

CHAPTER 14.

SPONSORING “GREEN” SUBJECTS: THE WORLD BANK’S 2009 YOUTH ESSAY CONTEST

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In recent decades, writing scholars have underscored the ways in which writing is facilitated and constrained by social actors. So-called “original” works have been shown to bear the traces of intertextual influence, and an array of rhetorical conventions, including those of genre, have been shown to delimit and enable creativity (Bawarshi, 2003). Every text is necessarily influenced by its context, and, as Brandt (2001) reminds us, sponsors of literacy frequently play a key role in defining the terms by which writers write. In this chapter, I suggest some of the ways in which a powerful literacy sponsor co-constructs specific identifications and forms of discourse.

Brandt (2001) was among the first to foreground the issue of literacy sponsorship among compositionists, suggesting that “it is useful to think about who or what underwrites occasions of literacy learning and use” (p. 19). Brandt defines literacy sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by in in some way” (p. 19). My analysis centers on an essay competition sponsored by the World Bank, a large multilateral lending institution that funds development projects throughout the world. In this study, I focus on a particular literacy event—an international essay competition that each year solicits and receives essays from 18 to 25 year-olds from all over the world. I draw on Heath’s (2001) definition of a literacy event as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of the participants’ interactions and their interpretative processes” (p. 445). Using methods of textual and rhetorical analysis, I describe (1) how the contest elicited certain kinds of identification and (2) how the winning essayists responded to the problem/ solution prompt.

THE WORLD BANK AS A LITERACY SPONSOR

In 2009, the World Bank held a Youth Essay Contest, inviting submissions on the topic of “The Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs.” Young people

from all over the world—ages 18 to 25—were invited to submit essays over the web in English, French, or Spanish in response to the following questions: “How does climate change affect you?” and “How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?” Nearly 2,500 college age youth from over 150 countries participated in the contest, and 95% of them, according to a report available on the Bank’s website, hailed from less industrialized or “developing” countries. The eight winning essayists all present moving testimony about how climate change is affecting their communities and offer ideas for addressing the problem. This chapter considers some of the ways in which their responses were shaped and constrained by the contest “call” and prompt.

The World Bank may at first appear an unlikely literacy sponsor. The Bank is not a Bank in the traditional sense, even though most of the money it lends comes from bonds sold on the financial markets. Instead it is a large, quasi-governmental lending organization, comprised of 184 member nations, the headquarters for which are in Washington, DC. The Bank was initially created after WWII to fund post-war reconstruction efforts, but, today, it has become one of the most important lenders to governments in the Global South. Although the Bank is perhaps best known for large infrastructure projects, it has in recent years become the “largest external (non government) funder of education” (<http://www.worldbank.org>). Moreover, as Wickens and Sandlin (2007) explain, it has recently “supplanted UNESCO ... as the primary funding agent for international literacy programs” (p. 277).

The Bank held its first essay contest in 2004, and, each year since, has chosen a topic related to social or economic development. In 2009, the contest theme coincided with efforts by the Bank to embrace the rhetoric of environmentalism. In a recent ethnography of the Bank, Goldman (2005) argues that environmental discourse has played an increasingly central role in the Bank’s public relations. According to Goldman, the “greening” of the Bank’s discourse seems to have assuaged the concerns of many of its most vocal critics. Goldman sees the Bank’s “green neoliberalism” as a pragmatic response to the criticisms heaped upon the Bank during the 1980s and 90s, when protestors were denouncing the punitive impact of the Bank’s structural adjustment policies on the poor. Within the space of two decades, the Bank’s environmental discourse has transformed the public perception of the development project into one that is believed to be compatible with the goals and aims of environmentalism. For Goldman, the Bank’s “green neoliberalism” refers to a discursive regime that encompasses not only textual practices but also an entire knowledge-making apparatus. This “green neoliberalism” is apparent in the emphasis on entrepreneurship in the “call” for the contest—the headline for which read, “The Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs.”

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

I approached this analysis from the vantage point of constitutive rhetoric—a branch of rhetorical study that deals with the values and assumptions that are tacitly embedded in discourse. Constitutive appeals operate, as Burke (1969) observes, not at the level of logic, but rather via a feeling of “elation wherein the audience feels as though it were not merely receiving, but were itself creatively participating in the poet’s or speaker’s assertion” (p. 58). Attending to the ways that rhetoric constitutes subjectivities involves highlighting how particular subjects are interpellated by and through social practices (Althusser, 1971) and how the politics of identification are operating in any rhetorical performance (Burke, 1969). Butler calls this the regulation of subjects through regulation of “the domain of the sayable” (p. 133); through rituals, habits, and conventions—including those of genre and narrative—certain kinds of speech are sponsored, while others are dissuaded. It is precisely this tacitness, this repetition, that constitutes the subject. As Charland explains, the power of constitutive rhetoric is “based in its capacity to enthrall an audience, not addressing their reasoning faculty, but poetically transforming their very experience of being” (p. 125). From this perspective, the essayists in this contest were influenced not only by this literacy event, but by this event in relation to other multiple acts of writing, and through their experience of the event as a competition, as well.

Essay contests have received little attention in the scholarly literature, despite the fact that many libraries, schools, newspapers, civic organizations, literary societies and large corporations regularly sponsor such contests. These contests are typically viewed as character-building exercises that encourage writing on issues seen as having civic merit: themes of peace and diplomacy, courage and leadership, or the commemoration of a date or figure in history. Often, these contests explicitly state goals related to the formation of character and are typically targeted at middle-school or high-school age children and young adults. Today, the fact that these contests are conducted via the World Wide Web has dramatically expanded their potential scope and reach.

METHODS

The data set for this study consisted of the essay call and prompt (see Figure 1), as well as the eight winning and finalist essays, which were available online. In this study, I relied on various methods of textual (Bazerman & Prior, 2004) and rhetorical analysis (Selzer, 2004). My analysis of the call and prompt involved examining these texts’ linguistic features (e.g., terms like “green,” “youth,” or

“entrepreneurs”) to determine how they made their rhetorical appeal. I also examined aspects of the contest that “spoke” to particular audiences, such as the invitation to submit essays in English, Spanish or French. In considering who the audience may have been for these appeals, a World Bank summary report offered demographic information about the actual contest participants. I was also able to access online other needed information about the contest itself.

In narrowing my focus for my analysis of the essays, I relied on contextual information about the Bank’s development agenda, along with my earlier analysis of the call and prompt. One of the rhetorical features that became evident as a result of this process was the importance of the two-part narrative structure of the prompt. This led to my examining the arrangement of ideas in the top eight essays to determine whether or not they had adopted this implied format. This involved creating an outline for each essay and recording the page numbers devoted to each section of text. This textual analysis revealed that a two-part, problem/ solution format was indeed evident in all of the winning and finalist essays. Each essay contained a section at or near the beginning which contained elaborate testimony about how climate change was affecting the essayist’s community, as well as a section at or near the end in which each essayist offered their proposed solution. These two sections together made up the bulk of each of these papers. All of the papers ranged in length from seven to 16 pages, but in each case, the section on solutions was slightly longer than the section dealing the problem. Common features like these suggest that, despite significant variations in the essays, the influence of the prompt was strong in compelling a problem/ solution format in the essayists’ response.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE “CALL”

The organizers of the contest solicited essays under the following heading: “WANTED: the Next Generation of ‘Green Entrepreneurs.’” This heading, which appeared in bold font on the Bank’s website, did constitutive work by collapsing distinctions between youthfulness, environmentalism, and entrepreneurship. As Charland (2001) suggests, “constitutive rhetoric simultaneously presumes and asserts a fundamental collective identity for its audience, offers a narrative that demonstrates that identity, and issues a call to act to affirm that identity” (p. 125). This heading likely captured the attention of college-age readers who may have imagined themselves as fitting some combination of: “next generation,” environmentalist, and/or entrepreneurial. The capitalized letters in “WANTED” might have called to mind a job ad or a poster from

the American West. This set of associations might have suggested a jobseeker, a “maverick” personality, or both. Responding to this call likely represented an affirmation of this “hailed” identity and—to some degree—as acceptance of the terms within which that identity might be expressed.

The contest invited online submissions in English, Spanish, or French. In doing so, the contest appealed to youth who were able to write in one of the world languages in which the Bank’s day-to-day business is conducted. Presumably not “hailed” by the call for submissions would have been those without access to the cultural capital of schooling, not literate in a world language, or on the other side of the digital divide. Also not “hailed”—or hailed with less frequency—seemed to be writers from overdeveloped or industrialized countries, representing only 5% of the submissions and one of the winners. (Incidentally, in 2009, an essayist from Australia won first place.)

The World Bank offers prizes each year for its competition, and the essayists—many of whom are from poor countries—have an especially powerful lure motivating their participation. Incentives like these can be powerful for writers, regardless of their ideological perspective. The finalist from Cameroon, for example, writes movingly about his financial struggles: “It costs a lot to obtain a college education in my country. I have had to struggle with this reality since I obtained my Baccalaureat.” This writer explains that, due to his financial situation, he has “taken odd jobs during my free hours to help my family cover a number of expenses. I sell youth magazines to young people, tutor secondary school students, and very often manage a ‘call-box’ at the university. In November 2007, a relative suggested that I drive his taxi to make some money,” this essayist writes. This essayist speaks to some of the lived realities that may have influenced some of these writers’ motivation to compete. In this way, the prizes (\$3,000 for first place, \$2,000 for second place, and \$1,000 for third) may have provided a strong incentive for writers, not only for compliance with the essay requirements but also for loyalty to the sponsoring institution. As Brandt (2001) observes “[a]lthough the interests of the sponsor and the sponsored do not have to converge (and in fact, may conflict), sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty (p. 19).

Aspects of the event itself suggest preferred set of attributes and values for respondents. In conducting this event as a “competition,” the Bank implicitly reinforced the value of competitiveness (in contrast to collaboration or cooperation). This value, believed to underlie philosophies of the “free market,” is consistent with the Bank’s neoliberal agenda, which emphasizes privatization and deregulation. As scholars of critical cultural studies point out, neoliberalism implies not only an economic agenda but also a “a frame of mind, a cultural

WANTED: The Next Generation of “Green” Entrepreneurs

Climate change has been identified as one of the biggest global threats of our time. Scientists agree that global warming and extreme climate phenomena can be increasingly attributed to human activity—in particular, heavy emission of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, resulting from industrial processes.

Solutions to those pressing problems could lie in the rapidly growing “green economy”: environmentally sustainable enterprises, technological innovations (new sources of clean, renewable energy), energy efficiency measures, economic incentives for low-carbon choices, etc. How can youth contribute?

The Essay Competition 2009 invites youth to share ideas on:

How does climate change affect you? How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?

Please answer both questions:

How does climate change affect you, your country, town or local community? How do you think it will affect you in the future? Think about the consequences for employment, health, security and other areas of your life.

1. What can you do, working together with your peers, to address the problem of climate change in your country, town or local community? Think specifically about the role of youth-led initiatives in the “green economy.”
2. What can you do, working together with your peers, to address the problem of climate change in your country, town or local community? Think specifically about the role of youth-led initiatives in the “green economy.”

Figure 1. Contest call and prompt for the World Bank's 2009 Youth Essay Competition

dynamic, an entrepreneurial personality type, and a rule of law that penetrates the most intimate relations people have with each other, state apparatuses, and their natural environments” (Goldman, 8). Competitive entrepreneurship thus comes to stand for an identity or social orientation that demands that individuals monitor and assess themselves based on values of productivity and self-discipline (Petersen & O’Flynn 2007).

In inviting submissions on the theme of “green entrepreneurship,” the Bank was issuing a call to youth who might identify both with the sense of themselves as environmentalists and as entrepreneurs. Additionally, in making this linkage, the Bank encouraged these essayists towards a particular articulation of the issue—one that saw entrepreneurship as not only compatible with environmentalism, but as the preferred solution for climate change. The ordering of the questions, additionally, invited a narrative structure that conformed to this telling—a problem/solution trajectory that culminated in a business model for saving the planet. By structuring the essay task in this way, the Bank issued a powerful incentive for respondents to write the environmental story that it wished to tell.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROMPT

The prompt for the 2009 World Bank essay contest begins with a brief paragraph that provides some background on the issue of climate change for potential essayists. Many essay prompts contain such a preface, which is typically brief, but provides a backdrop to the question that follows. The first sentence of this statement, which was italicized in the original, read as follows:

Climate change has been identified as one of the biggest global threats of our time. Scientists agree that global warming and extreme climate phenomena can be increasingly attributed to human activity—in particular, heavy emission of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, resulting from industrial processes.

Given the debates that still surround the issue, this statement is remarkable for its acknowledgement in 2009 that “scientists agree” not only that climate change is real but also that it has been identified as one of the “biggest global threats of our time.” Also remarkable, given the reluctance by some to acknowledge anthropogenic warming, is the explicit acknowledgement by the World Bank that “industrial processes” have played a decisive role. At the same time, the use of the passive voice (*has been identified, can be attributed*) implies that the stance of the author is unclear. Moreover, the problem of attributing causality to “extreme climate phenomena” becomes apparent in the clause qualifying “human activity.” Although the sentence ultimately ascribes causality to “heavy emission of greenhouse gases . . . resulting from industrial processes”—this chain of qualifiers leaves the relationship between “human activity” and

“industrial processes” indeterminate. Additionally, the precise industries, processes, and geographic regions most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions remain unnamed. Such instances of rhetorical indeterminacy leave questions of responsibility unnecessarily vague.

The statement continues, suggesting that

[s]olutions to those pressing problems could lie in the rapidly growing ‘green economy: environmentally sustainable enterprises, technological innovations (new sources of clean, renewable energy), energy efficiency measures, economic incentives for low-carbon choices, etc.

The use of “could” in this sentence suggests a modest recognition that solutions might not lie in the “green economy” at all. It even suggests a certain humility and hopefulness in the face of these “pressing problems.” And while it draws on the language of business to posit various examples of possible “solutions” — ranging from “sustainable enterprise” to “technological innovations” to “economic incentives” — their presentation as a kind of brainstorming list suggests the designers of the question were not tied to any particular one of these. At the same time, the requirement that the solution be a “green economy” solution is strongly implied.

The paragraph ends with the question, “How can youth contribute?” This question has the positive tone of consulting young people and encouraging their participation in problem-solving. Like any good essay question, it might be argued, this paragraph ends in a way that makes the question relevant for 18 to 25 year-olds, and engages their motivation to write. This question echoes a theme that has run through all of the contests since 2004 when they began: all of the contests have focused on the initiative of young people and their shared ownership of the difficult problems facing society. In its first contest, for instance, the Bank sought submissions on “Radically Reducing World Poverty.” And, in 2011, essayists wrote on the issue of “Youth Migration.” On the one hand, this rhetoric of “owning the problems” suggests that college age youth have a responsibility to demonstrate leadership. On the other hand, it may have the unintended effect of blaming of the victim: young people are charged with accepting responsibility for the complex problems that earlier generations have created and been unable or unwilling to solve.

The difficulty of this positioning is apparent in the essay by the finalist from Cameroon. This writer begins with chilling testimony about the unprecedented flooding that is affecting his community, recounting how “[f]looding has become the daily plight of my family and the residents of my neighborhood.”

“People have stopped keeping track of cases,” he says, recounting the loss of life and increase in water-borne disease resulting from torrential rains and landslides. But the essayist adopts a confessional tone in blaming himself for his contribution to climate change. He explains the harmful health and the environmental effects of “zoa-zoa fuel, a mixture of gas and oil” purchased inexpensively on the black market and used by taxi drivers in his city of Yaounde. This writer describes the strong sense of guilt that he carries about having engaged in this practice. As a taxi driver who has resorted to the use of zoa-zoa, he tells of how he first “came upon the map of global warming on the Internet. . . . The accompanying testimony sent shivers up my spine. I realized the extent to which I am utterly vulnerable to climate change and the extent to which I bear responsibility for it. . . . Since that time, I promised myself that if I could acknowledge my culpability, then I could also reverse the trend.” The bind in which this essayist finds himself is exacerbated by the use of the second person address and the emphasis in question number two, which might be paraphrased as “What can **you** do to fight global warming?” This essayist may have perceived the prompt’s direct address as implying responsibility or singling him out personally for blame.

PROBLEM/ SOLUTION STRUCTURE OF THE PROMPT

The prompt reads, “The Essay Competition 2009 invites youth to share ideas on: **How does climate change affect you? How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?**” (bold in original) These questions are briefly elaborated upon in the instructions that follow, which remind the respondent to “Please answer both questions.” This brief reminder implicitly introduces a two-part narrative structure that serves as a cue about what will be valued in responses. Essayists are asked to consider: “How does climate change affect you, your country, town or local community?” And “What can you do, working together with your peers, to address the problem of climate change in your country, town or local community?”

This narrative ordering not only serves to structure the responses, but it also primes the respondents to identify with the given framework. As Goldman suggests, the greening of the Bank’s reputation requires, to some degree, listening to global constituents who have first-hand knowledge of the realities of environmental devastation. The first question contains an acknowledgment that climate change is real, and accepts this premise as its point of departure. With this move, the Bank is able to disarticulate itself from those who would deny climate change and lay the groundwork for an identification with environmentalism. At the same time, it is the second question that sets certain limits upon

that environmentalism. These are limits to which, given the Bank's acquiescence in the first instance, the interpellated group is more likely to be predisposed.

The panel of experts who judged the essays included one representative from the National Autonomous University in Mexico (UNAM), one from the World Bank, and six representatives of international NGO's focused on youth leadership and development issues: Africa Leadership Forum, AIESEC Student Forum, The Glocal Forum, Junior Achievement Worldwide, AIESEC International, and Conciencia Association (from Argentina). When the panel of experts met to select the winners of the contest, they awarded the first prize of \$3,000 to a young essayist from Australia who wrote a "Blueprint for Green Schools." The second place essayist, who won \$2,000, was from Mexico, and wrote on "The Repercussions of Climate Change on the Rarámuri People." Third place, with a prize of \$1,000, went to an essayist from Ghana, who offered green solutions at the Community, National and International Levels. Presumably, each of these winning essays demonstrated successful adherence to the "Selection Criteria" announced by the judges, who evaluated the essays based on "their structure and coherence, originality and creativity and the use of thoughtful and concrete proposals/ examples." But, as is suggested in the following analysis, their narrative framing was additionally in keeping with the order suggested by the prompt.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE ESSAYS

PROBLEM/SOLUTION FORMAT OF THE ESSAYS

Because my rhetorical analysis of the prompt suggested that the two-part structure may have played an important role in framing the essay question, my analysis of the essays looked at the sequential arrangement of ideas. I recorded the page numbers devoted to each section of text and sought to determine whether "climate change" was explicitly identified as the focus of the first (problem) part of each essay. Additionally, I sought to determine whether "solutions" were the explicit focus at the end of the essay. This analysis revealed that all of the essays explicitly identified "climate change" as the problem, along with a number of related environmental issues (deforestation, carbon emissions, pollution, and industrial development, for instance). These sections, in every case, appeared at or near the beginning of each essay. Additionally, all of the essays identified solutions in lengthier sections that came at or near the end. Table 2 provides key citations from each section and page numbers that demonstrate how each problem section appeared sequentially prior to the solution proposed.

Table 1. Problem/solution format of the essays

Title	Problem	Solution
“Blueprint for Green Schools”	“Climate Change in Australia and its Impacts in the Future” pp. 3-5	“Green Schools” Solution pp. 5-10
“The Repercussions of Climate Change on the Indigenous Raramuri People: Local Actions, Global Benefits”	On Impact of Development on the Raramuri and “Effects of Climate Change” pp. 2-3	“How Can We Address Climate Change ... ?” (e.g. Biointensive Orchards) pp. 6-9
“Greening the Ghanaian Youth”	On Climate Change & “Recent Weather Extremes” pp. 1-3	“The Practical[] Green Solutions” pp. 3-8
“Climate Change is the Defining Issue of Our Time”	Climate Change Impacts to “my city and life” pp. 1-4	“Green Taxi Campaign” pp. 5-9
“Climate Change: A Challenge for Humanity”	“Overview—the current situation with climate change” pp. 4-8	“The Current Economic Model and the Challenge for the Generation of Green Entrepreneurs” including “University for Humanity” pp. 8-15
“Climate Change—An Explosive Long Bill the Earth’s Generations Must Pay”	“Deforestation in Indonesia” p. 2 and “Climate Change Does Affect My Country” pp. 3-6	“Youth—the Now Green Generation” —Public Awareness pp. 6-10
“Youth Participation in Green Endeavors” and green initiatives pp. 4-7	“Cebu’s Climate Change Crisis” pp. 3-5	“Solutions Offered by Cebuano Youth” and other initiatives pp. 5-9 “STEP UP” initiative pp. 9-12
“Go Green—The New Mantra”	The impact of “Global Warming” on Hindu spirituality p. 1; “The Global Crisis” p. 2; and “The Indian Scenario” p. 3	“Youth Participation in Green Endeavors” and green initiatives pp. 4-7

Although all of the descriptions of climate change as the problem had their own regional or geographical emphases, and some of these descriptions were preceded by a title page, outline, abstract, preface, or summary, all of these essays located their descriptions of climate change as the problem close to or at the beginning of the essay. Each of these descriptions, additionally, ranged

from two to four pages in length and appeared sequentially before the author's proposed solutions. In three cases, these sections were separated by brief transitional sections in which the author described the role of youth in green initiatives, generally, or reflected on fieldwork, for instance. But in all of the eight winning and finalist essays, the detailed description of the problem of climate change appeared prior to sections devoted explicitly to solutions. In the solution sections, the degree of elaboration varies, but all of the solutions sections range in length from three to seven pages.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PROBLEM: CLIMATE CHANGE

Each of the essays begins with detailed and often moving descriptions based on the author's own research into how climate change is affecting their country or locality. The first place winner, for instance, writes of "ferocious bushfires," "flash flooding and king tides" that have destroyed entire townships and made "the northern State of Queensland into an officially declared disaster zone." She explains that her country, Australia, is "the driest inhabited continent on earth and is therefore particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change." The second place winner, too, describes the impact of climate change on his country. He begins by explaining that 60% of families that he visited in the indigenous community of Huiyochi in the Sierra Tarahumara have been affected by an overall increase in temperature, deforestation, drought, and barren farmland. Many of them had to leave ancestral lands and find unskilled jobs, few of which are available. As he puts it, "The effects of climate change are not only the change in the environment, but also the severe social repercussions. Some of the impacts include migration, malnutrition, and drug trafficking."

The third place winner writes of his experience as a volunteer with the relief efforts in Ghana, after a period of severe flooding caused by unusual climatic conditions. He writes of the poor conditions in hospitals, of communities affected by the lack of electricity, food and water shortages, and cholera. This writer conducted interviews and surveys and writes, "One gentleman I interviewed said that before, it was good to be back home in his village but now, the weather conditions do not favor farming..." Each of the essayists proceed in this way, by offering climate change testimony from his/her unique perspective. Then, each essayist offers a proposal to address the problem, following the sequence implicit in the prompt—which consisted of two consecutive questions and seemed to imply a narrative trajectory culminating in "youth-led," "green," and/or "entrepreneurial" solutions. These solutions, as indicated by the third column in Table 1, ranged from "green schools" to biointensive orchards to public awareness campaigns.

RESULTS

This study suggests that, in the 2009 contest, the influence of the prompt was strong in compelling certain identifications and forms of discourse. As we have seen, the contest call and prompt encouraged “green entrepreneurial” identifications, and, in their responses, all of the essayists took up the implicit problem/solution format of the prompt. At the same time, however, it would be hasty to conclude that the World Bank entirely determined or dictated the essays’ ideological content. While I do not have the space here to report on my analysis of the student essays, several did indeed depart from “youth-led,” “green” and/or “entrepreneurial” solutions. Thus, while the influence of a literacy sponsor may be strong in compelling particular identifications and generic formats, it would be inaccurate to conclude that this influence was equally decisive in determining content.

DISCUSSION

As this analysis suggests, essay contests comprise a productive site for analyzing the shaping force of genre, literacy sponsorship, and ideological interpellation. Writers both compose and are composed through their literacy practices, and one of the principal ways by which subjects are constituted is via the workings of genre. As Miller (1984) suggests, all genres should be seen in relation to their collectively embedded, social motives. Genres can also be seen, as Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995) suggest, as tools of social or distributed cognition. Genres focus the attention of writers and, in so doing, shape writers’ subjectivities and epistemologies. Writers therefore encounter the shaping power of genre in numerous contexts for writing—not only essay contests. As Bawarshi (2003) insists, “[g]enres are defined as much by the actions they help individuals perform as by the desires and subjectivities they help organize” (p. 78). Genres co-constitute the subject, just as they participate in constructing the writer’s positionality in relation to the topic at hand. As we have seen, the influence that sponsors may wield in determining these aspects of the writing task can be significant.

One of the remarkable aspects of the 2009 essay contest was that the World Bank provided a necessary forum for an emerging genre: the climate change testimonial. At the same time, this emerging genre was embedded within a broader narrative structure: that of the problem/solution format. While problem/solution formats are not intrinsically a matter for concern, it is worth noting that Li (2009) has pointed to several problems with this format in the practice

of writing Environmental Impact Statements—which since 1989 have become “a requirement for all World Bank-financed projects” (p. 222). Here it is worth noting that Carolyn Miller expressed similar hesitations about environmental impact statements in her well-known (1984) article, “Genre as Social Action.” One of the consequences of documenting environmental impact has been to keep environmental risk assessment “manageable.” (Li, 2009; Goldman 2005). As Li reminds us, “as long as they are “manageable” risks, they are not an impediment to ... development” (p. 228).

Among the issues that complicate the effectiveness of the environmental assessment process, Li finds, are the requirements of the format itself. By definition, Environmental Impact Assessment necessitates that for every risk identified, a solution is articulated. Furthermore, these solutions are limited by the fact that the studies are conducted by the very entities who have a vested interest in seeing these projects go forward. Li’s study of the process in the case of a proposed expansion of mining in Peru demonstrates that these conflicts of interest can lead to ignoring long term health and environmental risks. Her description of the potential problems with this problem/solution format suggests that we should be attentive to its limitations. Additionally, the formal similarities between Environmental Impact Statements and the essays generated in the World Bank Contest suggest some of the ways in which writers may be tacitly inducted into ways of knowing endorsed by the Bank.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this analysis underscores the need for those who sponsor or design writing tasks to reflect carefully upon the ideological and epistemological assumptions that underpin those tasks. So, too, must writers (and those who rely on the knowledge that they produce) attend critically to the assumptions implicit in a task. Such reflection is necessary because writing tasks influence not only our ways of thinking but also our very identities, our ways of knowing, and our ways of feeling, perceiving, and acting in the world. In the World Bank’s 2009 essay contest, respondents were encouraged to identify as the “Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs” and to tell a story that posited entrepreneurial solutions to the problem of climate change. While any such urging towards a particular identity or narrative deserves our close examination, in the case of an international funder of literacy and development programs, it is especially pressing that we consider the transnational, political and ecological dimensions of this influence.

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