'

class backgrounds, coming from "wealthy suburbs in New York City," (36) as one of the

reasons they initially refuse to cooperate in their service-learning project. James M.

Dubinsky observes that "[s]tudents can become frustrated when we ask them to 'write for

communities they do not know' and they may see the only goal for the course being to

improve their technical skills" (63). Consequently, it is essential for students participating

in "writing *for* the community" projects to get to know the people with whom they will

be working so that they can gain sensitivity towards people who have concerns and

backgrounds that might differ from their own.

On the whole, students at Baylor are generous and thoughtful people, but they are

frequently unaware of their own wealth and privilege. Furthermore, when they think of

poverty, it is often within the context of church mission trips to foreign countries or

inner-city ministries—short-term volunteer work that Joe Mertz calls "guerilla service"

(qtd. in Flower, *Community Literacy* 253). The reality that many of the freshman students

at Baylor are reluctant to face is that they have moved to a city in which poverty is

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[5] It is worth noting that, since Baylor is a private Christian university, many of the students claim affiliation with religious traditions that increase their empathy and complicate their sense of responsibility to the poor. In this class, over 92% of the students identify with a Christian denomination. One student is Agnostic.

systemic, pervasive, and real. Dr. Jimmy Dorrell, the founder and executive director of Mission Waco and the pastor of Church Under the Bridge, teaches a poverty simulation that immerses students in an alternate version of Waco that Baylor students rarely experience ("Poverty Simulation—Grow!"). If I could, I would ask my students to participate in something like this before they ever deigned to compose for an audience with which they are so wholly unfamiliar. Moments like the Land Rover incident make me glad Peter feels so strongly about asking students to experience a different side of Waco by taking the public bus around town. It is clear that we need to make social class visible so that students might be more empathetic and effective communicators in their service-learning projects.

Seeing Waco: The Waco Public Transit Project (WPTP)

The Waco Public Transit Project (see Appendix E) begins with brief research. Students must visit Walkscore.com, a website that rates cities based on how easy it is for a resident to get around without his or her own transportation. The City of Waco has a Walk Score of 33 out of 100, meaning that most daily errands require a car. Students are typically curious to look up other cities to see how they compare. New York City, for example, has a Walk Score of 88. Equipped with this knowledge, students must then visit the Waco Transit System website and plan a trip on the public bus, thinking about practical concerns like fare payment options, destinations, and bus stop locations. The third step requires students to conduct fieldwork by taking the bus to the destination of their choice and recording notes in a double-entry log. Lastly, they must reflect on their notes and answer the following questions:

- What surprised you?

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- What disturbed you?
- What intrigued you? (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein 86-87)

Their responses are revealing, and demonstrate how many of them believe owning your own car to be a basic right.

When students show up for the next class meeting they are already talking about their bus trips. Most of the students are pleasantly surprised—proud even. The students have ventured beyond the walls of the university and they realize that people who take the bus are really not that different from anyone else. They might not have their own cars, but they are just people. I find that I am equal parts perplexed and amused that the point of solidarity that they keep referring to is that young people on the bus were "just looking at their phones, being normal." This observation is an unexpected, but salient, point of identification (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*). One student, incidentally the same student who had such a charged reaction to my suggestion that a Land Rover is not a cheap car, is convinced that he witnessed a drug deal during his bus trip after seeing two men speaking to each other at the bus stop. He also expresses concern that his bus driver was going to abandon him in a field. Change, in some cases, is slow.

One student shyly admits that he was touched when he saw the bus driver joking with passengers. "He obviously knew them pretty well," he notes. Another exclaims that she even saw a bus driver turn around to pick up an elderly woman that he had missed. Someone else mentions how he saw an elderly man with a cane. It was hard for him to walk up the stairs. Some students share that they are now more grateful for their cars than they have ever been before, but this observation strikes me less as "consciousness-raising" in a Freirean vein and more like relief and, maybe, a touch of backhanded bragging. A couple of female students say that the bus smelled and that people were

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staring at them. A couple of others insist that the Waco buses are actually pretty nice

compared to the public buses in their hometowns. At that point, a line seems to be drawn

in the class between those who have and those have not taken a city bus before. I will

explore the implications of this division later in this chapter. The reality is, for many of

them, this is the first time that they have paid attention to people in Waco outside of

Baylor. The elephant in the room that we are able to start addressing because of our

shared experiences on the Waco public bus is that our class backgrounds structure how

comfortable we are with the WPTP.

The students find the WPTP to be a valuable field research assignment for the

students for three primary reasons. First, the project is a way of practicing reciprocity

with Peter, the community partner who formerly served as a Waco Transit employee. He

cares deeply about the people in the community and the people who work hard to get

them from place to place, and the WPTP allows the students to participate in an

experience he values. Second, as a class, we are able to have productive discussion based

on the field notes that the students took during their bus trips in which we carefully

examine our assumptions about race, gender, class, and dis/ability. Lastly, some students

really did "see" Waco and begin to work out for themselves what these observations

mean beyond this experience. A key example of this learning process is preserved in the

blog post one student writes for a local community website. He calls the piece "Leaving

the Baylor Bubble," and it is a powerful reflection on the tension he experiences as a

Baylor student in Waco. He begins:

> "Did the faculty tell y'all not to talk to us?" are words that I will never
> forget.

When a homeless man named Cody asked if my "Christian" college told its students to avoid the poor I nearly broke down. Meeting this man opened my blind eyes. I saw a reality that I had not seen before, a reality where even though a person's potential may be astoundingly high, he can be shut down because of his economic or social standing. I never would have seen this reality if it were not for a simple assignment in my English class. Our professor asked us to take a bus ride on Waco Transit to see what the surrounding community is like. Just a few streets over from my university I met a man who had a profound effect on me; he gave me a new perspective.

Sam's experience during the WPTP has a definite impact on him, but he ends up composing a video for the GED Community Video Project that Kim, one of the community partners, finds offensive and silly.[6] I will examine a student's response to Sam's video later in this chapter and provide a more lengthy analysis of the contradiction that emerges between the activity systems of the community partner and the project sponsors in Chapter Five.

General Student Outcomes

Ultimately, students in FAS 1302 demonstrate that they value the process of learning that they experience through this class. Students collectively agree that the GED Community Video Project affected their learning in important ways. Table 4.1 shows that three students "strongly agree" and 10 students "agree" with the statement, "Creating a community project video made me more aware of issues facing the local community." All 13 of the students surveyed agree with the statement, "Creating a community project video was a meaningful way to use digital literacies in the service of a civic issue."

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[6] This example underscores what some researchers critique about service-learning projects: students often see poverty as particular and idiosyncratic but do not extend this understanding beyond the personal. Consequently, they fail to see the systemic conditions that create the conditions affecting the individuals they are trying to help (Bickford and Reynolds; Herzberg).

Table 4.1

Benefits of the GED Community Video Project for Students

Creating a community project video…	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
has made me more aware of issues facing the local community	4	9	0	0	13
has made me more aware of how I can address problems I see in the local community	2	10	1	0	13
was a meaningful way to use digital literacies in the service of a civic issue	0	13	0	0	13

Furthermore, most students express learning outcomes more aligned with a transformational process of learning than with the creation of final products. Table 4.2 shows that the majority of students in this class provide responses that focus on learning and growth in response to the question "Explain an important lesson you learned from the community video project." The general benefit that these kinds of projects pose for students is clear. Students display greater motivation and engagement, they emerge feeling closer to their communities, and they learn how they can use digital literacies and multimodal composing tools for a greater purpose.

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Table 4.2

Students' Learning Outcomes after the GED Community Video Project

Process-focused	Product-focused
I learned that the community around Waco, which Baylor is situated in, actually has a mixed view and opinion of Baylor. This made me think about how I represent and portray Baylor.	I learned that you must understand the audience you're trying to target. It's highly important to be able to connect emotionally, as well as bring forth a very professional, credible video that people will accept as legitamate [sic].
It was an awakening in general. I didn't realize everything going on around me. I'm pretty much the definition of the "Baylor Bubble."	That having digital literacy is important for creating the video for the community video project.
Kids dropping out of school is more of a long-term problem, effecting [sic] the future generation.	There are many ways to make a point.
info about the GED. Info about the community of Waco.	
That I now have a new skill set that I can help people with.	
I liked being able to get plugged in the community. I learned that I can influence a positive change.	
I learned that once you connect with your audience, you might be able to say something they would listen to.	
I learned to not label people or think that a person's circumstances determine their life.	
you can affect your community in such a simple way.	

In the section that follows, I will look more specifically at how two students navigate the challenge to be creative, be flexible, and solve problems as they prepare for and compose their final videos.

A Taxonomical Approach to Complex Individuals

The problem with any attempt to create analytical categories to explain different students and/or student behaviors is that the boundaries of each category are porous and inexact. Not only do exceptions to the category exist but the same student often takes on an entirely different identity in a different classroom environment. For instance, the "novice" picks up the mantle of "expert" in classes within her major classes while the "risk-taker" in a digital writing class finds she is reluctant to raise her hand to answer a question in a challenging Religion course. Thus, these categories are inherently limited in that they are partial and static descriptions of complex people. Stephanie Kerschbaum explores our tendency to rely on and reify categories in "Avoiding the Difference Fixation: Identity Categories, Markers of Difference, and the Teaching of Writing." She explains that these categories are not wholly accurate because they describe individuals who are "always yet-to-be, always moving toward a new position or awareness, using different tools and resources for managing [their] identit[ies]" (Kerschbaum 625). While Kerschbaum's focus is on traditional categories of identity such as "race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic class, disability, and religion, as well as of categories developed within writing studies (e.g., ESL writers, basic writers)" (620), I would like to extend her analysis to the particular identity labels that students adopt or perform in relation to the use of multimodal composing tools in the classroom.

The terms "novice" and "risk-taker" provide a way of talking about these students even though the terms fail to account for the dynamic and fluid process of learning. The role of "novice" is a familiar one in a digital writing classroom as some students express a sense of shame that they are "not good with computers," which then directs and shapes how they experience the class and the projects they are asked to complete. However, this identity as "novice" is often not stable even within the same classroom context as the student overcomes challenges and gains confidence throughout the semester. Furthermore, these roles often change over the semester—even from class session to class session. At times, the "novice" will take risks, and the "risk-taker" will encounter challenges that position her as a novice. We are, as Paulo Freire says, "beings in the process of *becoming*" (65). The categories might not be stable, but they are useful for my purposes here.

In this section, I describe the identities that Becca and Meghan adopt and analyze their approaches to taking risks during the fall 2013 semester of FAS 1302: Writing in the Age of Digital Media. I use the following categories of "novice" and "risk-taker" as ways of discussing how students generally talk about themselves and their perspectives on the course. Though these two students did not explicitly refer to themselves using this vocabulary, I draw from their direct quotations to support these descriptive labels. Ultimately, I argue that students in a multimodal community-based writing project are managing a complex network of goals related to their growth through technological proficiency and creativity, awareness of cultural diversity—particularly, social class—and formal assessment measures.[7] By asking Becca and Meghan to reflect on these

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[7] See Appendix F for the Multimodal Community-based Writing Assignment.

concerns, I offer a glimpse of this service-learning project from the students'

perspectives.

The Novice: "I was super uncomfortable at the beginning."

The novice in a digital writing classroom is someone who has no or limited

previous experience with composing texts in audio or video—either recreationally or as

part of a class assignment. Millennial students are, somewhat errantly, thought to be

experts in emerging digital literacies simply because of the era in which they were born.[8]

To be fair, many of these students are skilled in communicating multimodally using

mobile application software (apps) for social and entertainment purposes. A recent Pew

Research Center study found that Millennials outranked all other demographics in their

participation in the following self-sponsored smartphone activities:

- Texting use
- Taking pictures on smartphone
- Going online using smartphone
- Downloading apps
- Email on smartphone
- Recording video on smartphone
- Playing music on smartphone
- Playing games on smartphone. (Rainie n. pag.)

These tasks require considerable facility with digital technologies; on a functional level,

they require knowledge of how to operate the camera, record video, download apps to

edit and share media content, and conduct Internet searches to troubleshoot any technical

problems. These basic skills are the building blocks of digital and multimodal composing.

In spite of the fact that the millennial demographic is more likely than any other

to possess this skill set, it is an unfair generalization to assume that everyone under the

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[8] See Marc Prensky's "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants."

age of 30 has access to a smartphone, is tech-savvy, and possesses an innate ability to communicate using multiple modes. In response to these critiques, Marc Prensky has since clarified that he meant the terms "digital natives/digital immigrants" as a metaphor to explain how people from different generations are typically oriented toward digital life ("Digital Natives" n. pag.). However, the perception of young people being "good with technology" persists. Some of these Millennials, like many of the students at Baylor, actually have the means to afford smartphones and laptops, yet they still consider themselves to be weak and/or inexperienced in functional digital literacy (Selber). We do not think of these students as "basic writers" in the traditional, print-based sense (Shaughnessy; Perl; Rose; Lunsford; Horner and Lu) or in new multimodal contexts (Henry, Hilst, and Fox; Alexander, Powell, and Green; Leary) but they often bring some of the same insecurities and feelings of self-doubt. When these students, the "novices," enter a digital writing class, they must overcome a range of practical and emotional concerns in order to become multimodally literate (Selfe, *Multimodal*; Anderson).

Even the technologically-savvy students, however, do not spring from the head of Zeus fully formed and fully aware of how they can use their digital literacies for other purposes (Kimme Hea; Dadurka and Pigg; Keller, "Thinking Rhetorically"), so every student in a digital writing class has moments in which they might feel like a "novice." Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede point out that students "need to become more knowledgeable about the nature and complexity of the audiences for whom they perform, particularly as they shift back and forth from self-sponsored online writing to academic writing" (57). Daniel Keller also cautions that we should not expect students to apply their social knowledge about audience in educational contexts. He contends that this is an

issue of genre and medium more than laziness or ignorance, arguing that students need to be taught to think about how audience functions in school-based genres and media. There is a disconnect, which Keller refers to as an "audience gap," between students and educational texts that have neither addressed nor invoked them ("Reading Audiences" 292). I would argue that a similar audience gap exists between students' daily digital literacies and community needs, which positions students outside of discussions related to community action. Students also need to be taught (1) that they possess digital communication skills relevant to the task of improving the lives of others, and (2) how to use these rhetorical skills most effectively and ethically. Though some students are better prepared to achieve these goals, they often find themselves in the position of "novice" at one point or another in a digital writing class.

Becca. Becca seems shy in class, her blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail. She looks like she is either on her way to or from working out at the SLC, Baylor's fitness center. Female students at Baylor often dress casually, and they typically wear an unofficial uniform during the hot months in Texas: oversized v-neck t-shirt, Nike running shorts, neon running shoes. For a period of time, the choice of footwear was limited to boat shoes, so it seems as though most young women choose to wear running shorts and shoes for aesthetic reasons. As a point of comparison, Becca wears tightly fitting Under Armour shirts, Nike running shorts, and neon running shoes. Becca is, therefore, different. She doesn't talk much to the other students in the class, and when she does she is all business. At first, I could not decide whether she was frustrated with the class as a whole or just with her peers. I later learned that it was the latter. When she met with me during my office hours, she was an entirely different student. Laughing, open, eager to

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please. She seems like she was the type of child who preferred to be around adults and has never had much patience for the antics of her peers.

Becca is an 18-year-old Pre-Business major from the Midwest. She calls herself an extrovert, which makes her silence in class seem even icier. The contrast between Becca and the other students is noticeable from the first few days of class. The majority of Becca's peers are, as she later says, "not serious. And I'm super serious." They are frequently distracted and make impassioned pleas to watch Baylor football hype videos on the room's media screen before every class. The chairs at the U-shaped rows of desks have wheels, and one student, in particular, cannot resist making full use of them. The leader of the class of clowns, he either rolls across the room during peer review or idly spins in circles before class. Sometimes during class. This constant motion of students swaying back and forth makes the class look one undulating organism—except for Becca. She sits at the end of the U closest to my desk at the front of the room. Her chair seems wheel-less, her feet rooted to the ground.

The class begins at what feels like a reckless pace: the first audio project is due the second week of class. However, these small audio and video projects that the students are completing during the first three weeks of the semester have extremely low stakes. Professors Cindy Selfe and Scott DeWitt, the instructors of the Digital Media and Composition (DMAC) Institute at The Ohio State University call these kinds of assignments "finger exercises." They are designed to encourage play and experimentation with new software like Audacity, an audio-editing program, and iMovie, Apple's proprietary video-editing software.[9] Since I was in Becca's place as a relative novice to

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[9] See Reilly and Atkins for the connections between this kind of "deliberate practice" and models of assessment in multimodal projects.

multimodal composing just a few months earlier, I know how steep the learning curve

can be. During the second week of class, Becca emails me about her concerns with the

class:

> Hey Mrs. Williams,
>
> I just wanted to talk to you a little about our English class and let you
> know that I am feeling very in over my head about this class as a whole.
> This style of English class is completely different from anything I've ever
> done. I knew this class would be different, but I had no idea I was going to
> feel this unsure of myself, especially after having had only two days of
> class. This mini literacy narrative has caught me totally off-guard, and I'm
> just really worried that I'm going to feel this way about everything we do.
> If you have any advice, I would love to hear it! Or if you think we should
> meet and talk about it, I would certainly like to do that too!
> Thank you so much,
> Becca

My response encourages her to stick with the class, but Becca is one of the most reluctant

students when it comes to learning new technologies and practicing new forms of

composing.

Out of every student in this class, Becca achieves the greatest arc in

development—mostly because she is so unsure of herself at the beginning. When Becca

ranks the most important qualities that a student can bring to a multimodal community-

based writing opportunity, she lists "patience" first. She explains:

> [P]atience—especially when you're going into a situation you might not
> be as familiar with—is definitely good because you can definitely get
> super impatient if you're not comfortable with what you're doing, not
> familiar with what you're doing, and you might have to rely on other
> people maybe to help you … so I think that patience is super important.

In many ways, this quality is what makes her such a valuable participant in the

multimodal community-based writing project. She does not let her lack of knowledge

about multimodal composition stymy her progress. She asks for help or addresses the

gaps in her knowledge in order to meet the needs of her community partner. By the end

of the project, she still says that her "computer knowledge is, um, not that great," but she

demonstrates a great deal of patience in developing the skills that she has. Becca ranks

"relevant skills" last,[10] which indicates that she does not feel that her identity as a relative

novice restricts her ability to contribute to the GED Community Video Project. The goal

that motivates Becca's activity system at the beginning of the class is a desire to get

through the class and get back to more traditional forms of writing; however, as she gains

skills in multimodal composing and learns more about the community organization, this

goal shifts to include pleasing her community partner and creating a video that will

impact her intended audience. She reflects, "Maybe someone will see this [video] and

feel inspired. But, if not, then I guess maybe next time I'll just make a video, I'll make it

a little bit better (laughs)." Becca's ability to exercise patience, and to try again if

necessary, demonstrates her commitment to problem solving.

Disrupting expectations. Since Becca is a strong student and a good writer—in

the traditional, print-based sense—she enters the digital writing class assuming that she

will be able to make the transition to college-level writing with ease. She was told during

summer advising that FAS 1302 would be a traditional English class but with more

"moving around." She explains that she was told that "we were gonna be doing stuff with

computers and you were gonna have us, I don't know, doing stuff more than just sitting

in the regular English class." Part of the reason Becca experiences such a profound sense

of disorientation at the beginning of the class is because she is not prepared to re-envision

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[10] Two of the three students interviewed rank "transparency" last. When I ask them about this response, they indicate that they did not understand what was meant by the term. Based on this confusion, I chose to disregard this result and use their second-to-last ranking in its place.

what it might mean "to compose" —not to mention what it might mean to compose new texts for the community. Expanding the definition of what writing *is* to include the visual, aural, and oral modes, however, "[throws her] off." In spite of the fact that Becca is a strong student, she finds that composing with multimodal tools means that she has to confront what she does not know about writing, broadly speaking. She describes FAS 1302 as a demanding learning environment that challenged her initial levels of comfort: "when I ended up in class on the first day I thought "Okay, maybe I can do this and, once we got into it, it was "Wow." It was just like a shock. I wasn't entirely sure what I was doing or how to do it." She learns to accept that, in this kind of a writing class, she is in the unfamiliar position of a novice. In a sense, she has to "invent" what it will mean for her to participate in the new writing context of the multimodal community-based writing project using multimodal composing tools (Bartholomae).

Encountering the unknown: a crash course in Waco. As a transplant to Texas, Becca is also a novice when it comes to living in Waco and being a Baylor Bear. Becca describes the WPTP as just another example of feeling disoriented and destabilized. For Becca, everything about this first semester of college is "unknown" and uncertain. Becca uses the phrase "it threw me off" so many times during our conversation that it became an In Vivo Code during my analysis. She feels thrown off by "being in a completely new city." She feels thrown off by an English class that destabilizes what she thought she knew about writing. She feels thrown off by her peers, who initially seemed so open and welcoming on the Class of 2017 Facebook page. She feels thrown off by assignments like the WPTP that thrust her into a new, uncomfortable environment, a process that Peter, the Community Partner, calls a "crash course in Waco." In general, Becca feels thrown off.

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When Becca describes new or frustrating experiences (e.g., coming to Baylor, interacting with immature peers, using new technologies), she uses ambivalent and contradictory phrasing to depict the internal tension she feels. She describes the WPTP in a similar way: "It was good. It was good. It was definitely, um—wasn't my favorite thing." Her immediate reaction is to be positive. Her repetition belies either an inclination to convince herself of something she might not entirely believe or to please me because she thinks that is what I want to hear. Her description of the WPTP as "definitely [not] my favorite thing" appears to be a more honest representation of her feelings. She also refers to the project as "interesting" and "different" —vague descriptors that act as placeholder opinions for other, perhaps more authentic feelings.

For Becca, the WPTP was not an opportunity to see Waco, but a discomfiting venture into "the unknown." She explains,

> I was getting on the bus and I was just a little … unsure of what was gonna happen and how it was gonna go and it turned out fine and everything, but it was just a little —it was just a whole new, um, environment to be in and it really, it threw me off. And so, once that was over with, I was like, "okay, maybe—maybe we won't do that again for a while."

The new environment of the Waco public transportation system disorients Becca. She expresses anxiety about taking public transportation in Waco. Though she seems relieved that "it turned out fine and everything," her relatively uneventful experience on the bus still "[throws her] off" and does not immediately cause her to reflect on her expectations and assumptions in a way that better prepared her to relate to people in the Waco community. Instead, it causes her to strengthen her resolve to avoid the bus entirely.

In spite of feeling thrown off and unsure, she reflects that the WPTP forced her to confront her lack of knowledge and learn from these new experiences as preparation for

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the GED Community Video Project. She explains, "I had never been in that position where I was completely unsure of the area and everything and so that really made me go out and like help me understand Waco as a whole and it helped me kind of understand the types of people in Waco and what everyone in Waco is willing to do for each other." Although she felt uncomfortable at that time, she later understands that this kind of destabilization contributes to her growth and understanding. In her final class reflection, she writes:

> This class really changed the way I look at communities, specifically the Waco community. When I first came here, I knew nothing about the Waco community except for the fact that there was a high poverty rate. After examining the community through projects like the Waco Transit Project, I feel like I better understand the different facets of Waco. I understand the side of the community that is successful and prosperous, but I now also see the limitations that the poorer people of Waco face. I've learned that a community is not only the people that I identify with, but *everyone* in the community.

In a sense, the WPTP contributed to Becca seeing Waco, which ultimately leads to a greater and more complex understanding of the community and prepares her to compose a video that still has the power to move her when she watches it again months later. For Becca, the WPTP is a revealing experience for two reasons:

1. her expectations were productively challenged.

2. her understanding of communities grew more complex (see table 4.3).

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Table 4.3

Students' Learning Outcomes in Response to the Waco Public Transit Project

Student Participants	The WPTP caused
Becca "The Novice"	(1) the student to productively challenge her expectations (2) the student's understanding of communities to grow more complex
Meghan "The Risk-taker"	(1) the student's sense of empathy and connection to the community to increase (2) the student to start thinking less about service and more about activism and the structural inequities that need to be addressed

Additionally, Becca begins to understand the internal tensions of living in a community (Harris). Becca leaves the class saying that she still feels "like an outsider in Waco." However, her empathy for people in Waco has grown—in part because she is able to overcome feeling "thrown off" and to "understand Waco better and appreciate it for what it is."

Identifying and querying moments of growth. Even though Becca feels "super uncomfortable" and "completely overwhelmed" and thinks learning how to compose in multiple modes is "incredibly stressful," she is able to look back at the experience through a retrospective lens and recognize moments of growth and problem-solving. Some of these moments are related to gaining functional knowledge and a greater level of comfort with the tools of multimodal composing that we were using as a class, Audacity and iMovie. The finger exercises in these programs are both the source of her initial stress and, retrospectively, the source of her confidence. She explains, "at the time it was

incredibly stressful, but now hindsight looking back, I think it was actually a really good thing that you showed us all that technical stuff at the very beginning and even though I was completely overwhelmed … when we got to the final project I felt like things were so much better." By exercising patience, Becca begins to realize that she is actually capable of composing multimodally. She starts off feeling "super uncomfortable … with all of it and with all of the technology, but then, as we started making each video—started getting a little more confident, a little more comfortable… [and] getting to the point where I felt semi-comfortable doing what I was doing and it wasn't (pause) bad." She reflects that the finger exercises accelerate the learning process, and she starts feeling more confident after she has the chance to figure out these smaller, low-stakes assignments for herself.

As she developed facility with the technological tools, these moments of growth extend to include her developing awareness of the work being done to meet needs in the community and her understanding the stakes of the project. After meeting with her community partner, Liz, she reflects, "this organization really is special because they're just completely changing these women's lives and making it so that they're able to go get a job or just better their situation or whatever it is and completely improve their quality of life." Learning about the organization and its mission makes her want to create a quality final product. She expresses that she hopes she made a good impression during her interview and "that they could just trust me to do a good job and make their organization proud and do a good job representing them." She also describes learning about the kinds of people who typically volunteer with the organization. Instead of targeting a GED test-taker, Becca and her community partner decide that a good audience for her video will be

other people in the Waco community who have resources to offer as part of the GED support system. They envision showing this video before a church service since this organization has an explicitly Christian mission.

Becca demonstrates good awareness of this audience, which makes sense since she considers which rhetorical elements would appeal to her as a viewer. She ultimately decides that she wants to take a pathos-based approach that would "appeal to [her] … if [she] were sitting in church." In so doing, she positions herself as the intended audience, but she uses contradictory language to describe her own perspective in relation to these potential volunteers. Becca does not explicitly mention her own class status or affiliation, but she refers to the volunteers in terms of their social class. She seems unsure about the appropriateness of the terminology she uses, saying that she tried to appeal to "the upper class, the more upper-middle class in the community." She mentions that she is aiming for this audience because "a lot of those people are volunteering or giving money or both." By saying "those people," she seems to distance herself from this population, but then she explains that she uses "what would appeal to [her]" as a heuristic exercise as she is composing: "what would get me to want to get up and um, know that this isn't just a regular—like another organization … so that was really something I had to think about … I had to think about 'what would appeal to me?'" This audience is easier for Becca to connect with because it is a perspective she already shares: churchgoing, not currently volunteering, and "upper-middle class." This perspective unfortunately reinforces the feeling of "us" and "them" that many Baylor students bring to the community-based writing project. Ultimately, the result of this choice works, and

she creates a final video that achieves her objectives in technical execution and rhetorical impact.

Final product. Using visual and textual resources that her community partner gives to her, Becca's video depicts photographs of the actual women who participate in the nonprofit's GED program and Bible study. She also chooses to appeal to her audience using the words of the women themselves. The result is a video that the community partners most consistently cite as one of the most successful videos. She calls it "How You Can Change a Women's Life,"[11] and it is a high-energy, colorful call to action (see figure 4.1). Becca might see herself as a novice, and the video she composes might not be of professional quality, but she is proud of what she is able to accomplish after working through her initial anxieties about multimodal composing.

Figure 4.1. Screenshot of Becca's video for the nonprofit women's organization.

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[11] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhDk4a2Pof8

Ultimately, she emerges more confident in her abilities and creates one of the most rhetorically effective videos for her community partner[12], a nonprofit women's organization that offers GED preparation and Bible studies to local women who want a new start.

Looking back. When Becca re-watches her final video for the first time in months during the retrospective protocol, she is visibly moved by her own video and its message. As she is watching, she is half-smiling and looks amused. By the end of the video, she is flushed with pink-red splotches that creep up her neck. She clears her throat when the video ends with a slide that offers special thanks to Liz, her community partner:

dmw: So what are your thoughts after watching?

Becca: Brings back some memories there. I hadn't—I just hadn't thought of — much about the video after. I mean, I did, but I hadn't seen it or anything so…

dmw: Yeah.

Becca: It's just kinda um (takes deep breath). Okay, let's see.

dmw: What are your first thoughts? Like, do you still like it?

Becca: I do still like it. I think it's good and I think it –that tone that I was going for to try to appeal to um more pathos than anything —try to get people — get their emotions going, I guess. Um, is, uh that definitely is still there and I could see that definitely still like (places hand on chest) hits me when I watch it still.

dmw: And what kinds of emotions were you going for?

Becca: Not—okay—this is—not so much guilt, but making them feel like maybe they should be doing something, to get—to come up. I mean, maybe that they're not doing anything and maybe they need to step up and really, um, try to do something to help instead of just living their life like it is. Maybe

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[12] Furthermore, the community partner from the nonprofit women's organization is the only community partner who feels that the multimodal community-based writing project benefits all parties involved (i.e., Baylor students, the broader Waco community, and everyone involved).

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they need to come in and try to help somebody else's life, too. And that was a major thing that I definitely thought about because, I mean, I know it's bad to say that you're trying to make people feel guilty or whatever, but, to an extent, you kind of are to make sure that they um understand that there's more than themselves and they need to see the bigger picture.

Becca's reaction to her video after she has had some time and space away from it indicates that, if she and other people like her are her intended audience, the message is clearly sent and received. The technical quality of the video does not get in the way of what the video is meant to do. When Becca speaks to the "guilt" that she wants her video to elicit in her audience, she seems to be talking to herself. Reminding herself. This, too, is a moment of growth even though the class is long since over. Becca is in a new position now, no longer a novice in this regard and no longer ignorant of the very real needs for volunteers to step out into the Waco community. At the end of this chapter, I will analyze the implications of her peers' response—or, more accurately, their lack of response—to Becca's video.

The Risk-Taker: "The Safe Route" vs. the "Epiphany"

Even though it could certainly be argued that novices take considerable risks when they compose multimodal texts, the risk-taking student starts at a different point of development and has different goals. The novice is mostly trying to stay afloat, but the risk-taker intentionally punches a couple of holes in the raft to make things interesting. The risk-taker is the student who knows what she is doing and uses structured classroom space to innovate on what she already knows. This student could likely skate by without really challenging herself and still produce adequate work, but curiosity drives her onward. These students often invigorate digital writing classes because they have a lot of ideas and they tend to think out loud. Some students are threatened by the "Creativity,

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Flexibility, and Problem-Solving" portion of the course grade, but the risk-taking student is cut free.

Unfortunately, many students do not often feel compelled to take these kinds of risks. Despite the fact that students will take risks in their extracurricular, self-sponsored writing activities, they rarely demonstrate the same courage in their coursework throughout their college careers (Fishman et al. 231). In the Stanford Study of Writing, Jenn Fishman et al. find that nearly 75% of the students surveyed at Stanford begin college with a "high or very high degree of self-confidence in their writing abilities" (231). However, they also discover that this number plummets to less than 10% after the first year (Fishman et al. 231). This decrease in student confidence combined with increasing pressures to maintain a competitive GPA results in students who ultimately see no benefit in taking additional risks when they compose in classroom contexts. Leigh Jones acknowledges the fears that students often bring with them into a writing class, but concludes:

> risks are required for academic productivity and creativity—whatever goals students and instructors may have for students' growth as writers. Writing is a transformative process in that it requires us to imagine our audiences and ourselves anew, and this productive and creative transformation is inherently risky, particularly when evaluated by an experienced audience. (76)

The risks of a multimodal community-based writing project are compounded because of the experienced community partner audience, yet the risk-taking student is still willing to take on this challenge.

Meghan. On the first day of class during the fall semester, there always seems to be one freshman student who is determined to know everyone in the class. The social

butterfly. The belle of the ball. In this class, this student is Meghan. She is making connections and working the room from day one. "Oh! You live in SoRo? Are you going to rush?" She misses several classes in a row at one point because she is "swamped" with the pageant she is currently preparing for. She ends up doing a comedy routine for the talent portion of the show. She does not win, but she looks like she is having fun in every photo. Meghan's middle name is Baylor. Literally. She comes from a legacy family, and on the first day of class she shares that her parents met at Baylor and her grandparents are friends with President Starr. Perhaps that is why she waltzes in the classroom like she is the hostess of a party: she was born to be here. Meghan likes to talk, and I can count on her to have an opinion about whatever we are discussing in class. She exhibits a fearlessness and confidence to which most of the other students seem to respond to positively. She likes to use slang and spends an inordinate amount of time trying to convince her peers that our class community video project should use #GEDswag as part of a social media campaign. She's funny, loud, and outgoing. She has also perfected the "selfie" and presents a carefully curated public image on social media. Her long, golden curls would make even Taylor Swift jealous, and she uses the same expression for nearly every photo.

At the time of this study, Meghan is an 18-year-old Journalism, Public Relations and New Media major. She is from a town of 7,000 in east Texas, a place she describes as "very poor." Meghan does not consider herself to be especially good with technology at the beginning of the class, but she develops skill with multimodal composing tools quickly. After the audio finger exercise, she reflects:

> Editing was a little trial and error for me, but once I got the hang of it, it turned out to be quite fun. It's really, to me, just like artwork … I am very

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> proud of my first piece of audio and I feel accomplished, since I am not
> technologically apt; however, I very much enjoyed the project. SO MUCH
> better than writing an essay.

Meghan immediately takes to the multimodal composing tools and starts playing with

their capabilities. In every self-reflection, she notes that she is having "a lot of fun."

When I ask Meghan to rate the most important skill that a student can bring to a

multimodal community-based writing project, she ranks "relevant skills" first:

Meghan: I feel like you can't go into something and not be able to help, I
          guess. I mean, sure it's good that you want to, but if you can't then,
          you know, you might want to step aside and let someone else do it,
          you know?

dmw: And what kind of skills are you thinking of here?

Meghan: Um, like, if someone is building a house for humanity—like Habitat
          for Humanity and you don't know how to build a house, maybe not
          what you should go help with, you know?

dmw: Right.

Meghan: It's more than just the media stuff, you know? You know, if you
          broke your leg and someone wants you to run a marathon for, you
          know, cancer, you can't do that right now. So you know, —I mean,
          there's just no relevant skills at that time. I think that's the biggest
          thing. 'Cause you want to help and the way to help is skills. Relevant
          skills. (laughs)

For Meghan, the only way to help a community partner, with digital or non-digital

service projects, is by possessing the requisite skill set. She is pragmatic: you either need

to catch yourself up to speed and become skilled or you need to pass the job on to

someone else who is more qualified. She notes "patience" as the least important quality

that a student should bring to a service-learning project. This response is consistent with

Meghan's tendency to throw herself into new projects and unfamiliar situations, but she

clearly values patience in some contexts; for example, she practices "trial and error" as

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she is learning how to edit using Audacity and iMovie. However, she does not think that

a community partner should be burdened with someone who is unable to deliver a quality

final product. Her answers to this question are diametrically opposite from Becca's

answers, so there is a high standard deviation for the student perspectives on the most and

least important qualities that a student can bring to a community-based writing project.

The overarching goal that drives Meghan's activity system is to stand out and create

memorable video content by using relevant skills in order to create "an anthem for

supermoms."

Identifying her perspective. Meghan's background shapes how she approached

the Waco Public Transit Project and how sees Waco. She does not seem to count herself

among the "very poor" of her hometown, but her personal history is grounded in this

context: "like in [my hometown] we would always pass by, you know, the projects and

like really poor places and I never felt like 'oh, stay away from me.' You know, I never

felt like —it was just something— I grew up with their kids, you know?" In spite of

Meghan's awareness of the poverty in her hometown, she does not see the visible need in

her new place of residence until she is asked to notice it. And now, after having the

experience of taking public transportation and noting the similarities between Waco and

her hometown, she cannot help but notice. "I don't think people understand," she reflects,

"like, when they think of Waco, they think of like Baylor, but like … I drove past the

Salvation Army and people were just sitting there (laughs quietly) and I'm like 'this is the

Waco that no one advertises.' You know? So I understood now why we were … finding

it and like showing it to people who had no idea it existed."

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During our discussion of the Waco Public Transit Project, Meghan realizes that she has a different perspective from her peers. Though she, too, is comfortable in the "Baylor bubble"—an idea she latches onto after I bring up the term in class one day—she is stunned by her peers' reactions to taking public transportation in Waco. She recalls their attitudes in class when we discuss the WPTP:

> [they were] like, "ugh my gosh this happened and it was dirty and then this creepy guy was talking to himself and da da da da" and I'm like, "these are just people … just trying to survive and just like get by with their lives and go to work and go, you know, get groceries and like they're just trying to get from point A to point B just like you are, you know? They just don't have a car to do it.

Meghan's ability to see Waco is a consequence of her past experiences. She describes that, unlike some of her peers, she would not even think to be afraid of the economically disadvantaged people in her hometown: "I didn't, I didn't see them as like threatening or anything or you know like 'they're gonna harm me.' Some of them might have, but (laughs). I just, you know, never saw that." When some of her peers' talk about how they were scared to ride the bus during our class discussion, Meghan quickly intervenes. When she asks these students what they were afraid of, some of them respond hyperbolically, "I thought I was going to get shot!" Meghan rolls her eyes. By asking these questions and trying to probe beneath some of their naïve responses, Meghan helps me direct the discussion and supports the other two students in the class who say that they take the public bus at home and it is no big deal.

The WPTP makes it clear that the students in our class come from different social and cultural backgrounds—and only a few students seem to recognize the implications of this awareness. One student sees what is happening and tries to justify that she does not take the bus because she is "from Houston and it's dangerous because it's a big city." She

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assures us she does not think she is "better" than anyone, which is a step in the right direction, but even she does not think to interrogate the level of privilege that allows you to opt out of potentially unsafe situations. In these moments, it is important to remember that "Even in carefully designed projects … sending students off campus magnifies the cultural difference between the college student and the homeless person, illiterate factory worker, or community center director he or she has been assigned to encounter" (Bickford and Reynolds 233). Our in-class discussion, then, becomes a critical piece of helping students sort through their reactions to this field research experience. One strategy for managing these reactions is to practice what Julie Lindquist calls "strategic empathy." She argues that teaching students about class requires sensitivity towards the affective responses of students either empathizing with them, or, if real empathy is not possible, "performing empathy" (Lindquist 201). I will discuss my attempts at performing strategic empathy in relation to these issues of difference in Chapter Five.

The university setting is a place in which students are regularly confronted with new and/or uncomfortable ideas in their classes or from meeting new people with different perspectives, and the WPTP accelerates this process by asking students to watch and listen to difference in the new environment of a public bus. Through our discussion of the field notes that the students took during their bus trips, we begin to break down the assumptions they have about public transportation, the people they observed on the bus, and their peers. Some people are uncomfortable with this discussion while others are not. Irvin Peckham notes that being exposed to multiple perspectives causes students to "understand the contingent nature of assumptions they once believed were stable" (66). As a result of learning how to interrogate their assumptions, students "will not only write

more effectively but also learn how to accommodate diversity" (Peckham 66). One of the ways that Meghan helps her peers learn to accommodate diversity is through challenging dominant perceptions about poverty, class, and education. By arguing that the people on the bus "are just regular people trying to get from Point A to Point B," Meghan is able to help me destabilize what her peers view as the "norm." Meghan later observes that this experience of seeing and talking about "the Waco that no one advertises" reveals the power structures operating behind the scenes, which leads her to ask "what ways can fix this?" For Meghan, the WPTP was a revealing experience for two reasons:

1. She was able to see elements of Waco that reminded her of her hometown, which increased her sense of empathy and connection to the community.

2. She starts thinking less about service and more about activism and the structural inequities that need to be addressed (Bickford and Reynolds).

For the second essay, a 3-4 page alphabetic essay explaining a digital community or their experiences during the WTPT, Meghan chooses to write about the common misconceptions and the realities of taking public transportation. She wants to challenge what people think they know about Waco through the microcosm of the bus.[13]

Taking risks. Meghan's interventions during the WPTP discussion are one form of risk-taking, but she also takes risks in the work that she creates for the class. She composes her first video, a multimodal literacy narrative, on a very public social media fight she had the previous year with her high school best friend. She decides to take a more confessional approach in this video and records herself sitting on her bed in the residence hall, talking to the camera. She holds up a physical photo of the two of them

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[13] This assignment was primarily based on her field research.

smiling in their blue and white cheerleading uniforms before the harsh words appear all over Twitter and Facebook for everyone to see. A small tear is visible at the top of the photo, threatening to split the girls into separate halves. It looks like she might have started to tear the picture in half and then thought better of it. After reading "Blood in the Gutter," a chapter from Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, she pares down her rough draft from one long voiceover narrative in which she tells the whole story to small flashes of exposition. Her final video contains wide gutters, or gaps in the various semantic elements, but she invites her viewers to leap across these gutters and follow small clues using the affordances of other modes. When I ask if any students want to show their final videos in class, she volunteers to screen her video first. The lights go off, and we watch a friendship unravel, undone by the double-edged power of social media. The other students are impressed. They groan that the bar is set too high now, and Meghan just smiles. It is the third week of class.

Meghan feels like she can take risks in this class, so she does. She explains that, in part, the small size of our writing class contributes to her comfort level. The class has 16 students, and the tables are arranged so that we face each other. In classes held in large lecture halls, she recognizes moments that might call for bravery or boldness, but she feels like she needs to play it safe so that she does not embarrass herself by giving "the wrong answer." In our class, however, she feels like the risks are worth it because they will result in reward and affirmation: "it was so easy to speak up, and, you know, because everyone was so welcoming of each other's ideas and stuff and like, 'Oh okay, and this' and it was never 'No, you're wrong.' It was like, 'Oh, yeah, and this.' I mean it was okay to just kind of like speak up." The atmosphere she describes is one of generative

brainstorming and acceptance—not unlike the "yes, and" rule of improvisational comedy (Salinsky and Frances-White).

Meghan's appreciation of this "yes, and" environment extends to her interactions with her peers. She views herself as a leader who helps other students, especially students "who were kind of closed off in the class," see that risks carry potential rewards. She explains, "I think [the shy students] started seeing that the class itself was very, very welcoming … like once one person made that leap, it seemed like it was okay for everyone else to make that leap." In particular, Meghan references the emotional vulnerability that some people show in their videos because of the connection they feel to the cause. For example, one student shoots the rough draft of her final GED Community Video using a confessional style and implores her audience to believe that their futures are worth investing in. Meghan seems disappointed that this student completely removes this personal scene from her final draft. She also mentions a video that receives very mixed feedback from the community partners: Sam's video "Why Are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And How Does it Relate to Pie?" This Upworthy-style headline is fairly self-explanatory, but Meghan describes it as "Sam and his three very, very white and not very coordinated friends [dancing] to show their happiness" about earning the GED. She appreciates the risks that Sam took in the creation of this video and how willing he was to look silly and use humor to promote the GED. The identity of "risk-taker" that Meghan adopts in the class is important to her because she likes seeing other people feel comfortable enough to take risks in their own work.

The fact that students felt comfortable enough to take these kinds of risks speaks to the openness of the classroom environment as they relate to the final products, but the

open environment has important implications for their composing processes as well.

Meghan believes that the "Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving" category of the

final grade helps people in the class push themselves to take more risks. Without this

element, she says, people might

> not have given it their full creativity. And the class wouldn't have been as
> much fun 'cause it would have been like "Oh, same old videos. Same old
> video. We've seen this." And um I liked it because, I guess, I'm an artsy
> person anyway, and so I like that stuff—that's what I like to dive myself
> into, but it kept us on our toes. You know, it kept us like, I want to be the
> most creative—I want to be the one that people go "Oh wow! That video!
> That was crazy!" You know?

The "Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving" score motivates students to

"compete," but it also encourages them to sharpen their own skill in relation to each

other. Every time they worked on their video drafts in class, they see how much effort

other people are putting in, which encourages them to try even harder. By practicing

"proximal composing," or working on multiple drafts of their projects in the same

physical space, students interact during all stages of composing thus leading to a process

of "distributed invention" (Alexander and Williams). This process results in products

"where original ideas become mutually appropriated and evolve into something different

altogether" (Alexander and Williams 33). As students feel comfortable to take risks and

work side-by-side, their work often improves and becomes more complex.

Meghan also notes that she personally feels liberated by the relative consequence-

free environment of this class. She is never afraid about her grade, but she is concerned

that she will please her community partner. When she meets me for a one-on-one

conference about the GED Community Video Project, she tells me that she has two ideas:

the first is a traditional PSA-style video that follows "the safe route" and the second is an

original, animated video game, what she describes as her "epiphany":

> Meghan: I was like "oh my gosh! I could, you know"—I live with all these [Film and Digital Media] majors who all day play with animation and are into anime and they're into, you know, making films and all that sort of stuff, so I'm like you know, just sitting there like "Oh! That sounds like a cool idea." You know? But I mean, I was like "how am I gonna make animation? I don't know what I'm doing." So I was like, "Uhh. Push that to the side…"

> dmw: (laughs)

> Meghan: And so I just kinda —I don't even remember what I wrote down as the safe one. It was so boring, though. It was so bad.

> dmw: (laughs) Well, did you know that even when you were saying it? Or…

> Meghan: I felt it. But I mean, I felt like (pause)

> dmw: 'cause it seemed like you already kind of had your mind made up. You just needed, like, a little push. Is that how it was or—

> Meghan: I needed you to be like, "Yeah, if you mess up, it's okay." But I didn't want to mess up and you'd be like, "Meghan. Why—why did you do this?" You know? "If you knew you couldn't do this…" (laughs)

> dmw: Right.

> Meghan: So, if you were like, "If you mess up, it's okay. If it turns out really bad, it's okay. I understood you tried." That's like, you know—"You'll still get an okay grade…" That's what I needed to hear (laughs) from you.

Meghan's anxiety about producing a high-quality final product is offset by the classroom

culture created by the "Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving" grading category.

Since she knows that she cannot "fail," she is emboldened to challenge herself and learn a

new animation program. I will explore a contradiction related to risk-taking and creativity

in Chapter Five.

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She also observes a difference between the types of risks she takes in the class. She describes "speaking up" in class and being the first to present her multimodal literacy narrative video as belonging to a different category of risk when compared to learning an entirely new software. She recognizes that the first two situations require different degrees of risk, but they feel inconsequential in comparison with gaining new skills and trying to translate her "epiphany" into reality. Since Meghan values having "relevant skills" above all others, she holds herself to a high, potentially paralyzing, standard. She does not want to let down her community partner with a substandard product. However, once she starts working on her animated video, she feels she has two options: make it work on her own or figure out who she should ask for help. Meghan is not the type to scale back after she has committed herself.

Transferring knowledge from one context to another. Meghan's transformative moments through this class and this multimodal community-based writing project occur when she makes connections between her past and her present. By drawing on her prior knowledge to prepare for and create a video for the GED Community Video Project, Meghan transfers what she knows from an experiential, social context to an academic/public context. Scholars typically trace the process of rhetorical transfer from school to school contexts (McCarthy; Wardle; Driscoll; Bergman and Zepernick; Reiff and Bawarshi; Yancey, Robertson, and Taczak), school to workplace contexts (Anson and Forsberg; Freedman and Adam), or school to community contexts (Bacon, "The Trouble"). Meghan, however, transfers contextual knowledge and sensitivities gained from her hometown in order to compose a multimodal video suitable for Waco, her new home. In so doing, she practices a version of an "actor-oriented" theory of transfer, a

theory that pays attention to "the processes by which individuals generate their own similarities between problems" (Lobato 18). Instead of approaching the WPTP and the GED Community Video Project as though she is a tabula rasa, Meghan ultimately identifies "parallels across contexts and adapt[s] knowledge as necessary" (DePalma and Ringer 141). Michael-John DePalma and Jeffrey M. Ringer call this a process of "adaptive transfer," or adapting "knowledge in new and potentially unfamiliar writing situations" (141). The WPTP thus helps her see that she possesses contextual knowledge that sets her apart from her peers and that she has a different perspective than most students at Baylor despite her family's history at the university. Consequently, she feels she has a responsibility to help her peers think more critically about their assumptions about social class and privilege. She uses her prior knowledge to shape how she responds to these issues in this new composing context.

Meghan, however, does not immediately realize that these parallels between communities exist when she first conducts her interview with Kim. Meghan explains:

> I was scared about meeting with [her] because I was like I don't really—I didn't understand like … what kind of like um (pause) I guess approach to make the video and like what kind of questions I would ask her, so I just kind of asked her just general questions like you know for the GED process like what do you think people have the most trouble [with]? … What is their dilemma of going and getting it? 'Cause I mean it seems, to me, like it's an easy process. And she's like "It's not an easy process at all." It's—I mean, it is an easy process, but it's not, you know? 'Cause I mean there is work that goes into it.

Meghan initially assumes that she has nothing to offer this topic and does not know how she will compose a persuasive video when she does not fully understand why some people might find it difficult to take the time to earn a GED.[14] After asking more

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[14] Students prepare for their meetings with community partners by conducting secondary research (see Appendix H) and watch several videos from yourGED.org. Though Meghan knows statistics and

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questions, she learns that some people "go out and they find jobs and they feel like they're good jobs. And if they feel like 'this is the best it's gonna get for me without a high school diploma' … they're like "Okay, you know I don't want to stop this." She then realizes that, though this issue feels removed from her experiences as a legacy student at Baylor, she actually knows people from high school who find themselves in a similar position.

Meghan is not thinking about stereotypes of the typical GED test-taker when she decides to compose a video targeted towards young women who drop out of high school because they find out they are pregnant. She decides to "go the single mom route," as she says:

> I guess because back where I'm from high school moms like are—they come all the time (laughs awkwardly). They're everywhere. And um a lot of them are my friends and you know, they—some of them do have their GED, some of them don't, you know, some of them actually finished high school, but the ones who did finish high school, you know, had a lot of help from their parents and I could kinda tell that they didn't really raise their child as much as their parents did.

Meghan taps into her knowledge about the challenges that some of her friends and acquaintances have actually faced. She knows from experience that some of these young women are only able to continue traditional schooling because they have substantial family support. Meghan imagines what it would be like not to have that support and identifies a parallel between some of these single moms in her east Texas hometown and the young women she imagines dropping out of school in Waco. She reflects:

> I just know that a lot of them are really good moms. And I go back [to my hometown] and they're spending time with their kids and they're doing everything they can for their kids, so I kind of wanted to make a video about those moms who are good moms and you know—people think "Oh,

different reasons for taking the GED at this point, she does not fully understand the personal element at this time.

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she doesn't have her GED. She must not be a good mom." No, that's not it
—that's not like "She must not be a good mom." That's not the case at
all. But um. I kinda wanted to make a video, I guess—an anthem for them,
you know?

She thus adapts her knowledge of this social context as a heuristic for planning her video
for her community partner.

Planning the video. Throughout the planning process, Meghan demonstrates
caution and a keen understanding of how delicately she needs to handle this topic for this
particular audience of mothers. When she initially meets with me to discuss her video
concept, she plays around with the idea of having the mom become a superhero after
earning the GED—but then, she thinks out loud, what message would that send? As a
result, she decides to forego that narrative arc and pursues a different approach:

I made the mom, from the beginning, be a superhero. You know, like, you
know, she's kicking butt all day long no matter—you know, like, it
doesn't matter she's—this is her life. She does this. You know? So, I kind
of wanted the audience to go on being like, "Oh yeah. Moms are
supermoms" you know? And not just like, "Oh, they *become* supermoms
when they get their GED," you know?

She also seems to consider a secondary audience and wants people who may be
unfamiliar with this kind of a life to drop their preconceived ideas about what makes
someone a good mother. For Meghan, when she thinks of her primary audience of moms,
she already views them as superheroes. She explains, "I didn't want the video … to come
across as like—I guess, 'single moms are incapable' or, you know, 'they're not good
parents already.'" Meghan knows that the message of her video could be misinterpreted,
so she relies on her prior knowledge to guide her towards sensitive choices.

Ultimately, Meghan wants her video to nudge capable people towards action—not
unlike the push that she needs to take a risk with this assignment:

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> I wanted people to feel, like, empowered that they could —if they didn't already feel that they could. And I felt like it was a thin line between like saying "You're not a good mom if you don't get your GED"—I didn't want that to come across at all, you know? 'Cause there are GREAT mothers who don't have their GED, but I mean it—it was just a thin line— you want to make sure that, like, the message you are trying to portray comes across to the audience that you're—'cause the audience can see things totally different—especially like a mom! You don't want to call somebody a bad mother. I mean, that's like ultimate insult, right? So, I mean like you want to make sure that you're careful of like how you say things to certain audiences. 'Cause I mean, to us, we're like "Oh yeah, you go, single moms!" but I mean to them it might come off totally different.

Meghan acknowledges how easily messages can be misinterpreted or misconstrued in digital space. In part, however, the challenge comes from what Linda Alcoff calls "the problem of speaking for others." Attempting to represent the perspective of someone else with sensitivity and accuracy is not easy. Alcoff explains that "certain privileged locations are discursively dangerous" (7). Meghan's status is "privileged" in that she graduated from high school, she is going to college, and she is creating a video from the stance of "encourager" or "motivator," which positions her outside of the community for whom she is speaking. Consequently, she risks reinforcing stereotypes about less privileged individuals even if she has the best of intentions. She knows that her video could be interpreted in any number of ways, and her unease over whether or not her video unintentionally offends anyone still persists months after she uploads it to YouTube.

Meghan draws on her prior knowledge of single mothers—her "friends from back home"—to plan her video. Like Becca, she respects the power of pathos-based videos, but she knows that she cannot rely on emotion alone to connect with this audience. She tried to think of what her own friends would think:

> If they were watching the video, what would they respond to, you know, like would they respond—all of my friends , you know, they see these emotional single mom videos and they're like "okay, you know. Next!

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I've seen it before." And I'm like, "What's something that's different that could kind of make a connection and I was like … Video games! (laughs) you know? It's something fun. And something entertaining, that's kind of silly, that's [more] refreshing than the deep single mom like "oh, we—we're so sorry" you know? It's something entertaining! 'Cause I mean I know a lot of single moms who are really happy that they're moms, you know?

Meghan's plan to create an animated video game requires skill with multimodal composing tools that we do not cover in this class. She talks to her Film and Digital Media friends and they advise her to compose her video "anthem" to moms using an online animation program called GoAnimate. She pays a small subscription fee to get access to more tools than the free trial offers. Meghan has to make some revisions based on the mid-process feedback she receives that she would rather not incorporate, but she thinks her friends would be mostly pleased her video, "My Mom's a Superhero? What?"[15]

Final product. Meghan's video, like Becca's, begins with the "We Are Waco" image, but then it cuts to an animated scene that flashes the words "Round 1" and "Fight" like the viewer is playing an old school hand-to-hand combat video game like *Mortal Kombat*. The avatar, who we do not yet realize is a single mother, is stylized as a female anime warrior armed with a sword. She runs across the screen to face her first foe, a ninja dressed in all black. Punches are thrown.[16] She ducks. And then she somehow gets her sword back and slays the ninja. The camera pulls back and we see that we are actually watching a boy in real life playing this video game (see figure 4.2). The supermom character goes through one more round with an anonymous enemy, and then she reaches

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[15] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYW9c7wFLsA

[16] The swords have disappeared at this point for some reason.

the final round: a confrontation with the G.enerally E.vil D.ude. He is a regular guy who

laughs and mocks her as she takes a test. The boy drops his game controller, stunned.

Supermom cheers as the G.E.D. falls to his knees in defeat. Then, the supermom teleports

to a regular living room and walks past the boy playing the video game.

Figure 4.2. Screenshot of Meghan's video of Supermom vs. the G.enerally E.vil D.ude.

She nods and says "Hey" and he turns to the camera with a shocked expression when he

connects that his own mother is supermom from the video game.

Looking back. Meghan's final act of risk-taking comes in an unlikely form:

being "cheesy" for the greater good. She is laughing while she watches her video for the

retrospective protocol. She laughs again when the G.enerally E.vil D.ude shows up and

mumbles, "So cheesy. So cheesy." She clears her throat and laughs again when it ends

and exhales, "Oh my gosh. Okay." She tells me that she has "really mixed feelings" about

revising her original video to include elements like the "G.enerally E.vil D.ude" to make

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her video more specifically related to the GED. She understands why people need those

kinds of cues, so she ultimately accepts that she makes a "cheesy" video:

> Meghan: I mean, adding the "G.enerally E.vil D.ude" was a cute idea, and I liked the idea. I just felt like adding it to the end kind of made it more like cheesy—it made it cheesy, but it also did clarify things, I feel. So you know, as hard—it was hard for me to like find that balance, so I ended up just going full-on cheesy. You know?

> dmw: Right.

> Meghan: And just having—taking the risk of it being cheesy just so people would especially understand, you know, like what was going on. And I made sure to put the G.enerally E.vil D.ude or I made sure to put like the periods after the G and the E and the D, so like if people didn't catch it then, I don't—I don't know what to—you know?

> dmw: Yeah.

> Meghan: (laughs) 'Cause it was pretty obvious to catch, so um but I mean—the reason why I was so like hesitant to change it was 'cause the first draft kind of left it a mystery until the very end. Like, and that's kind of like how I felt [Sam's] video was and why it succeeded so well is 'cause you didn't really know why until it was like, "Oh, this is why we are [punch dancing]." You know? So off-the-wall and off-topic and you're like "Oh, this is a GED video." And I mean, you know, it was cute. So, and I feel like those are the ones that people are going to remember. Like, they watch them and they're like, "Oh, this is about something totally different" and then it was about the GED. You know?

Meghan's assessment of her video after the fact is that it is "cheesy"—but necessarily so.

While the original draft of her video was successful in setting up narrative tension, the

connection to the GED was fairly tenuous. Though she wishes her video could be as "off-

the-wall and off-topic" as Sam's, she feels that she is taking an important risk so that her

message will be heard and understood. And she's happy that the video is just "off-the-

wall" enough that people will likely remember and perhaps act on it, which validates the

risks she took in composing it.

The Service-Learning Activity System from the Student Point of View

In community-based writing projects, Deans explains that students experience

contradictions at the axes of three primary objects/motives:

1. Learning vs. Contributing to organization

2. Show subject mastery vs. Meet agency needs

3. Please teacher vs. Serve client (see figure 4.3)

Tools
School genres vs. Workplace genres
    Textbooks/lectures/classes vs. Meetings/mentoring/work sessions)

Subject(s)   Object/Motive ⟶ Outcome
"Good student vs.   Learning vs. Contributing to   Grade vs. Document for use
    Effective worker   Show subject mastery vs. Meet
Individual achiever   agency needs
    vs. collaborator   Please teacher vs. serve client

Rules   Division of Labor
Academic habits vs. Workplace   Teacher/student vs. Teacher/student/community partner
    habits
Doing school vs. doing work
Follow set rules vs. improvise

Community
New community of learners/novices in one class vs. Ongoing organization of
    professionals
Traditional school hierarchy vs. Cross-professional collaboration
Competition among individuals for grades vs. Cooperation to meet shared goals
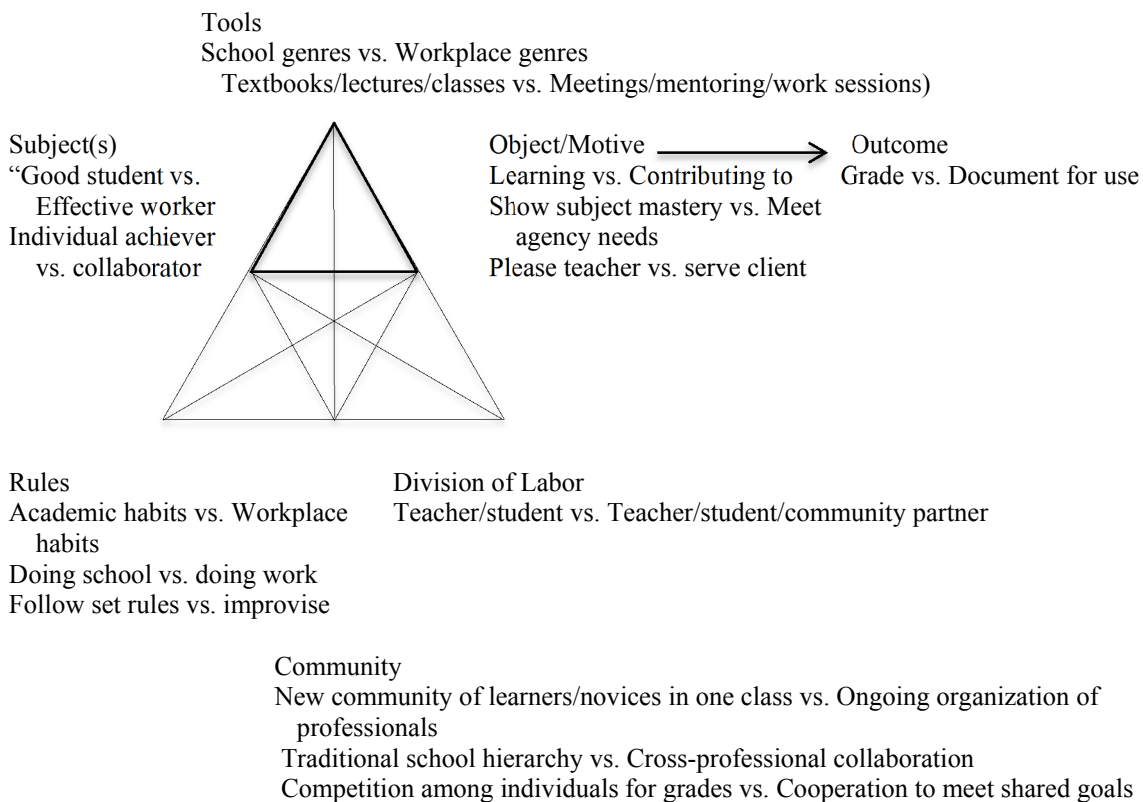
Figure 4.3. Contradictions in the service-learning classroom activity system from the
student point of view (from Deans, "Shifting").

These goals correspond to two outcomes, a final grade and a document that the

community partner can use. Most of the students in this class are concerned about both

outcomes, but they are less concerned about the grade of the final project since they know

that 15% of the course grade will come from the "Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving" category.[17]

Though the service-learning activity system of the classroom from the student perspective seems to have clear goals, individual students bring unique concerns that influence how they experience the same classroom context. Each individual student has her own specific object/motive and desired outcomes, but I will focus on the contradictions that emerge between the activity systems of two students, Becca and Meghan. As someone who has never felt comfortable with technology, Becca emphasizes achieving functional technological literacy and becoming capable of composing a usable video for her community partner. She draws on her personal knowledge about what would appeal to someone like her in order to achieve her goals. In contrast, Meghan's primary objective is to take risks and create a video that people will remember. Both students use the same mediating tools, work within the same rules, draw from the same community, and adhere to a common division of labor. However, the identities they adopt and the outcomes they achieve are markedly different.

Additionally, the reception of the videos differs and further reveals these contradictions. Though the community partners cite Becca's video as one of the most successful submissions from the class, her peers do not even notice it. Her video receives no votes in class. This omission is significant because, like Becca herself, many of these students are the exact audience she is trying to target: people from the "upper-middle

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[17] Though I informally evaluate students on these elements throughout the semester, I give them an opportunity to explain how they demonstrate these values in a "Choose Your Own Adventure" final reflection. They get to choose the modality, but they must respond to a common prompt that asks them to explain a central challenge that they experienced in this class and how they did or did not meet their expectations in overcoming this challenge. See Appendix G for the assignment.

class," churchgoers with resources like money and time. Becca is still clearly moved by her video, and, to be honest, I am moved by her video, too. Watching the images of these women and reading their words motivates me to contact her community partner and volunteer as a mentor myself. However, the video does not seem to make much of an impression on the students in the class. While this lack of interest could indicate that the in-class vote was a popularity contest or that the technical deficiencies in Becca's "novice" video prevent it from earning accolades, some people in the class might be responding to the video's message. By ignoring Becca's video, they can also brush off her call to action to donate their time or money to the nonprofit women's organization. "If we do not see the problems," so the logic goes, "then we are absolved from having to listen to them, to think about them, or to seek to redress the larger structural issues that perpetuate their presence." I do not mean to be unduly harsh towards the students in this class, but I do think that this example underscores some of the students' attitudes towards "the absent presence of race" and the "absence of class."[18] Not acknowledging a problem does not mean that the problem does not exist, but it does say something about a person's orientation to the problem. Becca's video does not address the structural issues that create this problem, but she does an effective job of promoting services designed to ameliorate its effects.[19]

In contrast, Meghan's video is easily one of the class favorites, but two of the community partners think it is an inaccurate representation of the typical GED test-taker.

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[18] In hindsight, I would spend more time bringing these issues to the surface through additional course readings and discussion instead of focusing so much on the technical aspects of the project.

[19] This assessment is consistent with Bickford and Reynolds' critique of community-based writing projects: "One of service-learning's biggest limitations, admittedly, is that it induces students to ask only, "How can we help these people?" instead of the harder question, "Why are conditions this way?" (231). Bickford and Reynolds propose re-framing service-learning as activism.

However, the students in the class praise the risks that Meghan takes in learning a new animation program. The creativity she displays overwhelms the fact that multiple viewings reveal its rhetorical inconsistencies. The class nominates her video for multiple categories: "Most Improved," "Best Use of Visuals," and "Most Entertaining." Meghan also gets the highest number of write-in awards, including, "Most Creative," "Most #GEDswag," and "Best Metaphor." As far as I am aware, none of the students in FAS 1302 are single parents, so I find it significant that they respond so positively to a video to which they are likely outsiders. Their approval likely stems from their appreciation of the visual methods she uses, yet this video's message is not very applicable to this group of people. Furthermore, even if Meghan is drawing on her prior knowledge about single mothers, the video reinforces stereotypes that the students—as well as the project sponsors—overlook. Stereotypes are often "based on a kernel of truth, but in its totality and coerciveness, a distortion of reality … If they tell us little that is reliable about the objects of such conceptions, they may reveal a great deal about those who hold them" (Fredrickson 39). I will discuss this discrepancy at greater length at different points in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

From the student perspective, success in a multimodal community-based writing project can mean adapting to a new composing environment, understanding a new side of the community, producing a usable final product, taking risks to satisfy audience needs, or earning a desirable final grade. Becca's goal, "to make [the] organization proud and do a good job representing them" aligns with the stated goals of the multimodal community-based writing project. She overcomes her anxieties with learning multimodal composing

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tools and composes a rhetorically effective video. However, what are we to make of the fact that the audience of her peers ultimately rejects her video? If Meghan composes a video that her peers love but she never shows it to one of her single mother friends from back home, is it anything more than "entertaining"? If another student composes a video that some community partners find offensive, is his clear development in other areas negligible? Activity theory creates space for these contradictions to exist alongside each other. One's student success will not look like another student's success. At the end of the day, students—novices, risk-takers, or otherwise—set their own individual goals, and they achieve their own particular successes at points relative to their own skill and effort. In the next chapter I analyze the student videos within the broader context of the multimodal community-based writing project as seen from the perspective of the project's sponsors. I present the results of rhetorically listening to "cultural logics" and how the digital writing classroom itself further complicates the activity system of the service-learning classroom.

CHAPTER FIVE

Project Sponsors' Perspectives: Listening to the Contradictions

> Before teaching a course, I reflect upon my assumptions about the course, the subject matter, the readings, the assignments, the students, the process of learning that will be taught, and my relation to all of the above …
> When such reflection does not help explain and predict classroom interactions, then I reexamine my assumptions—and tell myself to be grateful for the learning opportunity.
> —Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening*

> Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.
> —Paulo Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

Silence: The Assumption that "No News is Good News"

I often tell my students that I expect them to contact me when something is unclear or if they have a question. "When I hear nothing," I repeat several times a semester, "I assume that everything is fine. If things aren't fine, you need to let me know." Combined with other strategies like one-on-one conferences, written reflections, and post-unit surveys, this approach of "no news is good news" works well. It works less well, however, when I bring the same assumption to the multimodal community-based writing project. I give the community partners my phone number and email address at the bottom of the handout. I repeat that they should contact me with any questions or concerns at the end of every email I send throughout the semester. At one point during the semester, I get an email from Phoebe about a community partner named Nancy. Nancy has expressed concern over an email I sent to the Marketing and Communications

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director at the local community college in which I reference her by name. Nancy technically works at the community college, but her program is funded by statewide grants and the university does not technically employ her. She does not want to confuse anyone, so she wants to clear this issue up now. I apologize for the misunderstanding and pass this information along to my students. Based on Nancy's willingness to speak up, I feel fairly confident that things are fine when no other concerns are voiced or grievances aired. That is, until months after the project has ended.

Based on the meetings we have had and the emails we have exchanged, I am hopeful that I have established a respectful and communicative relationship with the community partners, so I assume that they will feel comfortable talking with me. What I fail to consider is how even these assumptions are rooted in my own perspective—as a white academic at a private university, as a Christian feminist, as a first-generation college student, as a member of that amorphous middle[1] class. Not all of these identifications are as easily observed as others, but they all play a role in structuring how I see and how I am seen. Power dynamics stemming from these identifications are at work even in seemingly small interactions that affect how people approach me and what people feel they can say in my presence or to me. And this is just one example of how this multimodal community-based writing project is bound by a matrix of assumptions— mine, Phoebe's, Baylor's, the community partners', and the students'—that ultimately affect and complicate how we evaluate its success.

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[1] I think. But who can say?

Untangling Assumptions

Assumptions I make about myself as a feminist also affect the success of this project. Feminist teachers seek to dismantle traditional power dynamics (e.g., teacher/student, expert/novice), but we are often reluctant to outline a certain set of practices as distinctly "feminist." The basic practices, however, are similar to trends in process pedagogy, which is characterized by the "decentering or sharing of authority, the recognition of students as sources of knowledge, a focus on process (of writing and teaching) over products" (Jarratt 115). FAS 1302 is marked by practices that destabilize my authority as the teacher at the front of the room: students sit in a U and face each other, they collaboratively design a rubric for multimodal assignments, and they conduct secondary research and give "micro-presentations" as "classroom experts" on community topics.[2] Additionally, before the class even starts, the GED Community Video Project and Waco Public Transit Project are designed in collaboration with community members, and "community experts" share their knowledge with students through interviews. I make a concerted effort when I teach to expose familiar power structures by asking students to consider why they are uncomfortable devising their own criteria or giving each other feedback on their drafts.

I assume that my commitment to feminism and gender equality makes me sensitive to unfair power dynamics, to privilege, to issues of difference. I assume that I am aware of my own blind spots. I am wrong. What I discover, through the process of interviewing these stakeholders and as I am writing up the results of this study, is that I am all too often blind to important issues of race and class. I realize I do not always notice the lack of diversity in the students' videos because seeing "whiteness [as] the

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[2] See Appendix H.

unexamined norm" (Tatum) is a problem many of my students and I unfortunately share.

Furthermore, I do not always recognize some of the stereotypes of GED test-takers in my

students' videos as stereotypes until I meet with Kim.[3] Despite my attempts to critique

social structures that privilege one group over another, I am stunned to realize how

frequently I do not see—that I am only immediately critical when I am not the one on the

"right" side of the power dynamic. This truth is hard to swallow, but it is also what makes

listening to other perspectives so critical.

Krista Ratcliffe exposes similar blind spots surrounding her "(in)visible

whiteness" in *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness* (3). I echo her

rhetorical question: "What lessons am I (un)consciously sending to my students, my

readers, my neighbors, my daughter, myself?" (Ratcliffe 3). And in what ways did I

unconsciously contribute to my students' "failures" in this multimodal community-based

writing project because I first failed to see how race and class are represented in these

videos? It would be easy to feel guilty about the role I played as a project sponsor, but

guilt gets us nowhere. Ratcliffe proposes an alternative response in the form of

accountability. First, she narrates her process of moving through three responses to her

race blindness: "good old-fashioned liberal guilt," absolution, and, finally, accountability

(Ratcliffe 5-6). Accountability requires us to pay attention to our daily lives and to listen

(Ratcliffe 7). As we lay these stories next to each other, we can begin to "expose troubled

identifications with gender and whiteness … and to conceptualize tactics for negotiating

such troubled identifications" (Ratcliffe 8). Like Ratcliffe, I am committed to this project

of hearing what we cannot see. Fortunately, feminist praxis is rooted in a "relentless

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[3] One of the community partners steers the students in the direction of these stereotypes—particularly the stereotype of the drug-user.

capacity for dialogue and self-critique" (Jarratt 117)—these qualities give feminist teachers opportunities to listen, and, most critically, to learn from our mistakes.

In addition to the assumptions I make about myself, I also make assumptions about Phoebe. When I first reach out to Phoebe about collaborating on a multimodal community-based writing project, I assume that her work with the local community website and newsletter is her primary job. I do not immediately realize that, in addition to her work with the community, she is also a Baylor University administrator. Our joint affiliation with Baylor thus shapes how the community partners see our motives (e.g., "Your primary concern is to structure good learning experiences for Baylor students") even though we might personally have different goals. Our institutional affiliations, like other identifications, structure how we are seen and how we see. By virtue of my role as an instructor in the Department of English at Baylor University, I invite certain assumptions from others both inside and outside of the university. Some of these assumptions might be accurate (e.g., "You must enjoy writing") while others are not (e.g., "I better watch my grammar around you"). Though Phoebe has close relationships with many of the community partners involved in this project and they likely know that she works at Baylor, I do not reflect on how our shared institutional affiliation might affect power dynamics within the project. This power differential might affect how comfortable the community partners feel critiquing certain aspects of the project.

In this chapter, I hope to work through some of these assumptions and place the various stakeholder perspectives side by side to examine the contradictions that surface between activity systems. I begin by defining "rhetorical listening" as an approach to cross-cultural communication in multimodal community-based writing projects. I then

introduce Phoebe as a project sponsor and discuss how the concept of listening frames the multimodal community-based writing project. My goals in this chapter are to describe (1) how we, as the project's sponsors, practice rhetorical listening by inviting other stakeholder perspectives; (2) how the contradictions between activity systems affect the outcome of a multimodal community-based writing activity system; and (3) how the multiplicity of voices complicate the possibilities for the digital delivery of texts. By exploring the contradictions that emerge between and within the activity systems involved in the multimodal community-based writing project from the overarching perspective of the project's sponsors, I hope to show how rhetorical listening can be used as a strategy for understanding that we can use to hear what we cannot see.

Using Strategies of Rhetorical Listening to Hear Key Stakeholder Perspectives

Though community-based writing projects tend to privilege the perspectives of university students and instructors, this study aims to add the voice of community partners to this chorus in order to disrupt traditional power dynamics in university-community partnerships (Iverson and James). In order to enact this strategy, Phoebe and I listen. Listening, however, is not just a matter of hearing other people share their opinions; listening is an ongoing process. In *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness,* Krista Ratcliffe presents new possibilities for communicating across different perspectives. She defines "rhetorical listening" "as a trope for interpretive invention, that is, as a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally" (Ratcliffe 25). Ratcliffe proposes that listening is an overlooked, but crucial, element in the field of

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composition and rhetoric and argues that we need to pause and hear instead of viewing listening as a space in which we pause to generate a response. She draws on Martin Heidegger's explanation of the relationship between the "Greek noun *logos* and its verb form *legein,* which in its fullest sense means both 'saying' and 'laying'" (Ratcliffe 23) to discuss the potential of viewing communication as a process of "laying-to-let-lie-before-us" (Ratcliffe 24). She calls for "a more inclusive *logos,*" which draws upon both senses of the word so that "people can engage more possibilities for inventing arguments that bring differences together, for hearing differences as harmony or even as discordant notes" (Ratcliffe 25). The first step of rhetorical listening is to reflect on the self in relation to what we hear, and then we can begin to act in more just and socially equitable ways.

This approach to communication is a key element of feminist praxis. Instead of deciding who gets to speak or privileging one voice over another, rhetorical listening can be used as a strategy to hear multiple perspectives that might clash or contradict (Iverson and James; Butin). The goal, however, is not to "win" or to determine which perspective is "right," but to let the contradictions exist side by side and to let them be heard. Hearing can then lead to dialogue and action. While this scenario might seem idealistic, Ratcliffe does not present rhetorical listening as a cure-all for resolving friction between diverse groups. She argues that rhetorical listening can have "a pragmatic effect" (Ratcliffe 27) that creates the possibility for productive cross-cultural communication when listeners dedicate themselves to practicing four key moves:

1. Promoting an *understanding* of self and other
2. Proceeding with an *accountability* logic
3. Locating identifications across *commonalities* and *differences*

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4. Analyzing *claims* as well as the *cultural logics* within which these claims function. (Ratcliffe 26)

These moves can facilitate the process of understanding different perspectives that seem, and sometimes are, incompatible and difficult to reconcile. The aim, however, is not to smooth over these contradictions but to "generate more productive discourses, whether these discourses be narratives or arguments, whether they be in academic journals or over the dinner table" (Ratcliffe 46). And, I would add, whether they are between or among different goal-directed activity systems in a community project. While Ratcliffe's focus is on the cultural categories of race and gender, her strategies for listening across difference are valuable for addressing the contradictions that emerge between and within the activity systems of the various community partners, students, and project sponsors involved in the multimodal community-based writing project.

Rhetorical Listening as Project Sponsors

Listening is a repeated theme when Phoebe and I meet to discuss the project's success. As my students can attest from practicing peer review and from receiving my and Phoebe's advice on their video drafts, sometimes listening is not easy. You might get feedback you disagree with and want to disregard. You might get feedback you do not want to hear because it means you have more work ahead of you. Or you might get valid, but conflicting, feedback and then you have to make a decision. At the time of my interview with Phoebe, I have met with the students, and I have interviewed the community partners. We are meeting to listen to and reflect on these diverse perspectives together so we can make improvements to the design of future projects. This meeting is a fact-finding mission, but it is also a sort of a rescue operation. What did we learn? What

is worth saving? We find that we are surprised by some of the discordant notes from community partners—not because their feedback is hard to hear on its own, but because their reactions point to gaps in our own awareness. "How did we not see what they saw in these videos?" we wonder. "What else are we not seeing? Why?"

As the project's sponsors, we feel responsible. I use the term "project sponsor" to refer both to the logistical (Lindlof and Taylor) and the formative aspects of sponsorship (Brandt). Our perspectives as the designers of the multimodal community-based writing project do not mean that our assessments of the project's success are, somehow, more valid. In fact, the only reason I draw attention to our role as project sponsors in this chapter at all is because of the vantage point we share. We see the original intentions of the project, but more importantly we see the points at which other stakeholder perspectives converge and collide. We bring these voices together so that we can hear something closer to the full story. Although I consider myself one of the project's sponsors, I will only provide a description of Phoebe here and describe myself within the context of our interactions. In so doing, I hope to emphasize the shared role that we have as we practice rhetorical listening during and after the multimodal community-based writing project.

Phoebe

Phoebe wears red high-top Converse and glasses with rectangular black frames. She has an infectious laugh and thick curly hair. She identifies with many of the students involved in this project because she is a Baylor Bear herself. Phoebe left Waco after she graduated from Baylor, but she came back. The first time we meet over Diet Cokes at Whataburger—Phoebe's unofficial "office" where everyone knows her name— we talk

about a local podcast called "The Waco Suck." Their tagline is "Waco sucks, and then it sucks you in." Though this motto will likely not appear on the city website any time soon, we laugh about how true it is. Phoebe works at Baylor, but she calls it her "paying job." Her real job —her passion and compulsion—is her work with the local Waco community. In 2008, she started what was really just a glorified email tree for local-area churches that has since turned into a weekly e-newsletter and a community website hosting a hub of valuable resources.

Phoebe was an English major while she was at Baylor, and she draws on this literary sensibility in her community work. She hosts book clubs on issues of race, poverty, and social justice, and her capacity for metaphor is evident in her work with the community both in person and online. She lugs a big open picture frame that she painted orange to events around town, encouraging people to take their picture with "the big orange frame." The blog on the website features picture after picture of kids, friends, neighbors, community members smiling together, their faces framed by a border of gilt painted orange. The big orange frame functions rhetorically—a physical sign that those pictured are in this together. The frame travels from event to event, marking small groups of people as part of a larger collective. At its core, Phoebe's work, in addition to sharing information about local events, volunteer needs, job opportunities, and resources, is about building and improving the community. She makes people visible. And then she connects them with others and they get to work solving problems. The big orange frame is an apt metaphor: the border of the frame can extend to fit everyone in town and everyone is welcome. Not only does everyone belong, but everyone has a part to play in making Waco a good place to live.

As a result of her work chairing the Poverty Solutions Steering Committee, a committee appointed by the Waco City Council, Phoebe has developed relationships with people working in a variety of areas. Since the steering committee discovered that education is a critical piece of addressing the problem of poverty in Waco, Phoebe proposes that we focus this multimodal community-based writing project on the General Education Development (GED) test. The fact that she has immediate access to people who have "insight into various parts of the GED 'process'" directly influences the topic selection for this course project. Though Phoebe is not directly involved in this GED process, she is a central, rallying figure and an advocate of promoting education in Central Texas.

Phoebe is one the project's "sponsors" because she provides access to the community and sponsors students' developing literacies by helping to create this opportunity to write *for* the community. She also occupies a unique role in this project since she is the project's primary "client"; she has the power to feature the best video(s) on the local community website or not. However, she also has moments in which she assumes a role as a "mentor" or a "teacher," structuring student learning by giving feedback on their work. Phoebe is well-versed in educating others through her work on the local community website. For example, through the website, she shows people how to navigate governmental procedures like applying for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits as well as provides information about other issues such as housing, healthcare, and recovery.

Phoebe is just as devoted to educating the students in my class when she is connecting them with community experts or giving feedback about the lack of diversity

in their video drafts. She points out that many of the student-actors in these drafts are wearing Baylor gear and tells them they need to change their clothes and re-shoot. She tells them that their videos are not diverse enough and they need to lay off the stock photos and clip art. Though some students do not re-shoot their video footage, some of the students listen and take her advice. To many of the students, Phoebe represents the community: she is the final word on how well they understand their audience and its needs. As Meghan reflects:

> as hard as it was to like you know, "ah gosh, I gotta change it" but you know, I understood. I understood … I don't think that she had way better opinions than other people, but I mean I feel like she … is very used to putting herself in the shoes of people watching it and like I feel like that's kind of where she like gets her credibility because she knows these audiences more than we do.

As an honorary teacher and a sponsor of this project, the students recognize that Phoebe's feedback is worth listening to and incorporating into their final video drafts.

When I ask Phoebe to rank the nine qualities that a student can bring to a multimodal community-based writing project, she ranks "listening" as the most important quality and "knowledge" as the least important. She explains, "I wouldn't expect [students] to know [about the GED process] at all because probably none of them took the GED and probably a lot of them don't even have friends who took the GED. But to get that knowledge, you have to listen to the people who do have that information and background." Like the community partners who view their roles as mentors, Phoebe believes that displaying a willingness to learn enhances student success when they compose these kinds of service-learning projects.

Phoebe's definition of listening, however, goes beyond a posture of "openness" towards new information and ideas. Though approaching a community-based writing

project with an eye towards openness is a good goal for any student, this approach can easily become what Paulo Freire calls "the banking concept of education" (53). In this view, students are empty vessels, waiting to be filled with knowledge (Freire 53-60). Instead, she views listening as a dynamic, dialogical process that is more aligned with Freire's conception of "problem-posing education" (60). In this model, students are "no longer docile listeners" but "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire 62). Phoebe clearly defines her use of the term:

> when I say "listen," I include in that being able to ask probing questions and things like that because I think—you're going out as a professional person at making this kind of thing, this video. The person that you're talking to may or may not know anything about that process and so you have to be able to listen to what they're saying and draw out of them the things that you need in order to make a good product.

For Phoebe, the process of composing a multimodal video for the community is a type of give-and-take interaction. The community partners might have the content knowledge, but the student is the representative "expert" on the production side. Only the student really knows what her vision for the video is and what she is capable of producing using the multimodal composing tools at her disposal. The kinds of questions she asks thus become vital parts of her understanding, providing her with the right information to which she can listen and respond by formulating new questions. Phoebe also notes the importance of understanding subtext: "You have to be able to listen with that double layer of what are they saying but what do they mean to be saying and pull that out of them." By listening to what is said as well as to what is unsaid, students can begin to work towards knowledge and understanding. Together, the community partner and student work towards a greater and more complex understanding of what the final video could be.

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Phoebe extends this observation about listening to think about its implications for all of our interactions. She believes that being able to listen in this way would benefit "humanity," generally speaking. "We could all stand to be a little bit better listeners," she says. Though listening is not really something that we explicitly teach in the university setting, Phoebe sees analogous work in critical analysis—particularly, in literary analysis. She tells the students she meets:

> a lot of your interactions in life are not going to be that different from analyzing a poem. You know? You have to listen, you have to hear what's being said, but you have to take into account the tone and the person and the context and the history and you have to understand what's being said below the surface. That to me is what you learn in the most practical sense when you're learning how to analyze a piece of literature. Take into account all of those things. To me, all of that is involved in listening.

Understanding listening in this way is deeply rhetorical— a situated and dialogical endeavor. Though Ratcliffe views listening as a distinctly different process from the act of "reading," Phoebe's explanation similarly frames listening as an active practice of "making meaning with/in language" (23).

The Activity System of a Typical Service-Learning Classroom

Generally speaking, the activity system of a service-learning classroom from the teacher and institutional point of view has its own internal contradictions. Deans explains that tension exists between the goals of the classroom and the goals of the community partners along the axes of process and product (i.e., "Create optimal learning conditions" vs. "Get agency best quality document) and risk and reliability (i.e., "Expect/allow mistakes" vs. "Insure high quality") (see figure 5.1).

Tools
Teach familiar school genres and academic discourse vs.
 teach varied workplace genres and professional/non-academic
 discourses
Hold traditional classes vs. Reconfigure schedule process

Subject(s)
Teacher in charge vs.
 Collaborator/Manager
Upholder of academic
 rigor vs.
 facilitator of
 problem-solving

Object/Motive ⎯⎯⎯⎯⟶ Outcome
Create optimal learning   Learning vs. Performance
 conditions vs. Get agency   Assess as usual vs. Intervene
 best quality document   Grade spread vs. High grades
Expect/allow mistakes vs.
 Insure high quality
Rank/sort students vs.
 Support shared goal

Rules
Academic habits vs.
 Workplace habits
Tidy school schedule vs.
 Unpredictable workplace
 schedules

Division of Labor
Teacher/student vs. Teacher/student/community partner
Control agenda vs. Facilitate partnership/problem-solving
Sole responsibility for assessment vs. Shared assessment

Community
Self-contained, one semester course vs.
 Ongoing organization off campus
Liberal arts ethos vs. Workplace ethos
Emphasis on safe place to learn vs.
 Expectation of professional standards

Figure 5.1. Contradictions in the service-learning classroom activity system from the *teacher* and *institutional* point of view (source: Deans, "Shifting").

As representatives of Baylor, Phoebe and I begin with our own set of assumptions about what the community partners want and what the students need to be able to do to meet these goals; however, these assumptions are tinted by our own goals and impressions of the project. One of the reasons that it is difficult to assess the success of the multimodal community-based writing project is due to the fact that stakeholders do not always articulate their assumptions about the project's overall goals, the roles they will adopt to achieve these goals, the level of technical ability that these videos ought to exhibit, or how success will be defined overall. Each activity system is its own goal-directed system, and individual subjects independently interpret and enact their own self-defined goals

based on their own assumptions and expectations. Later in this chapter, I will complicate

Deans' conception of the traditional service-learning writing classroom by considering

additional goals related to the cultural logic of the multimodal community-based writing

activity system. In the section that follows, I discuss our initial assessment of the

multimodal community-based writing project from our perspective as the project's

sponsors.

Our Initial Assessment of the Project's "Success"

Before speaking to any of the other stakeholders, Phoebe and I initially consider

the project to be a success. We are pleased with the videos that the students produce and

we both agree that, for a first attempt, the multimodal community-based writing project

represents a strong effort on the part of all stakeholders. In one of my final emails to the

community partners, I summarize what the class accomplished over the semester and

provide evidence of the students' learning processes by quoting "the teacher's happy-

dance words" from their final course reflections:

> From a teaching perspective, this project was successful in getting
> students to think about a number of rhetorical issues related to context,
> audience, and purpose. Here are a few of the students' comments from
> their final exam reflection projects so you can get a sense of what they
> learned as they were composing these videos:
>
> - "I've learned that a community is not only the people that I identify
>   with, but *everyone* in the community."
>
> - "I did my video based on mothers at any stage who need to go
>   back and get their GED. It's really complicated when trying to
>   convey a message without stepping on anyone's toes. I didn't want
>   to call any mom who didn't have her GED a 'non-superhero'
>   because I'm sure there a lot of moms out there who are great at
>   what they do, without having their GED. I really wanted to make a
>   connection with Moms, and even their kids, to inspire them to only

better themselves. <--Even that sounded kind of harsh. I had to be very careful not to step on toes."

- "By pushing me to combine my love for writing and my love for technology, this class has made me realize that a good story transcribed into a multimedia format can move people to action (perfectly exemplified by our 'We Are Waco' project). A multimodal narrative is much more than just a story; it can be a catalyst for social, economic, or even political change."

- "I still have some cynicism about the long lasting impact of change efforts that are accomplished through the digital realm. Yet by keeping my eyes and mind open throughout this class, I discovered that there were some other underlying issues to my concerns that needed a perspective shift. Much of this was brought to light through the constant enthusiasm and optimism certain classmates always had toward the project. This was an opportunity to change people's lives! Sure, lasting change can be hard to come by, but you never know what could help. Part of my doubt in the likelihood of me being able to impact others came from laziness. When you think you doing something will not help, it excuses you to do nothing. This project helped bring this fault in my character to light."

- "I don't know how different it is in my hometown, but in Waco, they've made it nearly impossible for someone not to graduate high school. When sitting down with [Peter], it thoroughly amazed me to hear everything he and his co-workers have come up with to help kids finish school. Half of the reasons why kids drop out off school never occurred to me. As it turns out, I learned a lot with this project. As sad as it is, I now realize how few people make it through college. It makes me proud that I've come this far, but it saddens me at the same time. I love what [Peter] is doing to the Waco community, and I pray that people hear about this cause and help out in whatever way they can."

The quotations that I choose to share with the community partners as evidence of student learning reveal my own motives and give insight into the criteria I am implicitly using to evaluate the success of the project. Though I want to provide a service for the community partners, I obviously value the student's learning process and assume that the community partners will be pleased with these students' reflections on their learning. Though I do not

articulate my hopes that students will develop their moral character and become more engaged community members through the process of composing the GED Community Video Project, my assumptions that student growth is a valid and worthy metric for success is clear.

Phoebe, on the other hand, explicitly expresses goals for the project that are both process- and product-focused. Since she occupies a dual role as a project sponsor and as a member of the community, she fills out the same survey administered to the community partners. Phoebe writes that she hopes the project would "Give the Baylor students an opportunity to learn more about the community in general and the GED process in particular." She also notes that this learning process should culminate in a usable product: "To end up with possibly one or two videos of high enough quality that we could use them to help promote some aspect of the idea of people going back to get a GED." Phoebe's personal understanding of the project's goal is consistent with the objectives that we collectively set out during the planning stages of the video and express during the initial planning meeting. Phoebe notes that she feels the initial planning meeting is a key part of our success—a practice that should be continued in future projects. During our post-project interview, she reflects, "I think one of the big homeruns of what we did was that initial meeting where we brought people together. I think that set everybody on a good path of being enthusiastic about this [project]." She "strongly agrees" with both survey statements related to the initial planning meeting.

During the semester, Phoebe visits the FAS 1302 class twice: once to provide feedback on the students' mid-process drafts and once on the day of the final exam to participate in the screening of the final videos and the end-of-the-year party. I bring her

an extra-large Diet Coke from Whataburger both times because the orange and white cup

brings a little bit of the outside community into Baylor's Dr. Pepper world.[4] Phoebe

makes two primary observations about her visits to the classroom related to the students'

learning processes and final products:

> I was very impressed with, even at the draft stage, what seemed like to me the technical competency of what they had done. I can't imagine putting together little videos like that and having them turn out that good. Maybe kids today do that every day, I don't know, but to me it seemed pretty impressive. I was pretty impressed with that. I felt like most of them had grasped how important this GED idea was even though I don't necessarily think that was something that they were particularly familiar with before or had ever had reason to be familiar with before, so I was impressed with all that.

Phoebe's assessment speaks to both the process of students' "moral development" as

informed rhetors in Quintilian's sense (i.e., expanding what they know about the GED

and their sensitivity towards people who take it) and the quality of the final products.

Along with her positive mid-process feedback on the students' videos during class, she

notices a recurring problem with the way that students are failing to represent the

diversity in the Waco community. She advises students to consider adding pictures of

more diverse individuals so that people won't think "there's nobody in the video that

looks like them." She adds that the lack of diversity "was interesting to think about from

the point of view of Baylor and what we want for students at Baylor and what perspective

they're coming from." Phoebe's observation makes it clear that, while she is impressed by

many of the students' videos, future projects might better prepare students by

intentionally studying whiteness to destabilize how students see and visually represent

the "norm" (Keating 59). By putting "all the 'race cards' on the table—in other words, to

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[4] Though Dr. Pepper is a Waco staple, Phoebe and I decide it is a decidedly poor substitute for Diet Coke.

lay whiteness alongside all other racial categories—so as to encourage productive conversations and actions about race in the US" (Kennedy, Middleton, and Ratcliffe 368), students can begin to see "the absent presence of race" and complicate their previously held beliefs.

Ultimately, as Phoebe's last comment reveals, her perspective is shaped by her role as a university administrator. Part of her "paying job" is getting Baylor students involved in meaningful ways with the local community, an arm of Baylor's *Pro Futuris* vision statement called "Informed Engagement." Paula Mathieu would call Phoebe's role with the university "strategic" while her work with the local community website might be considered "tactical." "Tactics," a term Mathieu borrows from Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life*, is defined in opposition to institutional, top-down "strategies" (16). Strategies are "calculated [actions] that emanate from and depend upon 'proper' (as in propertied) spaces, like corporations, state agencies, and educational institutions, and relate to others via this proper space" (Mathieu 16). Acting strategically is not at all bad, but this type of action is sometimes less responsive and agile than acting tactically. Tactics are rhetorically kairotic in that they "take advantage of 'opportunities' and depend upon them" (de Certeau 37). Because of Phoebe's two affiliations, both strategic and tactical approaches are at work in the multimodal community-based writing project.

Overall, Phoebe and I have a positive experience with the GED Community Video Project and assume that the community partners have, as well. When I send out an email for the community partners to vote on their favorite video(s) to decide which ones Phoebe will promote on the local community website, we hear silence. I vote. Phoebe votes. We reason that I sent the email at a bad time—"it just got lost in the Christmas

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shuffle"—so I resend the same email in January. We get one response, from Peter. He votes for his favorite videos. I assume that the community partners do not have time to watch 16 videos, so, based on these three votes, I send another email with links to the "top five videos." Along with this email, I send a brief announcement that I am interested in researching an underrepresented perspective in community-based writing projects: the community partner perspective. It is at this point that my inbox begins to ring with the tentative, but negative, responses that motivate this present study. And that is the last time that I think of the multimodal community-based writing project as an unqualified "success."

Moments of Contradiction

In the section that follows, I analyze the contradictions that surface between our activity system as the project's sponsors, the activity systems of the community partners, and activity systems of students. In particular, I look at three events in the multimodal community-based writing project's life cycle: the Waco Public Transit Project (WPTP), the viewing of the top five student videos, and the problem of digital delivery. The two primary contradictions related to the WPTP derive from different motives and rules. I then provide a rhetorical analysis of the student videos from my perspective as the course's instructor, paying special attention to the rhetorical effectiveness of the modal elements. I also discuss the contradictions that emerge within the activity system of the multimodal community-based writing project as they relate to community, motives, division of labor, tools, and rules. I then analyze the contradiction of the project's outcome separately within the context of the problem of digital delivery, which is ultimately the point at which the contradictions between and within these various activity

systems converge. In other words, this last section addresses the difficulty in answering the question, "How can we evaluate the success of this multimodal community-based writing project?"

The Waco Public Transit Project (WPTP)

The Waco Public Transit Project is a field research assignment that encourages Baylor students in FAS 1302 to challenge their assumptions and see a different side of Waco. Peter, the community partner who saw his role as "guide," suggests this kind of an eye-opening assignment during the initial planning meeting to "get students to cross the 35" and "step out" into the Waco community.[5]

Motives. The primary contradiction that appears between the students' and "community partner as guide" activity systems during the preparation stage of the multimodal community-based writing project is a tension related to the goal of exposing students to issues of social class. During the initial planning meeting, members of the community, including Phoebe, express that Baylor students will have little to no experience with people who undergo non-traditional schooling experiences. Peter's primary motive during the multimodal community-based writing project is to encourage student growth and transformation by getting students to "see Waco." He assumes that

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[5] Full disclosure: I had never taken the Waco public bus prior to creating this assignment, so I took a trip to visit a friend who teaches at the local community college before I asked my students to participate in the WPTP. To say the least, I was bothered by my own assumptions—mostly about gender but also about class. The demographics of the people on the bus changes at nearly every stop, and I found I was uncomfortable—frightened, even—at one point when I was the only woman on the bus and sitting near a group of men who seemed to know each other well. My double-entry fieldnotes mention only that the men had "lots of tattoos" and that I was relieved when they left. I am not proud of this reaction, but I was able to use my experience as a jumping-off point for a deeper class discussion that guided my students toward challenging some of their own assumptions about gender, race, class, and disability. Lindquist suggests that teachers can also perform this kind of strategic empathy in order to elicit students' affective responses to issues of social class ("Class Affects" 201).

Baylor students will be unfamiliar with public transportation and will therefore need an introduction to lifestyles that might differ from their own.

Peter's suggestion, however, demonstrates a causal assumption that Baylor students come from similar backgrounds and experience issues related to social class through the same limited lens of privilege. In other words, since Baylor students are privileged, they will bring a myopic point of view to the multimodal community-based writing project that needs adjustment. In many cases, Peter's assumption is correct, and I would argue that most of the students do indeed have an eye-opening experience on the public bus that begins a process of enhancing their sensitivity towards others. However, some students recognize themselves and their previous experiences taking public transportation as distinct from the majority; like hooks, they come to class consciousness by realizing the ways in which they differ from their peers. By revealing their comfort with public transportation—by not finding the WPTP to be a jarring or disruptive experience— they reveal their own affiliations with social class whether disclosing this information aligns with their personal motives or not. This process of exposure is not a contradiction by itself, but a contradiction appears when these students are still expected to undergo the same transformational growth as their more privileged peers by participating in this activity. Thus, Peter's assumption that all Baylor students in FAS 1302 "need" to be guided towards greater sensitivity is not wholly accurate. Some students begin with a more nuanced understanding of class for any number of reasons, and the WPTP will likely only encourage the kind of growth he desires in students who are at the greatest remove from this awareness. This outcome is desirable, of course, but

some of these students will likely need more than one bus ride to challenge their ideas about class privilege.

An additional contradiction emerges between the motives in the activity system of the "community partner as guide" and the activity system from the perspective of the teacher/institutional point of view. Peter's goal is to get the students to see the Waco community. As a former Waco Public Transit employee, Peter thinks the best way to achieve this goal is to ask the students to take a literal tour of Waco, which is not unlike the introductory van ride that students take with Mrs. Baskins around Pittsburgh's Northside in Linda Flower's *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement.* Students working with communities benefit from this kind of a ground-level introduction. "The community" loses its vague, general qualities and becomes something knowable, real. While the WPTP is a good opportunity for students to see another side of Waco, I am somewhat troubled by the idea of asking students to treat Waco and Waco citizens as part of "a cultural safari into the jungle of 'otherness'" (Forbes et al. 158). I also feel a responsibility to ensure that the students do not demonstrate insensitivity or tactlessness towards Waco's citizens. By taking public transportation instead of a private van dedicated to this purpose, the dynamic shifts. Instead of introducing a group of novitiates to a new context that can be seen through the windows, the Waco public bus is the context and the students, for good or ill, are immersed in it. The WPTP can thus be understood as an example of a moving contact zone. Mary Louise Pratt first used the term contact zone "to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power" (34). The contact zone of the Waco public bus gets

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students to pay attention and see Waco, but it also forces them to bodily inhabit this space of difference. Some students are mature enough to handle this position with grace and tact, but others are less equipped. As a teacher who is also concerned about the members of the community—and, if I am being honest, also concerned about protecting the reputation of the university—I want to do what I can to limit the tone-deaf actions that some of these students might engage in. This contradiction is a result of my goals as a teacher and Peter's unique goals as a community partner.

Rules. An additional point of contradiction comes from the "rules" that govern behavior in these two activity systems. While experiencing this "clash of cultures" on the public bus is not directly in conflict with Peter's or my goals, the critical pedagogue in me wonders how the artificial nature of the exercise might reinscribe already asymmetrical power relations. In part, this asymmetrical relationship is made worse because different rules govern this physical space of the public bus. Passengers who take the bus regularly are familiar with the basic guidelines of public transportation—the spoken and unspoken rules that people follow when they take or drive the bus. For example, people who frequent public transportation know where to wait to pick up the right bus, how close to sit to other people while they are waiting, how to pay the fare, where to sit on the bus, where to look, when to exit, etc. Baylor students, however, are largely unfamiliar with these rules. Although students are supposed to learn some of these rules prior to getting on the bus as part of the assignment, they often tend to treat this detail as negligible since "it seems easy enough to figure out." They eventually do figure

it out and complete the assignment, but they sometimes draw attention to themselves in the process.[6]

The reality is that Baylor students are not often seen on the public bus, and several students describe passengers saying something to that effect. A pair of female students, who rode the bus together, share that another passenger was very concerned that they were not going to get to the right destination because it was clear that they didn't know what they were doing. Another student mentions that she had such a positive experience she "want[ed] to take a giant selfie with the whole bus!" This sentiment is benign—even sweet—on the surface, but that move would likely draw attention to the fact that the students were "having an experience" instead of trying to blend in and observing what they saw as field researchers (Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein). Other students mention that they had no idea how to pay their fares and drew attention their lack of insider knowledge in that way.

Consequently, students on the bus were recognized as outsiders—tourists, really—who drew attention to themselves simply by being there. In this way, the students experience a different version of attempting to pass as a member of a different social class. Irvin Peckham draws on James Paul Gee's theory of primary and secondary Discourses and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to explain the set of unspoken cultural codes that act as class markers: "The primary Discourse is the discourse of one's family and close friends who share one's habitus. The secondary Discourse is the public Discourse—the one we put 'on'" (19). Peckham notes that these attempts are not always successful, yet he still tries to conform to the unspoken rules: "Even now, when I am

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[6] Though I did not explicitly ask students to discuss their experiences taking public transportation abroad, it would be interesting to compare their kneejerk reactions towards the people who ride the public bus in foreign countries.

sixty-five and dominantly middle-class, I watch others to find out how to eat when I go out to expensive restaurants. There are certain things I can't seem to get 'right'" (20). While Peckham himself makes the choice to "disguise his social class origins," it seems far more insidious for students to adopt a false secondary Discourse to practice the "rules" on the public bus as part of a class assignment.

While many students still have the kind of eye-opening experience that Peter wants them to have, I sometimes wonder, "At what cost? How might we have unintentionally reinforced stereotypes on both sides? How might we have contributed to negative impressions? And how much class consciousness can a student come to terms with on one bus ride?" I am struck by my naiveté in allowing this assignment to take place, quite honestly. Flower, relates a similar story of her first experience working with the Community House and teaching a community-literacy course. She describes herself as "Committed in the abstract; inexperienced in little. Literate in theory talk, monolingual on the street" (*Community Literacy* 101). I would likely think twice if I took a moment to step back and ask, "Who am I? What am I doing here?" (Flower, *Community Literacy* 101) and what am I really asking my students to do? The contradictions that emerge during this part of the project reveal that our concerns as teacher and guide are not necessarily in alignment. We would benefit from engaging in more conversation, more listening, to understand the complexities of what we are asking students to do in this immersive, experience-based assignment.

Student Videos

       The top five student videos—as voted by Peter, Phoebe, and me—are sent to all of the community partners to be considered for distribution on local community websites. These videos are:

1. How You Can Change A Woman's Life[7]
2. My Mom's a Superhero? What?[8]
3. Don't Be Blinded![9]
4. Drugs to Diploma[10]
5. Why Are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And How Does It Relate to Pie?[11]

The students hold their own election for their favorite videos in class, but there is some overlap between these top five choices and the students' favorites. Each video opens with the same "We Are Waco" image that students in the class collaboratively compose (see figure 5.2). Students submit a number of images and slogans, but they ultimately choose this one through a voting process. They feel strongly about using "We Are Waco" as a tagline because, after the field research, primary research, and secondary research they conduct, they decide that it is important to convey a sense of solidarity between the Waco community and Baylor. However, they also choose this motto because they want to communicate that everyone in Waco has the opportunity to take pride in the community and take action toward improvement.

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[7] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhDk4a2Pof8

[8] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYW9c7wFLsA

[9] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0OTezA8pjU4

[10] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qeCT6od7jN0

[11] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW1_mggL74s

Figure 5.2. The collaboratively composed visual introduction to the student videos.

This image introduces each of the student videos on the #WeAreWaco YouTube channel and also appears as the channel's avatar. In this section, I will begin by briefly describing the content of the videos and providing an analysis of the students' rhetorical choices from my perspective as the teacher of the class. While I initially found many of the videos to be successful, each video has room for improvement. I then discuss the contradictions that appear between different activity systems and reflect on some of the underlying assumptions that stakeholders bring to their assessments of the videos.

Rhetorical analysis of the top five student videos. Becca's video, "How You Can Change a Woman's Life" for the nonprofit women's organization is not technically perfect by any means. She inserts distracting transitions between slides, the images could be clearer, and the fonts could be more consistent and professional. However, her message is unmistakable, and her video is strong evidence that she has internalized the rhetorical elements that we discuss in class, especially as they relate to modal affordances

and rhetorical appeals. Her video begins with an attention-grabbing but logical hook that

establishes that women come to this nonprofit organization from a variety of backgrounds

and situations. The alphabetic elements in the video provide clear, accurate information

about the mission and methods of the organization. She effectively incorporates visual

elements such as bright colors and the organization's logo. She also arranges real

photographs of the women, which increases the emotional impact of the video and

bypasses some of the issues in her peers' videos related to racial diversity.

The true pathos-based appeals, however, come from her choice to use the

women's own words with their names and graduation years. In slide after slide, we hear

the women who directly benefit from their participation in this GED program speak for

themselves about how the organization has helped them, believed in them, equipped them

"resurrect[ed]" them, given them hope, changed their lives. In a deft move, Becca

juxtaposes a slide that reads, "They need you," which connects the past successes of these

women to her audience and the role they can play in facilitating these outcomes. This

appeal is followed by a call to action using solitary words in changing colors on three

different black slides: "donate," "volunteer," and "transform lives." Becca also

demonstrates awareness of issues that we discuss in class related to rhetorics of

disabilities in multimodal work (Yergeau et al.; Brewer, Selfe, and Yergeau). Many of

the slides use light text on a dark background, which will aid any viewers who might

have impaired vision. Additionally, the important messages are communicated

alphabetically, which eliminates the need to use captioning software to make the video

more accessible for people who have impaired hearing. Becca's video thus pays attention

to the potential needs of her audience in multiple ways. Interestingly, Becca's video does

not receive any nominations from her peers despite the fact that the community partners overwhelmingly favor "How You Can Change a Woman's Life." This outcome suggests that the student in-class vote was more of a popularity contest than a careful consideration of rhetorical success.

Meghan takes a risk with her high-concept approach to appeal to single mothers. The final product, "My Mom's a Superhero? What?" is relatively successful, and the video game animation is enthusiastically received by her peers. By creatively moving in and out of the animated world, she subtly plays with the line between fiction and reality, bringing accomplishments that might seem otherworldly and out of reach (like earning the GED) right into the boy's own living room. The slides she intersperses throughout the video game sequence add more contextual detail through the use of alphabetic text and give the story a narrative structure. A fast-paced tone is set by her choice of music, which matches the conceit of the video game and the sense of urgency she wants to convey about taking the GED. She also effectively uses silence for dramatic effect. The music stops with a record screech once "supermom" takes the GED and physically transports to the animated living room, but it starts up again after the boy incredulously says "Mom?" This use of silence and sound further blurs the line between the fictive world and the real world as the same music plays whether his mom is fighting off bad guys or just walking into another room of the house.

The message of the video is mostly clear, although certain modal elements seem to contradict each other. The overarching purpose of the video is to demonstrate that moms are, as Meghan says, "kicking butt every day" and they can apply this same level of intensity to the GED. Whether she is wielding a sword against a ninja or showing the

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G.enerally E.vil D.ude that she has won, she is a superhero of the first degree. The text in the video is mostly consistent with this message, but the final scene in which the son says "Mom?" jars against the text that reads, "He believes you can." And, from a feminist perspective, it is somewhat troubling that the son is presumably manipulating his mother's actions in the video game; however, there is redemption when he drops the controller and the game seems to take on a life of its own.

Katie also composes a video for the nonprofit women's organization. She utilizes a controlling metaphor throughout her video "Don't Be Blinded!" to appeal to an audience of potential volunteers. Her video opens with a college student literally placing a blindfold over her eyes, blocking her from seeing images of troubled women flashing across the screen. The photos depict women who are incarcerated, homeless, addicted, lonely. Each image is accompanied by the sound of a camera's shutter flash. Then the video jump cuts back to the student sitting on a couch, blissfully unaware of the problems that other women are facing. When she removes the blindfold, we see an injunction not to "let their story end there. Don't be blinded." Like Becca's video, Katie includes powerful quotes from the women themselves and real photographs from the organization and a graduation. One graduate of the program shares, "I'm over 60 years old and had never graduated from anything until I came to [this organization]. I love my job and have a reason to live now." Another explicitly says that she came to this program when she was "six months out of prison" and now she manages a resale store for a family abuse center. The video concludes with a call to action to volunteer to be a mentor because "these women can't do it alone." The audience is focused and the message is clear. Anyone who

watches this video can no longer claim ignorance that some women will seize second chances and this organization has proven results in helping them achieve their goals.

Katie's video is rhetorically effective for her chosen audience: college students who might be unaware of the problems that some women face and/or how they can intervene and help. She handles the metaphor well using visuals. Even though she has selected photos with gritty subject matter, she justifies the use of these photos and enhances the pathos-based appeals by including quotations from the women who have actually overcome some of these specific issues. Katie also uses sound and silence effectively in the first half of the video. Her use of the lone shutter flash sound effect underscores how easy it might be to ignore these sights, but the camera traps these moments in time. When the blindfold is removed, an acoustic version of Macklemore's "Can't Hold Us" plays over the images of the words and images of the women helped by this nonprofit, which signals a distinct shift in tone and optimism.

Despite the relative success of Katie's message, she could improve the effectiveness of a few key elements. In particular, technical details could be improved (e.g., she should shoot the opening scene in landscape mode, and she should extend the duration of the slides with text). Additionally, the alphabetic text she intersperses to give a frame to the narrative is confusing and does not add anything essential to the video's meaning. The opening slide that reads "Imagine this" does not make it clear what exactly the viewer is meant to imagine. The other text in the video, aside from the words from the women who have participated in the organization, seems equally out of place. Furthermore, Katie's video does not use songs and images available under Creative Commons licenses, which means that the community organization would likely not be

legally allowed to use it for any public purpose. However, Katie's creative approach to the GED Community Video Project earned votes and was nominated for the "Most Inspiring" award by her peers.

Jacob's video, "Drugs to Diploma," has the most controversial plotline, but it is easily the most visually arresting. Jacob decides to tell the story of a student who drops out of high school due to an addiction to prescription pills and chooses to take the GED to regain control of her life. He uses a stop motion animation technique in which he sets a timer on his camera to take photos at spaced intervals, which he then edits to create the impression of a moving image frame by frame. The visual effect is powerful. The staccato quality of the images —as if each moment of a person's life is just a snapshot, one move away from a good decision or a bad decision—is a thought-provoking choice. Jacob also thought carefully about how to depict the visual tone of the narrative arc by playing with the lighting of the photos. The images that depict the young woman's life unraveling are dark and muted, but a shift occurs when she discovers and takes the GED. The images and colors get brighter, culminating with her triumphant fist in the air. His video takes first place for "Best Use of Visuals" and receives a write-in for "Best Overall" in the student vote.

Jacob's video makes effective use of multimodal elements that leave aural and visual gutters that invite the viewer to make meaning along with the composer (McCloud). He pairs the jerky, documentary-style visuals with an audio track of simple fingerstyle guitar. The use of sound and silence in the music mirrors the visual gaps he creates by jump cutting the images to create the movement in the piece. He also uses a creative technique to direct the focus of the narrative. Instead of embedding text on

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slides, he includes a white board in every shot that incrementally peels back the layers of this story. By using a handwritten whiteboard instead of a polished font in the video, he retains a level of intimacy as though "Amy" is writing the viewer a personal note (see figure 5.3).

Figure 5.3. Screenshot of Jacob's video for the public school district.

Overall, Jacob's video demonstrates a cohesive and effective artistic vision that communicates a clear, though ultimately divisive, message: drug abuse can derail a student's life, but the GED can help her get back on track.

Oddly, some of the elements that make Jacob's video so compelling are the same elements that make this video difficult to take seriously. The stop motion animation is such an interesting composing technique that it is almost easy to overlook how comical some of the individual photos actually look. For example, Amy takes pills as though she is taking shots of alcohol out of a prescription bottle. When she is done, you half-expect her to slam the bottle on a bar counter and order another round. Additionally, all of the images that show Amy spiraling into drug use are clearly taken in a university dorm

room, and the use of the whiteboard—that staple of communication between college roommates— reinforces this impression and draws attention to the video's college-aged orchestrator. Furthermore, the handwriting on the whiteboard is too cute, too stylized to be consistent with the video's theme. In a way, these details draw attention to the composer's naiveté even as they register as thought-provoking rhetorical choices.

Sam's video "Why Are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And How Does It Relate to Pie?" is nearly as divisive as Jacob's. His peers voted his video "Most Entertaining," and many of them of their own volition share a link to his video through social media. The rough and final drafts of his video each had nearly a hundred views— not exactly viral, but they definitely get more eyeballs than most students' projects. After analyzing videos on YouTube, Sam concludes that humor is an essential key to success, so he composes and stars in a video of guys "punch dancing." Punch dancing typically refers to young men dancing out their feelings—usually anger—à la the 1980s dance classic *Footloose*. This dance style is typically sincere and only incidentally funny. Punch dancing is now a satirical trope that sometimes appears in remakes of 80's movies. In Sam's video, three different college-aged men dance alone in front of isolated buildings. Their level of focus and intensity is heightened by their apparent lack of self-awareness.

Sam's video is effective on one level because it is memorable and fun to watch; however, the video ultimately prioritizes humor over sensitivity to his audience. His video effectively hooks the viewer with a question overlaying a video of a guy dancing, his rubbery limbs hypnotically swaying at the joints to a laidback techno track: "Why are these white boys dancing?"[12] The rest of the video provides an answer to this question,

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[12] Sam's depiction of the "white" bodies in the video as well as Meghan's memory of the video of "[Sam] and his three very, very white friends" would be an interesting study in itself, but detailed analysis

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setting up narrative tension as the alphabetic text describes that they finally achieved

something "they had been putting off for a while." The text eventually reveals "These

horrible dancers finally decided to get their G.E.D." and the celebratory dancing-out-of-

feelings continues until the video ends. The basic message is that earning the GED is

"easy as pie," and the video aims to motivate viewers to sign up to take the test because

then you can also celebrate with pie. Sam's video is catchy, weird, and creative.

However, his video also presents a troubled perspective on race and gender. While he

seems to be drawing on a comedic stereotype that "white men can't [insert verb here]" by

making fun of how he and his friends are dancing, he also frames the issue of the GED in

ways that might alienate his audience.

    Community. The two main groups in any community-based writing project are

the university community and the local community. Thus, one point of contradiction

within the activity system of the service-learning classroom is related to community.

Each community has different needs, tastes, and expectations. When students neglect to

understand the community for which they are composing, they create videos that reveal

this basic ignorance. Sam's video, "Why Are These White Boys Punch Dancing? And

How Does It Relate to Pie?" is one such example. His rhetorical choices demonstrate a

commitment to a specific type of audience that is not wholly appropriate for the

objectives of the assignment: the community of his Baylor peers. Though an "off-the-

wall" video might also appeal to a potential audience of GED test-takers, Sam includes

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of this aspect of his video is beyond the scope of this study. See the first of James E. Porter's five *topoi*
related to digital delivery of texts: "*Body/Identity*—concerning online representations of the body, gestures,
voice, dress, and image, and questions of identity and performance and online representations of race, class,
gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity" (208). For the purposes of the present study, it suffices to say that
this example is yet another instance of the lack of attention paid to what "whiteness" means as a cultural
category.

several markers that indicate he is primarily trying to appeal to students at Baylor. Most obviously, the young men are dancing in Baylor shirts and dancing in front of Baylor's recognizable red brick buildings. The video primarily appeals to Baylor students like Meghan, who cites Sam's video as the most memorable moment of the class.

However, Sam does not fully consider how members of the local community might receive his video's message. The community partner Kim, for example, does not like how Sam refers to the process of earning a GED is "as easy as pie." For many GED test-takers, earning the GED is an achievement that takes considerable effort and sacrifice. To say that the GED is as easy as pie might be a catchy phrase, but she feels that this description diminishes the achievement. By prioritizing the taste and sense of humor of the Baylor student community, he inadvertently offends community partners who do not "get" his approach to the multimodal community-based writing project and think that he is making light of a serious issue. Consequently, depending on the community affiliation of the viewer, Sam's video is either a success or a failure.

Sam's video represents a significant misreading of the local community, but this misunderstanding could go both ways. One factor that might have influenced how the community partners view the videos composed by Baylor students is that they had limited contact with the students as they were composing their videos; as a result, they only see stereotypes when they watch the videos, and they do not see the eager students behind the videos who are grappling with new ideas and unfamiliar situations. In fact, this lack of interaction might encourage community partners to base their impressions of the Baylor students themselves on stereotypes (e.g., privileged, out of touch, etc.) as well. Cassie, the "community partner as mentor," notes that increased face-to-face interaction

would likely change how some community partners respond to the videos. She points out, "I just think it's really easy to hide behind email and [critique] without seeing the person who created it … [The community partners] didn't have anything invested in it. They had nothing to lose." Some of the problems related to the contradiction of community can be corrected, but others will take more time and effort to reconcile.

Though the students are not supposed to be composing their videos for multiple primary audiences, the public nature of digital delivery opens them up to criticism from other community partners with different priorities. While writing for multiple audiences makes it harder to ascertain what "the audience" wants, Reiff discusses the benefits that this task can have for writers:

> While the writer must struggle to find a middle ground for all these competing factions, these tensions can help the writer shape the text. Out of the writer's negotiation of these tensions and conflicts emerges a document that is open to multiple angles and considers the various viewpoints of the multiple readers, while perhaps privileging the audience at the top of the power structure. (417)

By carefully considering all of the community partners' perspectives earlier in the process, Sam could have created a humorous video that appealed to a broader public audience and was ultimately more successful in achieving the stated aims of the project.

Motives. The contradictions related to community are a result of the different motives that animate each community group in the activity system. Deans describes "learning vs. contributing to organization" ("Shifting" 461) as the central tension in the motives of a typical service-learning classroom. He cites additional contradictory motives: to "show subject mastery vs. meet agency needs" and to "please teacher vs. serve client" (Deans, "Shifting" 461). These goals derive from different values and

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priorities, creating potential sources of conflict. These motives are further complicated by what it might mean for a student to "serve the client" if the client is primarily concerned with student transformation. As I discuss in Chapter Three, the community partners express different "product-focused" or both "product- and process-focused" goals influenced by their organization's needs and their willingness to enact certain roles.

An important motive that yields contradictory responses is related to the cultural logics that govern each community. Ratcliffe explains, "If a claim is an assertion of a person's thinking, then a cultural logic is a belief system or shared way of reasoning within which a claim may function" (33). The videos can be seen as claims initially expressed within the cultural logic of our classroom—an environment that not only values but incentivizes creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving. In part, this emphasis on creativity stems from the values of the digital writing class itself. John Branscum and Aaron Toscano explain that teachers of multimodal composition ought to "Put explicit value on creativity, and open the door for experimentation" (87). This motive, to be creative within this cultural logic of creativity and experimentation, however, is complicated by the internal tensions within the activity system of a digital writing class writing *for* the community who might not share or understand this value (see figure 5.4).

One of the most crucial points of contradiction about the videos surfaces between the activity systems of the project's sponsors and the "community partner as client." When Phoebe visits the class to give feedback on the students' mid-process drafts, she views the videos within the frame of a cultural logic that stresses creativity. While she offers constructive criticism about the lack of diversity represented in the videos, she is largely supportive of the creative risks that some of the students take. Consequently, she

views the more straightforward, PSA-style videos as good but ultimately missing something. She explains:

> [Becca's video] to me seemed like a well-done, pretty uncontroversial standard "here's a good PSA for [the nonprofit women's organization]." I thought it was good in that way but there were other ones that to me were pushing the envelope a little bit more. Like the dancing one and the one with the girl on drugs and all these different ones. I felt like they pushed the envelope a little bit more, which made them in one way more appealing but to some people less appealing.

The videos we value as project sponsors are the ones that show us something we have not seen before and translate the message about the GED in a new or unusual way. We might value these qualities for any number of reasons: our distaste for sad Public Service Announcements (PSAs), our shared literary background, etc. However, we do not articulate these values until after Kim expresses her concerns that some of the videos depict negative stereotypes and we begin reflecting on the contradictions of the different social motives at work in this multimodal community-based writing project.

Understanding the videos within the context of this cultural logic of risk-taking provides one reason to explain why Phoebe and I might initially fail to see the videos with the same set of concerns as some of the community partners (see figure 5.4). Another reason, quite simply, is because our personal connection to the students blinded us—me, especially—to certain realities like the number of stereotypes that appear in the videos or how the Upworthy-style headlines might turn off a viewer unfamiliar with the genre. Phoebe reflects on these realities in an email to me: "Really good feedback from [Kim]—I'm so glad you talked.   I guess I got so caught up in the students' enthusiasm when we were reviewing that I didn't think about those things either … just goes to show, that's why it is important to talk to the people who are 'on the front lines.'" An

additional reason, which might be hiding behind our sentiment that we are blinded by the students' enthusiasm, is that we might be blinded to issues of race and class because we are both middle-class, White women working at Baylor. Phoebe demonstrates a greater sensitivity to issues of diversity than I do during the mid-process review of the students' videos, but we both fail to see the stereotypes until Kim makes them visible for us. After listening to Kim share her perspective, we hold ourselves accountable to her feedback. We do our best to hear what we cannot see.
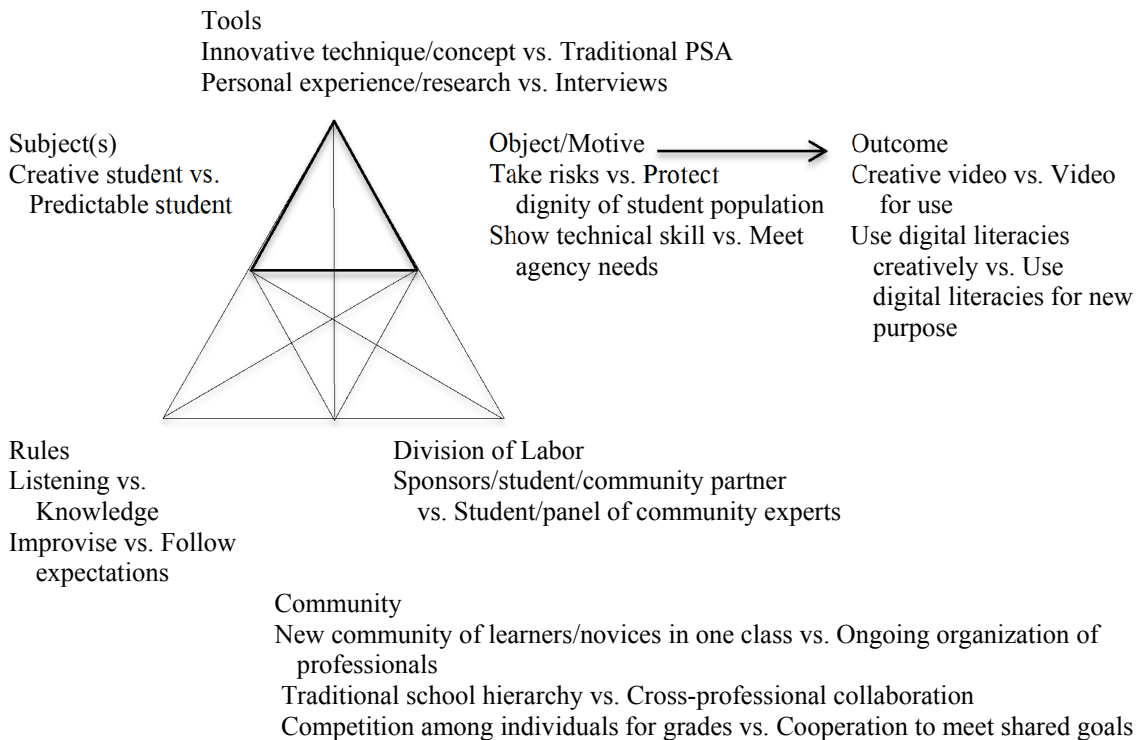
Tools
Innovative technique/concept vs. Traditional PSA
Personal experience/research vs. Interviews

Subject(s)
Creative student vs.
  Predictable student

Object/Motive   → Outcome
Take risks vs. Protect   Creative video vs. Video
  dignity of student population   for use
Show technical skill vs. Meet   Use digital literacies
  agency needs   creatively vs. Use
    digital literacies for new
    purpose

Rules
Listening vs.
  Knowledge
Improvise vs. Follow
  expectations

Division of Labor
Sponsors/student/community partner
  vs. Student/panel of community experts

Community
New community of learners/novices in one class vs. Ongoing organization of
  professionals
Traditional school hierarchy vs. Cross-professional collaboration
Competition among individuals for grades vs. Cooperation to meet shared goals

Figure 5.4. Contradictions in the multimodal community-based writing activity system from the *student* point of view (adapted from Deans, "Shifting").

Phoebe repeats how valuable Kim's feedback is during our reflective interview:

> I thought that feedback that you got from [Kim] was really enlightening about reinforcing stereotypes, you know, because I hadn't thought of that. As much as I deal with this all the time, when I looked at the videos—part of it I was caught up in the kids' enthusiasm, I think. But, you know,

(pause) I hadn't really thought about that either, and so that was really valuable.

Once these problems surface we experience what "ruptura." We pause. We take time to think about the assumptions we have made and how we have failed to see what should have been obvious. Ultimately, this break in our thinking will lead to a transformed future multimodal community-based writing project, but at this point we just listen.

A factor that might influence the contradictions related to motive is that people "on the front lines" like Kim are operating within a different racial- and class-sensitive cultural logic. The community partners—especially the community partners who view their roles as clients—value accuracy over creativity. They also value protecting the dignity of the people they work with by avoiding narrow stereotypes like "the addict" or "the single mother." This is not to say that the project sponsors and the students do not also value these things, but this cultural logic is clearly subordinated to other concerns when students begin working on their videos. While I do not mean to overlook flaws in thinking because the students—and we—are overly enthusiastic about creativity, we can get a better sense of the students' motivations when we examine the cultural logic that Phoebe and I promote through our feedback on their videos.

Division of labor. The contradiction that surfaces at the point of the division of labor refers primarily to expectations related to student learning. The tacit agreement is that the community partners will give students content knowledge about the GED and the population of test-takers with whom they work during interviews with the students. While the students also conduct their own research through the WPTP and secondary

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sources to present "micro-presentations"[13] to the class, the most useful information comes from their interviews with community experts. The project's sponsors are mostly responsible for providing rhetorical feedback on their video drafts, and, obviously, I provide instruction related to the course and project objectives stated in Chapter One. So far, so good. The contradiction occurs when Phoebe and I assume that these diverse expert opinions will not ultimately complicate the overall effectiveness of the videos.

When each community partner lends her expertise as it relates to her specific population, we end up dividing the access to generalizable knowledge when we divide the labor. Instead of partitioning knowledge about the community into discrete silos, we could address the contradiction of the division of labor in the multimodal community-based writing project by sharing the responsibility of content knowledge across a panel of community experts. During my interviews with community partners, both Kim and Cassie propose the idea of holding panels of community experts to help students understand the context of the GED and receive early feedback on their video drafts. Though Phoebe and I are reluctant to make more demands on the community partners' time, we recognize that re-dividing the labor would help us avoid some of the issues in the videos related to context and audience. Phoebe reflects:

> Let's say there were maybe three different days when you were reviewing the little short videos and so you had fewer each day that you were looking at and maybe even different people on the panel each day. But I think the community people would learn from each other too, from watching the videos and [Peter] hearing [Kim's] comments and [Diane] hearing [Mary's] comments. I think the community people would learn the different interests and areas of concern … I think that would be a benefit to the community people as well.

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[13] See Appendix H.

This idea would be a substantial time commitment for the community partners, which is one of the reasons that Phoebe and I did not initially pursue the idea of holding a panel—much less multiple panels. However, the community partners themselves seem willing to divide the labor differently in order to increase the chances of promoting more comprehensive student growth and ending up with more accurate final products. And they would likely learn something valuable by listening to the perspectives of other community partners, too.

Tools. In Engeström's conception of the activity system, tools refer to the material and immaterial mediating agents that facilitate the process of completing an action. A contradiction that surfaces between the students and the community partners is related to the issue of identifying stereotypes in the videos. Kim believes that students are relying on stereotypes about the people who take the GED because she views the primary tool to be the knowledge of community experts. Essentially, students will compose high quality final products through the mediating agent of the accurate information the community partners provide. When Kim views these videos and sees a stereotype, like the single mother or the drug addict, she assumes that students must be relying on stereotypes to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. What seems to be the case, however, is that students might be using other tools to compose their videos. For example, Meghan draws parallels between her task to compose a video about the GED and her knowledge of friends who have gotten pregnant and have had to drop out of high school to create her video game animation about supermoms. In this case, the tool she uses is not the community expert interview but her own personal experiences. Another example would be Jacob's video. He composes his video "Drugs to Diploma" because his community

expert, Peter, believes that drug abuse is "a stereotype based in reality." Jacob creates a controversial video, but he does so because he is relying on a different tool (i.e., a different community expert interview) who offers a perspective with which Kim disagrees. Katie's video is yet another example. She uses one or two "mug shot" photos that show women as they are getting booked, which could be seen as a damaging stereotype of the GED test-taker; however, she is using the tool of the direct quotations from the women who participate in this program. While some of the students might indeed compose videos that incorporate stereotypes from common misconceptions about the people who take the GED, it is also true that some students incorporate these tropes because they use different tools to achieve their goals. Once the specific context is stripped away and the videos appear on the #WeAreWaco YouTube channel, it is difficult to identify whether or not students are relying on stereotypes or using other tools.

Rules. The rules in an activity system typically refer to the expected standards of behavior. In this case, "rules" refer to the most valuable quality a student can bring to a community-based writing project. All stakeholders are given eight different qualities to rank in order of importance. The contradictions that emerge from this one question are striking (see table 5.1). What is so interesting about this finding is not just that the stakeholders' opinions of the most important qualities differs but that everyone feels so strongly about the relevance of "knowledge" in a multimodal community-based writing project. Out of six individuals, five people either rank "knowledge" as the very most important or the very least important quality. "Knowledge," in this case, refers to content knowledge derived from research or personal experience.

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Table 5.1

Side-by-Side Comparison of the Most Valuable Quality that a Student Can Bring to a
Multimodal Community-based Writing Project

Project Role	Most important quality	Least important quality
Community Partner as "Client"	Knowledge	Relevant skills
Community Partner as "Mentor"	Openness	Knowledge
Community Partner as "Guide"	Openness	Knowledge
Student as "Novice"	Patience	Knowledge
Student as "Risk-taker"	Relevant skills	Patience
Community Member as "Sponsor"	Listening	Knowledge

"Relevant skills" and "patience" are equally divisive. Based on the individuals surveyed

during this study, there is a split between the value of social skills like "listening,"

"openness," and "patience" and pragmatic skills like "relevant skills" and "knowledge."

These findings suggest that when it comes to the most important quality that a student

can bring to one of these projects, it would seem there are no rules or rather that everyone

operates under their own unarticulated set of rules. However, this finding has

consequences since rules govern our behavior and provide structure for our social

interactions. The variance in opinion along this point reveals that community partners are

divided in what they want from students, which makes it difficult for students to know

how to prepare for interacting with community partners. This lack of consensus relates to

the diversity of assessments of the final outcome of these videos and further demonstrates

why it is difficult to evaluate the ultimate success of this project.

The Problem of Digital Delivery

Delivery, the fifth canon of classical rhetoric, has experienced a renaissance as a

result of digital technologies (Adsanatham, Garrett, and Matzke; Ridolfo and DeVoss;

DeVoss and Porter; Yancey, "Delivering"; Selfe, "The Movement"); however, the ease and ubiquity of digital delivery prompts questions about what ought to be shared and why. Traditional delivery initially referred to the act of public speaking using the "only available technology of delivery" or "the body" (Yancey, "Delivering" 9). In "Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric," James E. Porter updates the classical category of delivery to account for the affordances of digital media. He explains that the options available for circulating digital texts are vast and far-reaching. A digital text can start off being published in one location, but if a rhetor wants to accelerate the sharing process she can ask herself "to what extent do I want that document to circulate, to be recycled, reused, and reshipped?" (Porter 214). Two of the ways that Porter talks about increasing the circulation of a digital video on YouTube are (1) by tagging the video with metadata that will help a user find the video using key search terms and (2) by publishing the video under a Creative Commons license with Attribution or ShareAlike privileges to allow other users to share or remix your work (214). Just because you can do something, though, does not necessarily mean that you should. In this section, I discuss the affordances of participatory culture and analyze the final contradiction that emerges between activity systems in the multimodal community-based writing project: the outcome, and ultimately "what now?"

Affordances of participatory culture. Participatory culture made possible by digital composing environments has certain potential and limitations. On one hand, participatory culture provides students with a platform and an audience for their videos. The notion that students can compose for real audiences and share their work online is seductive for teachers who merge multimodal and community-based writing pedagogies.

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Even so, it is important to consider if the benefits of sharing outweigh the potential for

harm. Jenkins et al. describe the "relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic

engagement" (5) of participatory culture as though these are obvious benefits. However,

since there is no one community partner perspective, our challenge as teachers is to

evaluate the risk of public sharing when stakeholders have very different opinions about a

particular video's success.

One limitation is related to how easy it is for the intended audience to actually

find a video relevant to their needs. Publishing the videos to YouTube makes them public

in one sense. They can be viewed and linked to and shared and reblogged. However, the

likelihood that these videos will be stumbled upon by someone who might actually

benefit from the information is not great. There is simply too much other content to wade

through. In fact, scholars conducting research in Critical Internet studies use this point to

question how "participatory" participatory culture really is. Christian Fuchs, for example,

argues that, though YouTube theoretically has the potential to be a democratic space, the

video content produced by "the little guy" can hardly compete in YouTube's "attention

economy" ("Class and Exploitation" 214). Fuchs observes that entertainment is what

people seek on YouTube (e.g., Justin Bieber's music video "Baby" has over 607 million

views in 2011). Consequently, video content produced for other purposes can hardly

touch this number of views[14] ("Class and Exploitation" 214). Given this reality, it is

difficult to imagine that students can really have influence or "participate" in this space or

that the videos composed by students will garner a substantial number of views.

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[14] It is worth noting that terrorist propaganda from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is one
of the fastest growing areas of digital video production despite YouTube's efforts to ban violent content.

That said, there are still ways that a composer can increase web traffic to the videos she really wants to share. YouTube, for example, released "The YouTube Creator Playbook" in 2011 to show content providers how to build a more dedicated audience following on their individual YouTube channels. Topics include building brand awareness, hooking viewers through storytelling, adding call-to-action overlays, using metadata, and releasing content at strategic times. Understanding that video production is an integral part of digital communication for a variety of purposes, YouTube also tailors their advice for specific applications such as education, brand marketing, and nonprofits. The Playbook for Good takes these basic principles and uses them in the service of the nonprofits and other initiatives for the public good. The March 2013 playbook, which I distribute to the class, is a polished PDF document replete with concrete examples and suggestions for increasing traffic to a YouTube channel.

As a class, we devise a strategy for optimizing the #WeAreWaco (see Appendix I) and brainstorm hashtags to kick off a focused social media campaign using our personal Twitter and Facebook accounts. The students have trouble agreeing on a hashtag (e.g., Meghan insists we should use something "catchy" like #GEDswag or #GEDitchin and other students feel these suggestions cheapen the GED), they ultimately decide to use #WeAreWaco even though it seems that this hashtag has been previously used by another Waco group or organization. A second method for increasing visibility is to showcase the videos in a more specific context, such as local websites devoted to community resources. Since Phoebe has direct access to one of these websites, we feel confident that at least one or two of the videos will have a life beyond the avalanche of content available on YouTube. We just need to get the stakeholders to agree on a video. Since

Phoebe and I design the project with digital delivery as the goal, we do not at this point

consider whether the videos ought to be public. This outcome is already a foregone

conclusion.

Outcome. The outcome is the teleological end of the goal-directed activity

system. The goal motivates the subject to use mediating tools to achieve her motive, but

the outcome is the realization of the goal. Since each of the stakeholders involved in the

multimodal community-based writing project start with a slightly different goal (i.e.,

community partners primarily want to facilitate student growth or receive a usable final

product while students want to take risks or just survive the class), they also assess this

final outcome differently. The individual goals of the stakeholders ultimately affect the

perceived success of the project and determine whether or not the videos will be

circulated to a wider public audience through digital media. The students are relatively

excited about the prospect of having their work shared with a larger audience. Becca, for

example, still envisions playing her video for the nonprofit women's organization before

a church service. And Phoebe and I at least initially try to choose a video that enough

people like to publish on the local community website, but none of the videos are without

technical issues. Even the best ones rush through slides with important information or

include distracting typos. However, Phoebe thinks that if we frame the video as "as look

at this cool thing Baylor freshman did," the video will be better received by the wider

public. She explains that "there's a certain charm that goes along with them being

freshman that maybe is a good trade-off for the professionalism." Cassie is pleased that

the project was valuable for the students, but she sees untapped potential in creating

videos that are specifically branded so that the "client" is clear and we can avoid

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miscommunication among community partners. Kim's goals are not met because, at best, she does not see any videos that her organization would want to use and, at worst, she finds some of the videos offensive. She does not think they need to be pulled from the YouTube channel, but she does not think they should be circulated on any additional websites. And Peter never really cares about the quality of the videos because he is mostly concerned that students see Waco differently as a result of this project; however, he thinks that some of the most controversial videos could potentially impact a student who might be thinking about dropping out so they should stay public. We listen to these different perspectives, but we reach a standstill. We end up doing nothing. Ultimately, the outcome for the GED Community Video Project is that the videos stay publically available on the YouTube channel, but even the most popular videos do not break a hundred views. The activity systems of these three stakeholders contradict at a number of key points that affect the overall success of the videos and prevent them from having much of a life online even though they are tagged with metadata and are freely available under Creative Commons licenses.

Conclusion: A Defense of Multimodal Community-based Writing

The vantage point from the perspective of the project's sponsors allows Phoebe and me to see the complexity of the project that we have facilitated. From this distance, we can see the flaws in the design and it is little wonder that we can only say "This project was [un]successful." In our attempt to obtain a comprehensive perspective on the process of preparing for, taking, or getting a job with the GED, we complicate the issue by inviting the perspectives of multiple community partners with competing goals and definitions of success. We also inadvertently promote a cultural logic of creativity and

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risk-taking that, while extremely productive for a digital writing class, results in tension when we place these values next to the values of the community organizations we aim to serve. Furthermore, the project does not foreground research on race and class, so these issues remain peripheral to Phoebe and I. In so doing, we take responsibility for setting some students up to "fail" when it comes to pleasing their community partners.

Service-learning pedagogy is not without its critics. Charges abound that community-based writing projects primarily benefit university students, that they reinscribe asymmetrical power relations, that they reinforce a "charity" model of service, that they neglect to raise a student's consciousness, that they turn "activism" into a dirty word in the service-activism binary, that they do not touch the real issues that perpetuate systemic inequalities, that they neglect too many important perspectives, that they rush to conclusions about the communities they aim to serve, that they drain community members' limited resources, that they ultimately exist to make teachers feel less guilty about our middle-class lives. And yet. And yet each of the community partners involved in this case study who takes the questionnaire say something to the effect of the "idea is a good one" and "projects like this are great." These final assessments belie the sense that projects like this might not be worth doing.

Following Paula Mathieu, I would argue that we persist in participating in community-based writing because we are ever hopeful. Mathieu proposes that hope is not naïve wishing: "To hope … is to look critically at one's present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated" (19). This orientation towards revision—re-vision, re-seeing, and trying again—is what drives us onward in community-based writing projects. We know that there is potential in crossing

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university-community lines and attempting to understand more about the other. Community-based writing is one motivation for taking the first step towards understanding perspectives with which we are unfamiliar. We want to hear from each other because we sense that there is something that we can learn from listening to unheard voices. And I believe this desire to understand goes both ways. Though we could try to decide which stakeholder's values are prioritized in these interactions, I would argue that they all matter equally.[15] Derrick Bell expresses a similar sentiment in "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory?" He writes, "Critical race theorists strive for a more specific, more egalitarian, state of affairs. We seek to empower and include traditionally excluded views and see all-inclusiveness as the ideal because of our belief in collective wisdom" (Bell, "Who's" 901). In order to benefit from the wisdom of the collective, we first need to demonstrate a willingness to listen and to learn from each other. The GED Community Video Project might be too complex to ever say that it was an unequivocal success, but we did learn enough from each other that we are willing to try again. And that is a manifestation of hope.

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[15] When it comes to the formal assessment of student work, I would like to see the concerns from the cultural logics of each stakeholder weighted evenly. Categories could include (1) Creativity, Flexibility, and Problem-solving, (2) Sensitivity to Community Issues, and (3) Rhetorical Effectiveness.

CHAPTER SIX

Implications of Findings and Future Areas of Research

> A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air gets it nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick.
>
> —Anna Tsing, *Friction*

> For sight gets us only so far; we also have to listen to other people, not so that they will do the work for us, but, as Morrison reminds us in *Beloved*, so that *we* and *they* may lay *our* stories alongside one another's.
>
> —Krista Ratcliffe, *Rhetorical Listening*

When we pursue the unheard or underrepresented voices in a multimodal community-based writing project, we learn that each stakeholder has unique assumptions about their goals, their roles, their measures of assessment, and their own opinions about what we should do next. These points of divergence between the activity systems of community partners, students, and project sponsors represent what Anna Tsing calls "friction," or "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (4). Friction has a negative valence, but there is productive potential in these spaces. As Tsing notes in the epigraph, without friction, a stick is just a stick. Friction and contradiction give us a starting place for dialogue and inquiry that leads to negotiated understanding.

One of the challenges in writing up the results of an ethnographically-oriented case study is that the convention of writing a conclusion threatens the polyvocality of the perspectives presented in the earlier chapters. As a feminist teacher, I resist taking back authority from those who have co-created this knowledge with me. Tracy Hamler

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Carrick, Margaret Himley, and Tobi Jacobi speak to a similar tension between ethnography and community work in "Ruptura: Acknowledging the Lost Subjects of the Service Learning Story." They are worth quoting at length:

> We have to remain alert to the power asymmetries and different discursive and material realities of the people involved in community-based writing projects. We risk confusing our ethical and political desires for reciprocal and mutually beneficial relations with the much messier realities that those relations often (re)enact. We risk masking rather than unmasking power dynamics. We risk mis-recognizing our own desires and needs. If we move too quickly toward discursive constructions such as the reciprocity narrative, which then suture over these difficulties, we risk *fixing* complexities rather than *acknowledging* them as central to and part of learning. (301)

The contradictions that emerge from an activity analysis of the community partners, students, and project sponsors are valuable because they each look at the project through the different lenses of their perspectives. These perspectives were sometimes difficult to hear because they expose blind spots that I still have. Furthermore, these perspectives are difficult to reconcile; yet, even if I could, I am not certain that I would want to smooth over these moments of contradiction and turn them into a cohesive narrative. I admire Carrick, Himley, and Jacobi's use of the metaphor of "suturing" because it speaks to the rawness of an open wound. As much as I want healing and understanding between the university and the community and among different races and classes and genders, I do not want to "suture over these difficulties" with rough stitches, forcing a union between two disparate pieces. I want the borders—the contradictions and complications—to exist because I am afraid of what we will fail to see when we think the wound is healed.

By practicing rhetorical listening across the different stakeholder perspectives, Phoebe and I hear the discordant notes and gain increased sensitivity towards each of the stakeholders' perspectives. We now see just how diverse the community partners are and

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that it is misleading to think that we can identify "the" community partner perspective and assess the project's success. We also see that some students take risks in some areas and fail to take risks in others. And we see that the activity system of a multimodal community-based writing classroom is even more complex than Deans' conception of the service-learning classroom because digital writing encourages cultural logics that are sometimes at odds with the community partners' needs. To return to the elephant in the dark metaphor: when someone, like the project's sponsors, can take a step back and turn on the light, we find that we have a clearer picture of our elephant. These findings have implications for digital delivery and the complexity of composing for multiple audiences in digital contexts. This study also has implications for how we ought to structure future multimodal community-based writing projects that attempt to write *for* the community. In this last chapter, I discuss the implications of my findings for each key stakeholder involved in the multimodal community-based writing project. I conclude with a defense of multimodal community-based writing as a method for gathering diverse community perspectives and make recommendations for teachers looking to merge multimodal and community-based writing pedagogies.

The Community Partners' Perspectives

Rhetorically listening to the community partners' perspectives on their experiences participating in this project reveals that, even when the goals of a community-based writing project are discussed at an initial planning meeting, the way that the community partners interpret various elements will vary based on their personal interests, time, and goals. Some community partners naturally gravitate toward roles as mentors or guides and prioritize the learning process and/or moral development of the

students. Other community partners—perhaps those working with a stretched staff and less time—prioritize the final products that the students will create for them. For these community partners, student growth is a potential byproduct of the first goal since students will not be able to compose a rhetorically effective piece if they do not also develop audience sensitivity. These unspoken assumptions are further revealed through the community partners' ranking of the most important qualities that a student can bring to a community-based writing project. While some community partners expect the students that they work with will be a blank slate and will gain knowledge through the experience of service learning, others expect that they will be knowledgeable before they begin their work writing *for* the community. Both of these factors influence the community partners' expectations and structure how they will eventually evaluate the success of the project and the partnership. Ultimately, the community partners involved in this study feel that the project benefitted the Baylor students the most. The community partners who set out to act as a mentor or guide were more optimistic about the project's success, but even they have no intention of using any of the videos since they are not branded for a particular "customer."

Though these community partner perspectives seem at odds, rhetorical listening provides a way for the feminist teacher to hear these different experiences of the same project from a posture of openness. The goal in listening is not to privilege one contradiction over another or to reconcile these contradictions but to allow them to be heard, to grate against each other, to coexist. In so doing, we reduce our tendency to categorize people, things, and experiences neatly and create space for "*a*, not *the*," community partner perspective (Ratcliffe 99). Ratcliffe refers to this type of listening as

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"listening metonymically" or not assuming that this person is representative of an entire group so much as associated with the group (78). Thinking of listening in this way eliminates limited ways of thinking about the diversity of community partner perspectives.

These findings have implications for how teachers and/or project sponsors should structure the design of a multimodal community-based writing project. During the initial planning meeting, project sponsors ought to complete pre-project surveys in which they identify and articulate some of the unspoken elements related to their goals, perception of roles, unofficial "rules" or the qualities that they value in a student partner, and their willingness to take on the role of mentor, if necessary. Community partners could also indicate the time commitment they are willing to make and express their interest in returning to participate on a panel of community experts and give feedback at intervals on student videos to ensure that any problems with the videos are caught early in the process. Community partners and students alike would also benefit from drawing up a formal Community Partnership Charter in which community partners and students clearly articulate their goals, external time commitments, and evaluation criteria for success.[1]

The Students' Perspectives

Rhetorically listening to the students' perspectives reveal that they are negotiating a complex web of new experiences—and the challenges of a digital writing classroom are just one source of their anxiety. Some students are better equipped to handle these changes and more willing to take risks than others. By encouraging an environment of creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving, students of all levels of comfort with

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[1] [1] See the Team Charter that Joanna Wolfe recommends in *Team Writing: A Guide to Working in Groups* (see pp. 27-39).

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technology can take steps toward greater facility with multimodal composing tools and feel comfortable composing videos *for* the community. One of the ways to encourage experimentation and play is to create a separate grading category that rewards these qualities. By incentivizing creativity and giving students an opportunity to make the case for their own application of these qualities through the final "Choose Your Own Adventure" reflection, students focus less on perfectionism and more on the capabilities of the media and affordances of the modal elements they select.

Since the digital writing class frontloads technical instruction, students seem to focus their energy on the technical elements of the multimodal community-based writing project. While this aspect of the digital writing course is important, the ultimate goal extends beyond mere proficiency with digital tools. Working with the community partner and understanding their expectations and needs is a crucial element in developing a rhetorically effective final product. To that end, it is equally important for students to be aware of the variable values and expectations that different community partners might have. Though it might not be appropriate or necessary for a community partner to disclose details about their willingness to play the part of "mentor," students would likely benefit from knowing that a community partner expects them to enter into the partnership with an emphasis on knowledge or openness. Students might also be more aware during their own learning experiences if they self-identify and reflect on the kind of qualities that they either feel are important or want to develop in a multimodal community-based project.

Students also need to be aware of issues related to social class and the assumptions that they may or may not have about people in the community. Students

should be asked about their prior experiences with people who are different from them to assess what kinds of additional assignments (e.g., readings, small research projects, etc.) might help them gain sensitivity towards issues of difference and start conversation about complex issues. Some Baylor students are tactful and better equipped to deal with issues of class-based difference while some students might already be navigating an experience similar to hooks' in which she has to leave certain parts of her identity behind. Instead of assuming students will elide the realities of their experiences, a classroom informed by a pedagogy of rhetorical listening can create space for these different perspectives to be articulated and coexist.[2] Students should also be aware of their roles stepping into the community: instead of seeing themselves as "solvers of community problems," they should view their primary role as "listeners of community needs." This orientation towards their work with the community will likely reduce students' tendencies to view their roles as "heroes" or "saviors."

In order to prepare students to write *for* the community, students benefit from stepping out into the local community and challenging their assumptions about people who might differ from them. While the Waco Public Transit Project is one way of initiating this process, students would also benefit from participating in more focused activities related to the population for which they will actually be composing. The WPTP was definitely a "crash course in Waco," but the connection between the project and the immersive experience could be tighter. Also, the immersive experience could be more carefully crafted so as to avoid unintentionally offending any members of the community.

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[2] Ira Shor discusses interesting strategies for getting students to talk about complex issues in "Why Teach about Social Class?"

Lastly, students need more experience composing for multiple audiences. Teachers might consider scaffolding focused assignments on composing audio or video texts for specific groups in the class or on campus, or students might adopt roles or perspectives of different people in the local community based on their research and enact responses from these different perspectives. The goal, ultimately, is for students to develop a greater awareness of audience before the stakes are potentially more threatening. As Mary Jo Reiff points out, if students can compose documents or videos that are persuasive to a greater number of people, then they are developing skills that will assist them in this community-based writing project that can be transferred to future writing contexts.

<center>*The Project Sponsors' Perspectives*</center>

While the approach to interpretive invention and dialogue across difference has enormous power for cross-cultural dialogue, rhetorical listening is a crucial strategy for understanding stakeholder perspectives in empirical research. At different points in the semester, Phoebe and I work through Ratcliffe's four moves to listen *with* intent (Ratcliffe 28):

1. We understand ourselves and others, or "stand under" someone else's perspective in an attempt to hear "what we cannot see" (Ratcliffe 28-29).

2. We are held accountable by the community partners when we lose sight of the big picture, and we hold others accountable by ensuring that all perspectives are heard (Ratcliffe 31).

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3. We identify points of identification in both what we share and do not share with others so that we can critically reflect back on our selves and re-assess what we know with less certainty (Ratcliffe 32).

4. We listen for the cultural logics that surround the claims that other people make and listen to the cultural logics within which we make claims ourselves (Ratcliffe 33).

We practice listening according to Phoebe's definition, too. We ask questions that lead us towards greater understanding in the hope that we get a second chance to improve.

Phoebe and I learn a great deal through this process of designing a multimodal community-based writing project. After I share Kim's feedback with her, Phoebe writes me an email and reflects:

> I wish there were some way we could have captured this kind of feedback for the students. Is there any chance we could do this exact project again another time? I feel like this year was the "prototype" and with it under our belts we could make it really terrific with a couple more tries. To me, this kind of work (trying, revising—with the help of the community) is at the core of whatever "informed engagement" is going to be.

This perspective towards "trying, revising—with the help of the community" is an approach to conduct that crosses boundaries related to perspective. Combining rhetorical listening with activity theory helps us "[hear] what we cannot see" across the contradictions of diverse perspectives and backgrounds. This practice has important implications for future multimodal community-based writing projects.

The most salient points that emerge from this activity analysis of the multimodal community-based writing project are that everyone involved in the project makes assumptions about what is expected of them, about what constitutes an "effective" video, about which factors shape a "successful" project or partnership, about what personal

qualities matter, about which cultural logics ought to be promoted, and about what we can learn from our "failures." As the designer of this project, I can see points at which I could have intervened or provided structure to more effectively meet the project's stated goals of composing videos *for* the community and helping Baylor students learn more about their new city. I list them briefly below as recommendations, reminders both for myself and for other teachers:

Brand Videos for Specific Community Partner "Customers"

Instead of going for breadth in their videos, future multimodal community-based writing projects should focus on depth and students should compose videos branded for one community partner "customer." This limited scope will enable students to conduct ample research into one aspect of an issue and create videos that directly respond to specific needs. The goal here is not to reduce the contradictions and complications but to increase the chances that the community partners will end up with a usable product.

Articulate Assumptions and Clearly Define Roles, Values, and Goals

During the initial planning meeting, the three primary community partner role types of "client," "mentor," and "guide" should be discussed. We should also discuss the most important qualities that a student can bring to a community-based writing project and rhetorically listen to each other's perspectives. These roles and values should foreground the project and provide us with points of identification and disidentification (Ratcliffe 48-67). It would be useful to model activity theory for community partners and students using visuals so that they can see the different goals that motivate their individual activity systems. Students could also conduct their own activity analyses and

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interview community partners to determine their individual goals, tools, rules, division of labor, communities, and desired outcomes.

Design Ongoing Methods of "Seeing" the Community

During the initial planning meeting, we should brainstorm the best methods that students can use to gain sensitivity to the issues in the community. While some of these methods might be immersive experiences like the WPTP, others might be research-focused or more sustained volunteer opportunities with local community organizations.

Discuss Cultural Logics of a Digital Writing Classroom

Community partners should be informed prior to the initial planning meeting that the digital writing classroom values creativity, flexibility, and problem-solving. This is not to say that this cultural logic ought to subsume the cultural logic within which the community partner works, but they need to be aware that students will be taking risks. Since students' "failure" as a result of risk-taking will affect the community partner, we need to make sure that we understand, and stand under, the same expectations for the multimodal community-based writing project. Students should also be encouraged to take risks and understand when they are addressed as an audience through these videos—even or especially when it might make them uncomfortable.

Invite Community Partners to Participate on Panel and Give Feedback

Community partners should also be informed prior to the initial planning meeting what the levels of commitment of participating in a multimodal community-based writing project could be. They should be invited to participate on community expert panels and give feedback at regular intervals. Even if the students are only composing videos for one

"client," multiple community partners from different sectors should be invited so that we enact a logic of accountability and continue to grapple with different perspectives (Ratcliffe 31-32).

Conduct Focus Group with All Relevant Stakeholders

This project would be vastly improved by including the perspectives of the GED test-takers themselves. Community partners should be consulted to recommend people who might interested in participating in a focus group interview.

Incorporate Strategies of Rhetorical Listening

Throughout the course, students will practice rhetorical listening. The due date for the final project should be well in advance of the last day of class so that students have time and opportunity to reflect on different responses to their videos. By creating space for discordant notes, friction, and contradictions, we can demonstrate the productive potential of actually hearing each other. Students might also conduct activity analyses of some of these different responses to see contradictions as an opportunity for inquiry. By implementing these strategies, we can expand our empathy, our sensitivity, and our ability to communicate across different perspectives.

Evaluate Risks of Public Sharing

Ultimately, we must also create an environment in which public sharing is not the default *telos* of a multimodal assignment. Risks should be evaluated, and all stakeholders should be consulted before accelerating the process of digital delivery.

Looking Forward: Future Areas of Research

Ultimately, more research is needed to understand a community partner perspective in multimodal community-based writing projects. We need to listen to more voices and conduct more empirical studies to understand how we can facilitate projects that benefit all stakeholders. Additionally, a glaring omission from this dissertation, and one that I wish I could have avoided, is the missing perspective of the GED test-takers themselves. In order to know how effective any of these videos might be, we obviously need their perspective. Future studies might conduct focus group interviews with people at the nonprofit women's organization or the technical college's GED testing center to see what their needs are, where they would look for these kinds of resources online, and how effective the videos might be in persuading others to pursue the GED. In soliciting their feedback, we would gain an even more detailed understanding of the complexities of composing *for* communities.

Additional areas of research might focus on which specific metrics denote success in digitally delivered projects (e.g., views, shares, etc.), what "reciprocity" looks like in service-learning interactions online, what the pedagogical applications of activity theory could be, and how this study expands what we know about measures of assessment. Lastly, I would be interested to conduct a longitudinal study in which the same first-year students are re-interviewed during their senior year to assess their community involvement and their impressions of the videos years later. When we pursue these lines of inquiry with the open stance required by rhetorical listening, we can get closer to seeing the productive capacity of contradictions, complications, and competing definitions of success.

APPENDICES

FAS 1302 Essay IV: Merging Digital and Civic Literacies

Digital writing is sometimes criticized as nothing more than an exercise in "navel-gazing."

> to contemplate one's navel: to engage in (freq. profitless) meditation or contemplation; to spend time complacently considering oneself or one's own interests at the expense of a wider view (*OED*).

In order to make digital literacy matter in a greater sense, we need to move beyond the self-expression of micro/blogging and the mostly superficial "connections" forged through Facebook. Expressing ourselves and connecting with likeminded individuals is most useful as a social tool when we are able to accomplish something as a result of these connections. People all over the world are already finding ways to merge their digital literacies with civic literacies in order to enact change; as a result, we are seeing the vast potential of Web 2.0 technologies like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and YouTube as they pertain to situations in the real world societies in which we live and work.

For this project, you will:

(1) prepare, and participate in, a group presentation on one of the topics on this prompt. Using sources provided to you by Mrs. Williams and your own research from reliable sources, your group must provide the cultural and political context for the problem, identify and define any important key terms, provide specific examples of how digital literacy is being used to address this civic problem, determine the potential outcomes of continuing to use the technology as a solution, and come up with at least three questions that will generate class discussion.

Your audience is our class; try to approach the topic in a way that will spark your peers' interest in this issue. You must also create a visual aid (handout, Powerpoint presentation, etc.) that will utilize the rhetorical appeals (*ethos, logos,* and *pathos)* and the features of visual rhetoric that we have discussed in class. Your visual aid should include a Works Cited section that lists any sources from which you have drawn information (paraphrased or quoted). Your presentation must be 8-10 minutes long, and each group member must make a clear contribution to the project; and

(2) write a 3-4 page essay on one of the topics (can be the same topic as your presentation) in which you answer the following question: "Is this digital

literacy effectively merging with civic literacy in its attempt to solve a specific social problem? If not, what would need to change to improve the situation?"

Your essay should begin with an engaging introduction that sets up the context for the issue; your thesis should clearly respond to the question and appear at the end of your introduction. You should use specific evidence from *at least two reliable sources* to construct your argument, taking care to avoid logical fallacies.

Consider the following questions as you craft your response*: Who does this problem affect? When, where, and why do some people perceive this as a problem? What are the limitations, if any, of using digital literacy to solve civic problems?* Additionally, you must demonstrate an awareness of any potential counterarguments and refute these claims using specific and logical evidence.

Your conclusion should re-emphasize the significance of the issue and reflect upon the value of utilizing digital literacy in the service of civic issues. Follow MLA formatting for all citations and include a Works Cited page.

Topics
(N.B. the keywords are merely suggestions to help you if you need ideas for filtering the information; I welcome alternative approaches to these topics. Also, if you have a suggestion for a topic, please let me know ASAP):

(1) Twitter and Citizen Journalism (keywords: Bin Laden; Arab Spring; occupy Wall Street; England Riots; Library of Congress)

(2) YouTube and Citizen Journalism (keywords: Iran; Neda; Oscar Grant; Japan earthquake)

(3) Online Communities Overcoming Censorship in China (keywords: Sina Weibo; Twitter; democracy)

(4) Pinterest and Etsy as Empowering Sites for Women? (keywords: homemaking; entrepreneurship; feminism)

(5) The "Trevor Project" and Suicide Prevention (keywords: "It Gets Better"; Tumblr)

(6) Internet Crowdfunding and Microlending (keywords: Kiva; Third World; disaster)

(7) Smart Phones and Microvolunteerism (keywords: crowdsourcing; Sparked)

In addition to the articles posted on Bb, you should find additional sources that will help you make your argument for both parts of this project. Reliable sources may come from online versions of newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The Wall Street Journal,*

popular magazines like *Time, The New Yorker,* or *Newsweek,* or scholarly journal articles found through a database in Baylor's Electronic Resources.

To access "Electronic Resources"
- Go to Baylor's Library homepage: http://www.baylor.edu/lib/
- Under "Books, Articles, & More," click on "Electronic Resources."
- Click on "A" to filter the list of databases; while subject-specific databases might be worth checking out, *Academic Search Complete* is always a good place to start your research.
- Scroll down to *Academic Search Complete (Online)* and click on it.
- Once you are there, use general search terms in each search field like "Twitter" and "citizen journalism." Unlike Google, using very specific search terms might filter out good articles because the article is not categorized under the same terms (i.e., "social network" instead of "social media"). Try synonyms of your search terms, too (i.e., "child" instead of "kid").
- Look for full-text articles; if the article is not available, click on the "BU InfoLinks" button for more options.
- If you have any questions, you can IM a librarian from Baylor's Library homepage or you can email Mrs. Williams.

The group presentation will comprise 40% of your total grade for this project, while your essay will comprise the remaining 60%.

APPENDIX B

Analyzing the Impact of Digital Literacies on Issues of Civic Concern:
Community Partner Questionnaire
Researcher: Danielle M. Williams

Name:_____

Email:_____

Part I: Background Information

1. Gender: _____ Female   _____ Male

2. Community Organization Affiliation:

   _____

Part II: Technology and Social Media Background
Listed below are statements concerning your experiences and impressions regarding
technology and social media. Circle the answer that best corresponds to your opinion on
the following statements.

3. Describe your comfort level with technology.
     Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not
     comfortable   Other:_____

4. Describe your comfort level with social media.
     Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not
     comfortable   Other:_____

5. When I am online, generally speaking, I feel like I am a part of a global
   community.
          Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. I believe "liking" a cause on Facebook has value.
          Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

7. I believe social media has made me a more aware individual.
          Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

8. I can see the potential in using Web 2.0 technologies like Facebook, Twitter, and
   YouTube to raise awareness for civic issues.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Part III: Survey over GED Community Video Project

Listed below are statements concerning your experiences and impressions regarding the process (i.e., initial planning meeting in August, meeting with student/s, watching video/s) of working with Baylor University to help students compose videos about the GED and/or educational initiatives in Waco.

9. I left the initial planning meeting in August feeling optimistic about the goals of the GED Community Video Project.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

10. I left the initial planning meeting in August feeling like I could express my concerns about the GED Community Video Project.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

11. The Baylor student/s I met with appeared to be motivated and engaged.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

12. The Baylor student/s I met with asked good questions about my organization and/or my role in the community.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

13. The Baylor student/s I met with appeared to demonstrate a concern for reaching their intended audience.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

14. I watched _____ student videos on the #WeAreWaco YouTube Channel.
           1-3   4-6   7-9   10 or more

15. The student videos I watched met or exceeded my expectations of the GED Community Video Project in technical execution.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

16. The student videos I watched met or exceeded my expectations of the GED Community Video Project in the quality of their messages.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

17. The student videos I watched seemed to demonstrate a clear understanding of audience.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

18. The GED Community Video Project benefits Baylor students.
        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

19. The GED Community Video Project benefits the Waco community.

Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

20. What, in your opinion, is the most important skill a student can bring to a community-based writing opportunity like the GED Community Video Project? Please rank the following from most (1) to least (9) important:

_____Honesty
_____Openness
_____Patience
_____Listening
_____Relevant Skills
_____Transparency
_____Empathy
_____Tact
_____Knowledge

21. Based on the initial planning meeting and subsequent emails from Danielle Williams and/or Phoebe, what was your understanding of the goals of the GED Community Video Project (i.e., what were you hoping the videos would achieve)?

22. What is your general impression of the student videos composed during the GED Community Video Project?

23. Do you have any advice for instructors regarding the use of similar projects in first-year writing courses?

24. Would you be interested in participating in one twenty-minute follow-up interview?
    a. Yes   b. No

Any additional comments? (Please feel free to use this space to elaborate on any of your previous answers)

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will help improve how digital literacies can be used in first-year writing courses.

APPENDIX C

Analyzing the Impact of Digital Literacies on Issues of Civic Concern:
Student Questionnaire
Researcher: Danielle M. Williams

Name:_____

Email:_____

Part I: Background Information

1. Year in school: ____Freshman   ____Sophomore   ____Junior ____Senior

2. Gender: _____ Female   _____ Male

3. Age: ____18   ____19   ____20 or older

4. Ethnicity: _____

5. Religious Affiliation: _____

6. Political Affiliation: _____

7. Academic Major: _____

8. Have you had experience volunteering prior to taking this course? Please circle
    one.
       Yes   No

9. Describe your level of civic engagement prior to taking this course.
       High   Medium   Low

10. Describe your interest level in civic issues prior to taking this course.
       High   Medium   Low

11. Describe your comfort level with technology.
       Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not comfortable

12. Describe your comfort level with social media.
       Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not comfortable

13. Describe your comfort level with working with people whom you know.
    Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not comfortable

14. Describe your comfort level with working with people whom you do not know.
    Extremely comfortable   Moderately comfortable   Not comfortable

15. Do you consider yourself to be more extroverted or introverted?
    Extroverted   Introverted

Part II: Survey over Digital Civic Literacy Projects
Listed below are statements concerning your experiences and impressions regarding the microvolunteerism task and GED community video project assignment. Circle the answer that best corresponds to your opinion on the following statements.

16. I think digital literacy is most effective when it is used to express personal feelings.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

17. I think digital literacy is most effective when it is used to connect individuals.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

18. When I am online, generally speaking, I feel like I am a part of a global community.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

19. I use Web 2.0 technologies for social or recreational uses.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

20. I use Web 2.0 technologies for social activist uses.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

21. I believe "liking" a cause on Facebook has value.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

22. I believe social media has made me a more aware individual.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

23. I can see the potential of using Web 2.0 technologies like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to raise awareness for civic issues.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

24. I can see the potential of using Web 2.0 technologies to raise funds for social organizations.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

25. My generation is better equipped to use Web 2.0 technologies in the service of social issues than previous generations.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

26. I feel my understanding of digital literacy has changed since the beginning of this semester.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

27. I feel my digital literacy has improved since the beginning of this semester.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

28. Using microvolunteerism sites like skillsforchange.com, helpfromhome.org, or ifwerantheworld.com for the microvolunteerism assignment was an easy, straightforward process.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

29. Finding a worthwhile microvolunteerism challenge was easy.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

30. Microvolunteerism requires a sophisticated understanding of digital literacy.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

31. Microvolunteerism is just as meaningful as volunteering face-to-face.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

32. Microvolunteerism is a good way to learn about issues facing communities.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

33. I felt like my skills and interests were well matched with the microvolunteerism challenges.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

34. Participating in the microvolunteerism project has made me more interested in doing more projects like this in digital environments.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

35. Participating in the microvolunteerism project has made me more interested in volunteering in my immediate, physical community.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

36. Microvolunteerism has changed how I think about the uses of digital literacy.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

37. Participating in the microvolunteerism project for this course has been a positive experience.
    Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

38. When I participated in the microvolunteerism project, I felt like I was a part of a community.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

39. Creating a community project video made me more aware of issues facing the local community.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

40. Creating a community project video has changed how I think about the uses of digital literacy.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

41. Creating a community project video requires a sophisticated understanding of digital literacy.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

42. When I created a community project video, I felt like I was a part of a community.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

43. Creating a community project video has made me more aware of how I can address problems I see in my community.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

44. Creating a community project video was a meaningful way to use digital literacies in the service of a civic issue.

        Strongly Agree   Agree   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

Part III: Overall Assessment

45. Rate your overall investment in the microvolunteerism task.

        Very invested   Invested   Somewhat invested   Not at all invested

46. Rate your overall investment in the community project video assignment.

        Very invested   Invested   Somewhat invested   Not at all invested

47. Rate your overall investment in civic literacy.

        Very invested   Invested   Somewhat invested   Not at all invested

48. Rate your overall investment in using digital literacies in new ways.

        Very invested   Invested   Somewhat invested   Not at all invested

49. Explain an important lesson you learned from the microvolunteerism project.

50. Explain an important lesson you learned from the community video project.

51. Do you have any advice for instructors regarding the use of similar projects (microvolunteerism or digital composition) in first-year writing courses?

Any additional comments:

Thank you for completing this survey. Your responses will help improve how digital literacies can be used in first-year writing courses.

APPENDIX D

Student Interview Questions

1. What stands out most to you when you think about our class last semester? Significant memory? Assignment? People?
2. What did you expect when you signed up for this class? Expectations met?
3. Typical uses of digital literacy pre-college? Post-FAS? Now?
4. What would you tell someone who was thinking about registering for this class next semester?
5. What were your impressions of the WPTP?
6. What were your impressions of the GED Community Video Project?
7. Go into greater detail about questionnaire responses.
8. Explain ranking selection of most important qualities.

APPENDIX E

Waco Public Transit Project Worksheet

Note: This project will take some time. Plan ahead and do not wait until the last minute. This project is worth 25 points to be added to your Daily Work total. You will not receive credit for this assignment unless you complete all of the steps.

Baylor students are often insulated in the Baylor community, which is not necessarily bad although it does tend to cut us off from the outside world. For this assignment, you will see a unique side of the local community by taking Waco public transportation to a destination of your choice (some suggestions include practical excursions like a trip to HEB or to your church or more adventurous trips to one of the Waco Public libraries or McLennan Community College). The Waco bus schedule, map, and riding rules can be found on this website. Try not to go alone. Recruit some friends or partner with someone from our class.

Step one: For the sake of context, find out how easy or difficult it is to navigate Waco without a car by visiting walkscore.com. List Waco's WalkScore here and explain what this might mean for a typical Waco citizen.

Step two: Choose your destination and plan your bus trip. Which bus line do you need to take to get to where you want to go in Waco? Where do you need to catch it? What time do you need to be ready? How will you pay for the fare? Do you need to have cash on hand or can you pay ahead of time?

Step three: Take notes on the process. What do you need to do and in what order? Record your observations about what you see, what the condition of the bus is like, who you see, what fellow passengers on the bus are doing during the trip, how people seem to be treating each other, what this makes you think about the local Waco community, etc. Try to be discrete and respectful while you are taking notes.

See pp. 89-90 of "Analyzing Your Fieldnotes" to see an example of "Read and Respond" double-entry notes. *Attach a separate sheet of fieldnotes to your completed Waco Transit Project worksheet.* Once you reach your destination, you can spend some time gathering more fieldnotes about what the destination is like, or you can start planning your return back to campus. Take more fieldnotes on the trip back and see how the two trips compare.

Step four: Using p. 87 of "Analyzing Your Fieldnotes" as a guide, answer the following questions upon your return:

- What surprised you?

- What intrigued you?

- What disturbed you?

Multimodal Community-based Writing Project

For your final project, your class will plan, design, and create an informative and engaging web video series that informs community members about various aspects of the General Education Development (GED) test. The GED, which is the equivalent of a high school diploma, is a necessary step for people who want to improve their job prospects and/ or to pursue a college education. Many members of the Waco community would benefit from learning more about what opportunities the GED might afford, how to start the GED process, and how to best support those who are thinking about completing a GED. In short, this is a practical, meaningful way to connect our digital literacies to the project of civic engagement.

You will be personally responsible for constructing a 60-second multimodal video geared towards a particular audience of community members (e.g., prospective test-takers, current test-takers, or members of the test-taker support structure). The final versions of the videos will be 1 ½-2 minutes each (including the collaboratively constructed intro/outro, which will be ~10 seconds each). The most effective videos will be chosen to display on websites that promote these kinds of resources in the Waco community.

Components of the GED Community Video Project

Researching (10/22- early November)
- Consult resources to gain an understanding of, and a sensitivity towards, the issue and context
  - Micro-presentations (10/24 & 10/29) and ongoing research
- Identify stakeholders and understand your audience
  - Choose a community partner
    - Nonprofit Women's Organization, School District, Community College Success Coaches, Technical College Success Coaches
  - Write inquiry letter for community partner (draft due: 10/31)
  - Conduct community partner interview (early Nov.)
  - Other ideas: Try to see if you can interview a campus or community member who has experience related to your topic
- Observations, field notes, reading notes, and/or journal notes

Planning
- Draft research question/s to which your video will respond. What is the takeaway message of your video? (This message should be clear, direct, and engaging) (due date: TBA)
- Determine tone

- Collect and choose most effective design elements (images, songs, color schemes, etc.)
  - Think about fair use and copyright guidelines
  - Consider contacting local musicians or students in Baylor's School of Music for music tracks
- Brainstorm and peer review the organization of your layers (storyboard) (due date: TBA)

Composing (as a class)
- Design visual materials that consider rhetorical effectiveness
  - (logo contest for the series, avatar, etc.)
- Construct general video intro (sets up context consistently)
- Construct general video outro (contact information, external resources)

Composing (individually)
- 60 -90 seconds of accurate, compelling information about your particular topic
- A "clicky" headline that would generate interest in the video (like Upworthy)
- A brief description of your video's content

be prepared for several rounds of review with your peers, community members, and consultations with me

Presenting and reflecting
- Upload to the class YouTube channel
- Write self-reflection
- Invite community members to our film screening day
- Present and share!

APPENDIX G

FAS 1302 Final Exam: Choose Your Own Adventure Reflection

FAS 1302: Writing in the Age of Digital Media is a different type of English composition experience and has likely challenged you and/or your thinking in one way or another at some point during the semester. I mentioned at the beginning of the year that the key traits of citizens in the digital age are flexibility, creativity, and the ability to solve problems independently and collaboratively. For your final exam, you will prepare a text (you may choose the modality: alphabetic, audio essay, multimodal essay) that

(1) explains a central challenge related to this class that you personally had to overcome,
(2) demonstrates how you did, or maybe did not, meet this challenge according to your expectations, and
(3) reflects on the meaning of this experience as part of your first semester as a college student, writer, or citizen.

I will leave the length of the project up to you, but I expect you to utilize the full potential of whatever mode you choose (e.g., an audio essay should make effective use of aural elements while an alphabetic text must clearly communicate a strong thesis supported by organized evidence) to compose an interesting and thoughtful piece.

I expect you to complete this assignment with an eye towards creativity and an attention to detail. Remember that you are always telling a story of some kind when you are communicating information to someone else; the genre (e.g., a college essay, business report, blog post, tweet, video) will necessarily change how the story is told, but you should always try to strive for interest (*pathos*), credibility (*ethos*), and logic (*logos*) in your written/composed work.

Due: Submit your text through Canvas by 2:00 p.m. Saturday, December 14 (the day of our final exam)
- If you choose to complete an alphabetic text, please follow MLA formatting and save the document as a Microsoft Word file –not as a Pages file.
- If you choose to compose an audio essay, please upload the link through SoundCloud.
- If you choose to compose a multimodal essay, please export using Quicktime and upload to YouTube or Vimeo. Make sure that you change the privacy settings to "Unlisted" or "Public."
Note: If your submission is inaccessible, you will receive late penalties.

Here are some exercises that can assist you during the brainstorming process:

Analyze your emotions:
> At any point during the class did you feel uncomfortable, overwhelmed, frustrated, surprised, relieved, pleased, victorious? What were the events surrounding this feeling?

Analyze your expectations:
> In what ways did this class differ from what you thought it was going to be like? How did you manage this shift from expectation to reality?

Analyze your strengths:
> In what ways did this class reveal what your strengths and/or weaknesses are? Were you aware of these factors before?

Analyze your learning style:
> Did you learn anything about how *you* learn through completing these different types of modal exercises? For example, maybe you realized that you are not a visual person, so the multimodal essays challenged your thinking and made you adjust your approach.

Analyze your perspective:
> In what ways did the activities in this class challenge how you thought about writing, people, communities, education, technology, etc.?

APPENDIX H

Micro-Presentations

For this assignment, you will choose <u>one</u> of the numbered topics from the following categories to research and present to the class. As part of your 2-3 minute micro-presentation, you will create some sort of a visual aid (handout, Prezi, PowerPoint, etc.) that will distill your research into a few key takeaway points. Consider the principles of visual design we have discussed in class. Use the italicized questions as a guide for your research. The goal for this assignment is to crowdsource the research for the community project so that we all do a small part and end up with a solid body of knowledge.

Background Information:
1) High school dropout rates for US/Texas/Waco
2) GED basics (What is it? Who gets it? How long does the process take? How do people prepare for it?)
3) Work opportunities that require the GED
4) Success rates of people who get the GED
   - *Which details do we need to know?*
   - *What problems are associated with these issues?*
   - *What are people trying to do to solve these problems?*
   - *What can our class do to help?*

Community Partners:
5) Nonprofit Women's Organization
6) Public School District
7) Community College Success Coaches
8) Technical College Success Coaches
   - *What is the purpose of this organization? What are their goals?*
   - *Who in the community does this organization serve? Who is the audience?*
   - *How could our class assist this organization to achieve their goals?*
   - *What else is interesting or noteworthy?*

Community Resources:
9) Local Community Website
10) Drop Back into School
11) Pass Times (and crowdfunding sites like Kickstarter)
12) YourGED.org (have you seen these billboards around town?)
13) Waco Tribune
- *What is the purpose of this website? What are its goals?*
- *Who in the community does this website serve? Who is the audience?*

- *How could our class use this resource as we construct our videos? Be specific. And be creative.*
- *What else is interesting or noteworthy?*

Social Media Resources:
14) Change.org and online petitions
15) Upworthy
- *What is the purpose of this organization? What are its goals?*
- *Who does this website serve? Who is the audience?*
- *How could our class use this resource as we construct our videos? Be specific. And be creative.*
- *What else is interesting or noteworthy?*

Creative Resources:
16) Adobe Photoshop
17) Music Composition Apps
   - *How does this resource work?*
   - *How much knowledge and skill would it require to use this for our project?*
   - *What kinds of resources exist to assist us?*
   - *What else is interesting or noteworthy?*

APPENDIX I

Using the Playbook for Good to Design a YouTube Channel Strategy

Based on what you read in YouTube's Playbook for Good, answer the following questions:

1. Give some examples of metadata. How can we use metadata to activate our cause?

2. What are "Call to Action" overlays? Are they distracting or useful? Would there be any uses for this with any of the organizations we are working with?

3. Two of the key strategies for "Storytelling for Causes" are to (1) identify your goals and (2) to identify your audience. What are your individual goals for your video project? (i.e., what is the purpose of this act of communication?) Who is the audience for your message? Be specific.

4. Name one other piece of advice from the Playbook for Good that our class could use as we plan the community project.

5. Any other ideas, thoughts, concerns at this stage?

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