

CHAPTER 11.

**KNOTWORKING
COLLABORATIONS: FOSTERING
COMMUNITY-ENGAGED
TEACHERS AND SCHOLARS**

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Sheridan draws on her experience founding and co-teaching the Digital Media Academy (DMA) to propose knotworking collaboration as a central practice for alternative forms of graduate education and professionalization. Examining the academy's design—both in messaging with external, public and funding audiences, and in internal programming with graduate student co-facilitators—Sheridan concludes that such collaborations represent a messy, but significant form of community and intellectual engagement for graduate students.

For a variety of reasons, academics have been trying to explain what we do to those inside and outside the academy. One current strategy is to articulate *threshold concepts* (Meyer & Land, 2003), the ways disciplinary insiders make meaning (e.g., the epistemologies and practices that mark certain disciplines). Not surprisingly, newcomers often struggle to learn these insider threshold concepts, but this theory holds that once students grasp these disciplinary ideas and practices, the learning is irreversible.¹ Scholars investigating how to foster students' understandings of such concepts have forwarded the idea of *threshold experiences*, what community-engaged scholars Barbara

1 The richness (and critique) of this idea has found traction in many disciplines, including our own where threshold concepts have been taken up, perhaps most overtly in Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle's *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (2015), a book that forwards our own field's threshold concepts (surrounding the metaconcept that writing is an activity and an area of study), as well as the possibilities and difficulties of fostering the learning environments for people to engage and adopt such threshold concepts. A quick Google search illustrates how threshold concepts are playing out in many disciplines; readers of this collection may be interested in the Launius and Hassel's *Threshold Concepts in Women's and Gender Studies: Ways of Seeing, Thinking and Knowing* (2015).

Harrison, Patti H. Clayton, and Gresilda A. Tilley-Lubbs (2014) define as “reflective encounters with dissonance that give rise to deeper understandings and sometimes internalization of threshold concepts” (p. 5). For Harrison et al., threshold experiences combine the experiences and the reflections on those experiences that can lead to the deep learning, the irreversible changes described in threshold concepts. Yet not every experience qualifies as a threshold experience; threshold experiences require full engagement with the complexities and contradictions that dismantle past understandings and move us toward a deep learning. As teachers, researchers, community partners, and mentors, we are called to create the conditions for people to learn these threshold concepts, in part by constructing opportunities for threshold experiences.

Taking up that challenge in regards to this collection’s focus on how feminist community engagement can be fostered in higher education, I forward one threshold experience: knotworking collaborations. Knotworking collaborations emerge out of what I consider a threshold concept within our field: doing is a leading edge of learning. Unfortunately, our desire to provide opportunities for this learning-by-doing faces institutional and individual obstacles that hinder feminist community engagement. The obstacles have been well articulated, from the mismatch of academic and project timelines (Lindquist, 2012), to struggles with community partners (Mathieu, 2013), to changes in our professional or personal lives (Deans, 2013). The dilemmas are real. And yet, if we believe that doing is central to learning, we need to provide more models of how to enact that doing.

The threshold experiences provided through knotworking collaborations, I argue, construct such opportunities. Essential to this deep learning is the feminist practice of destabilizing unhelpful hierarchies found within traditional academic partnerships, both those inside and outside the university. Knotworking collaborations do that destabilizing by helping participants interrogate issues of power, knowledge making, and relationship building within their collaborative partnerships.

In this chapter, I explore how knotworking collaborations can provide threshold experiences for graduate students interested in community engagement. After discussing ways to rethink how graduate education can build threshold experiences in community engagement, I detail how knotworking collaborations can enhance these efforts. I then offer an example of such a project: the Digital Media Academy (DMA), a free, two-week summer camp for rising 6th grade girls taught by University of Louisville graduate students and faculty. I conclude with a call for us, feminist community-engaged scholars, to find ways to foster such threshold experiences in our own settings.

RETHINKING GRADUATE EDUCATION IN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH FEMINIST, WRITING STUDIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION LENSES

As external pressures push higher education to re-examine both what it does and how it engages with diverse stakeholders,² universities have found great interest in engaging with the community—a point made plain in the fact that hundreds of academic institutions applied for the most recent Carnegie Foundation designation of a “Community Engagement University,” with 240 U.S. colleges and universities earning that designation in 2015 (Carnegie Classification), and that even more universities are building the infrastructures for such designations.³ What this engagement looks like in practice varies but, generally, projects align with the oft-cited Carnegie Foundation’s definition of community engagement, which focuses on “the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” between institutions of higher education and people in “the public and private sectors” in order “to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (New England Resource Center for Higher Education, 2015). Enacting this definition requires an attention to both philosophical orientations and pedagogical practices (Butin, 2014), if, as the name indicates, academics are to truly engage with a community. It is here that feminist and Writing Studies traditions have much to offer as universities reimagine graduate education to include the doing of community engagement.

2 As has been well documented (e.g., Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2014), the government is withdrawing significant support from higher education, prompting institutions to raise tuition to cover the shortfall. Moreover, as the numbers of grants decrease and the amount of student debt increases, the public understandably asks if higher education is worth the price. As I have argued elsewhere (Sheridan, 2014), this questioning can be dangerous when those of us in higher education, including those in writing studies, struggle to explain our value to those beyond our classrooms (cf Duffy, 2012).

3 The Carnegie Foundation designation is but one measure. According to the Campus Compact’s 2013 annual membership survey, support for community engagement is growing, as evident in rising levels of support for faculty (via faculty development workshops; sample syllabi and assessment materials; tenure and review rewards) (p. 3); for students (via service considered in admissions criteria; graduation requirements; student awards) (p. 4); and for alumni (via service opportunities; public recognitions; university awards) (p. 4). Similarly, budgets for campus engagement centers are rising (p. 8), and center staff are increasingly credentialized. Collectively, these efforts show that universities are not only valuing community engagement, they’re devoting more material resources to foster such engagement. And though such work may be, in part, to redress the current public relations crisis that questions higher education’s price tag and relevance, higher education has an opportunity to demonstrate its value in part through developing meaningful community engagement.

Since the earliest days of Women (and Gender) Studies Departments, feminist scholars have advocated for community engagement as fundamental to the university's mission, as Adrienne Rich outlined in a "Woman-Centered University:"

"Ideally, I imagine a very indistinct line between 'university' and 'community' instead of the familiar city-on-a-hill frowning down on its neighbors, or the wrought-iron gates by which town and gown have traditionally defined their relationship" (1979, p. 152).

While some have asked what makes *feminist* community-engaged scholarship distinct (cf Iverson & James, 2014), in general, it's that scholars in are asking questions similar to ones feminists have been asking for years: Who gets to decide on the project, and how? Whose voices are heard? Who benefits? How do we foster genuine, reciprocal relationships?⁴

Such feminist questions highlight the importance of examining power, knowledge making, and genuine partnership—topics the university would be wise to address in its deep dive into community engagement (cf Orr, 2011).⁵ Yet while such questions prompt us to think about relations *between* university members and community partners,⁶ they are also relevant for relations *within* university groups, such as within faculty and graduate community-engaged collaborations. This is certainly the case for feminist community-engaged scholars committed to designing threshold experiences for graduate students, both for their current education and for opening possibilities for similar work in their future.⁷

Writing Studies also has a long history with community engagement, from democratic impulses that call for class mobility or critical consciousness to scholars promoting reciprocal relationships between academic and community partners, as the chapters in this collection demonstrate. Writing Studies scholars have built on these histories to the point that community engagement is

4 In the same ways that feminists focus on power and the consequences of that power, feminist community engagement scholars also examine power and privilege in their work, as evident in the types of questions they ask: How can we change the fact that the voices least heard in community-engaged research, according to Stoecker and Tryon (2009), are community partners—those with the least power to shape the scholarly write-up and discussions about such partnership work? Or, how is it that community engagement is defined in a way that, as Mena and Vaccaro (2015) argue, frequently occludes engagement by women of color, precisely because their work often focuses on everyday community survival for those without much privilege?

5 For a history of divergent trends of current feminist community engagement scholarship, see Costa and Leong (2013), especially their distinctions between more individually-focused entrepreneurial models and the more structural, social justice models of community engagement.

6 See Stoecker and Tryon (2009) about the need for more attention to community partners.

7 For discussions in this collection, see Mathis & Boehm about graduate student experiences and see Brandt et al. as well as Concannon et al. about undergraduate student experiences.

prevalent. Individual papers and panels focusing on community engagement are becoming more prominent at our local, national, and international conferences; engaged scholarship is not only being accepted into flagship journals, but also becoming the focus of special issues, monographs, edited collections, and books; MLA Job List postings are calling for community-engaged specializations in their announcements; and graduate programs are adding course offerings in community literacies (Fero et al., 2008), civic responsibility (Bowen et al., 2014), or service learning within feminist activist frames (Webb et al., 2007).

The calls to develop models for community-engaged, graduate education within Writing Studies parallel those circulating elsewhere in higher education. For example, Professor of Higher Education Kerry Ann O'Meara (2008) argued that graduate students should have multiple, repeated opportunities for community engagement—from coursework to a practicum to extended projects that may lead to dissertation work. MIT Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning professor Lorlene Hoyt (2010) similarly proposed an expansion of the sites for community engagement both within higher education (e.g., in individual assignments, within individual courses, across multiple courses, and in thesis and dissertations) and within the community (e.g., working on city boards; including graduate student salaries as a budget line in community grant applications). These and other opportunities to engage with communities beyond our classrooms could change the way knowledge is created and shared, a goal for graduate education. This potential may be pursued by focusing on what Hoyt called “reciprocal” knowledge making: “For higher education, [this reciprocal knowledge making] means conceiving of knowledge differently, rethinking how professionals are prepared in the academy and how knowledge generated by citizens is valued in the university; it also means

[Doing DMA, I learned] that I really LOVE community engagement like I thought I would. . . . It has [also] been a crash course in logistics management. There are so many things to juggle that I never would have thought of if I hadn't experienced it. It has also been a crash course in responsivity (my favorite word). We obviously had really detailed plans on our way into camp but also adjusted them a lot to what was actually happening, and not just what we thought was happening. I also got to see the way [my research on] trauma impacts community work in some incredibly interesting ways that I'm still processing but can't wait to write about.

– Michelle, 2015 Camp Blog, <https://dma-2015research.wordpress.com/2015/06/25/day-nine/>

I think it would be almost more appropriate to think of this experience [in DMA] as equivalent to a course for me. . . . It was like a practicum in doing place-based, you know, person-based research. I think it was really cool that we got to plan it from the very earliest stages, everything from who do we involve, how do we involve them, and what age, and do we do just girls, you know, do we do all one grade, do we do this a couple times over the summer or do we only do it once? And then, obviously, day to day, a lot of planning, too: purchasing tools and technology, and software, and so on. So we were heavily—we were given basically sole control over the project. Mary P was very hands-off and that was really cool from a learning perspective. I feel like I did learn a lot about planning this sort of camp and, you know, teaching in general [and] research in general.

– Elizabeth, interview

ters on campus, students wanting to do such work in graduate school need more “systematic means” to meet the challenges and opportunities of both participating in genuine community engagement and graduating within the given timeframe (2008).

Providing knotworking collaborations within graduate education could be one such systematic means.

adopting broader and more humanistic modes of scholarship evolving into more nimble and responsive civic institutions” (2010, p. 86).

Such efforts in feminist studies, Writing Studies, and community-engaged scholarship provide expertise the university could tap as it investigates how to infuse community engagement in graduate education while minimizing the “push and pull” graduate students may face when attempting to do community-engaged work (Feigenbaum, 2008). As Paul Feigenbaum explained, despite good intentions and genuine desire from many quar-

WHY KNOTWORKING COLLABORATIONS IN GRADUATE EDUCATION

From the outset, let me say I struggle with how to name this project; I’m working with the provisional title of knot-working collaborations with the hopes that others can build on this project to find alternative naming options. I want these collaborative opportunities to be part of an institutional structure, but I’m aware

of the tactical suppleness central to community-engaged projects—projects that arise and fade based on myriad factors that are often at odds with academic, institutional structures. *Knotworking* attempts to get at this. Although I appreciate concepts like *community*, *community of practice*, or *discourse communities*,⁸ these terms also evoke more homogenized, almost utopic spaces that simplify the complex multiplicity happening in these temporary groups that are coming together in a shared project that is shot through with diverse, even conflicting histories and goals (see Prior, 2015). In contrast, knotworking, according to Engeström, Engeström, and Vähäaho's model (1999), refers to braided activities when people collaborate on an issue or project, bringing together their own (often disparate) agendas, histories, tools, and goals, to form a stabilized-for-now group. Work is distributed, often unevenly, and, upon completion, participants go their separate ways. This uneven work distribution in stabilized-for-now groups better captures what I am looking for.

Similarly, while *collaboration* may have halcyon associations that are important to interrogate, I prefer this to other common terms like *apprenticeship* and even *mentoring* given that these latter terms often focus on one-to-one as opposed to group relations, and often emerge out of hierarchical models (Rickly & Harrington, 2002) that feminists generally work against. Fully recognizing the default power relations in student-faculty community-engaged projects, I am nonetheless persuaded by Sosnowski and Burmeister (2006) that collaboration, perhaps especially in graduate studies, provides a viable way to overtly address this concern. Such a premise is part of Dana Bisignani's (2014) feminist model, with its goal of creating structures that give newcomers legitimate ways to contribute to a project. Through what she has described as "collective responsibility and problem-solving" (96), Bisignani seeks to defamiliarize students of their traditional roles and routine, thereby creating what I call threshold experiences that can help graduate students develop new projective identities (Gee, 2003). By changing the traditional, hierarchical relationships through new participation possibilities, those within such projects enact a feminist goal of creating the conditions for, as Bisignani has described it, "students [to] actively engage in critical problem-solving and participate in *constructing* their knowledge rather than simply *receiving* it" (p. 96).

In my proposal of knotworking collaborations, graduate students and faculty come together on a shared project, during which they jointly engage in deep learning (in this case developing the dispositions and skills that mark communi-

8 Writing studies has long interrogated the idea of community, whether in reference to language communities (Prior, 1998) or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Prior's (2015) "Community" essay in *Keywords in Writing Studies* provides a nice overview of this critique.

ty engagement threshold experiences), and after which they take what they have learned to form new collaborations in future projects. As is typical of community engagement projects, the specifics of what knotworking collaborations may look like in practice will vary depending on the local resources and conditions, but what distinguishes knotworking collaborations are the participation roles that exceed those typical of many community-engaged projects. To learn the expectations of such roles, students new to a group need multiple, low-barrier entry points with helpful guides along the way (cf Jenkins, 2009) and intense commitments of time, responsibility, and guided opportunity so that students develop the skills and dispositions to take on leadership roles whereby they are poised to rework power dynamics that permeate typical master-apprenticeship models.



Figure 11.1. 2014 DMA teachers—faculty and graduate students alike—collaborate in low-barrier activities as they prepare for that day’s storyboarding workshop.

By providing graduate students with experiences in which they are challenged and supported to become meaning makers who co-construct knowledge helpful to the group, knotworking collaborations provide threshold experiences that can help students reorient their understandings of themselves, in this instance about what it means to be a community-engaged scholar-teacher. This was the case at DMA.

DIGITAL MEDIA ACADEMY (DMA): KNOTWORKING COLLABORATION AS A FEMINIST THRESHOLD EXPERIENCE

DMA illustrates how knotworking collaborations can function as a feminist-informed threshold experience by providing deep learning opportunities to do community engagement. To achieve that goal, DMA seeks to destabilize power hierarchies that prove unproductive to graduate education and, instead, provide both opportunities for collaborative knowledge making on complex issues and opportunities for participants to redefine themselves and their roles in this knowledge-making process.

Within this framework, DMA, like all community engagement projects, emerged within specific conditions, some that may be familiar and some that may be distinct. The University of Louisville is like so many others in its ramping up of attention given to community engagement. On the one hand, the university has initiated projects designed to integrate community engagement across campus. For example, in AY 2013-2014, DMA's inaugural year, the university was completing what would become its successful application for re-accreditation as a Carnegie Foundation Elective Community Engagement Classification university; the Delphi Center for Teaching and Learning hosted a year-long, interdisciplinary Faculty Learning Community on Community Engagement; there were on-going campus presentations on successful university-community partner projects; and, the Provost appointed a faculty member to conduct a year-long study of UofL and comparator schools with the goal of figuring out how to facilitate community engagement throughout the university. On the other hand, in many parts of the university, community engagement remained largely ad hoc, and often absent. This was the case in the English department, though the department was open to more structured initiatives, if someone would take the lead.

In 2013, a year after arriving at Louisville, I offered a graduate seminar in Community Literacy where students read community engagement scholarship and participated in a semester-long project. About 3/5 of the class worked with community partners of their choosing, spending regular hours in those sites, and composing documents that these community organizations desired; the other 2/5 worked with two Jefferson County Public Schools on an on-going digital storytelling project I coordinated before the semester, a project led by teachers in the College of Education. During this graduate seminar, we all composed documents that "did work in the world" (i.e., documents negotiated with community partners for their use) with the goal of understanding the systemic forces shaping these sites (for an example of this understanding, see Perry, Chapter 10, this collection). Several of us wrote grant proposals, and three community partners

received grant funding, as did I for the Digital Media Academy.

DMA first ran in June 2014, when five University of Louisville doctoral students and I inaugurated this two-week digital media camp for rising sixth-grade girls from two Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville. Connecting with two public elementary schools, one of which scored in the bottom 3 percent of Kentucky public schools, we developed shared goals. Initially, we sought to address the “summer slide,” when children (particularly lower-income children) tend to lose academic skills—especially in reading and writing—during the school-free summer months (National Summer Learning Association, 2009; Borman, 2000). This goal was gradually superseded by a second goal: slightly modifying Stuart Selber (2004), we sought to help girls develop the technological, critical, and design literacies they needed to create digital messages of their choosing, thus encouraging girls to be critical producers, not just consumers, of digital media. Building on literature that showed how STEM fields had high income possibilities but few females (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011), DMA sought to provide role models and hands-on experiences that might encourage girls to persevere in their academic and personal interests, perhaps even pursuing STEM opportunities. In addition to exposing the systematic economic roadblocks girls face, DMA worked to help girls recognize and redesign the pervasive sexualized and commercialized images of what it means to be a girl today (for a fuller description, see Chamberlain, Gramer & Hartline, 2015; Sheridan, 2015).

I also learned a lot about graduate education. I mean, just the fact that, I just think that teaching, and research, and the sort of crazy on-the-go stuff that you end up having to do in administrative work—they were all working together. They were all happening at the same time, in ways that they will all be happening at the same time when we’re all eventually faculty members somewhere. So it sort of gave us all a chance to experience that, that I think was really good, and valuable.

– Megan, interview

In addition to the girls and their communities, DMA targeted a second group of participants: graduate students. Balancing teaching, research, administration, and community engagement is messy work (see also Mathis & Boehm, Chapter 6, this collection), and my goals for DMA included creating structured opportunities for participants to reflect upon and engage in that mess of creating curriculum, conducting individually defined research based on that curriculum, and being a community-engaged teacher-schol-

ar through that curriculum. Such structured opportunities are often underdeveloped in graduate education (cf Miller et al., 1997), and this absence makes it a struggle for graduate students' transition to faculty ways of doing (Moore & Miller, 2006). In contrast, DMA requires this doing and reflecting, and partially through this process becomes a site of deep learning, a possible threshold experience that exposes graduate students to the complexity they may face in their careers.

It is this part of DMA—the feminist practices seeking to intervene in current graduate education in community engagement that I am calling knotworking collaborations—that I want to explore here.

Across its institutional lifespan and in myriad ways, DMA and ongoing reflection on this project function as a threshold experience, providing participants a learning-by-doing opportunity that changes many participants' views of themselves and of their research, teaching, and community-engaged work in and beyond graduate school (for examples of the complications of this work see Brandt et al. and Concannon et al., this collection). As detailed above, for such work to be successful, students must be active participants in a shared experience that shifts authority and expertise from a centralized knower to a group of knowers with authority and expertise distributed across the group.



Figure 11.2. I provide logistical support during a workshop led by graduate student Michelle Day, DMA's specialist in trauma-informed pedagogy.

In the first year of DMA, that transition of knowledge-making authority happened over several months, with reflection spreading out for over a year. Living out such a shift in power and subsequent knowledge making, I argue, is part of a threshold experience.

Before the camp, I held much of the power: since I imagined and founded DMA—designed the project, wrote the grants for funding, selected the graduate students, developed the community partnerships, secured the speakers, and so forth—I clearly shaped the structures of DMA.⁹ And yet, once we started our six months of weekly meetings before the camp, we began to forge a more collaborative path for enacting a particular instance of DMA within those structures. Along the way, I structured opportunities for graduate students to take up new responsibilities for knowledge making through activities such as choosing readings, creating curriculum, designing assessments, and teaching newly learned digital media programs and platforms (e.g., Gimp, iMovie, WordPress, Instagram).

During DMA, the transition continued as lessons learned from camp shaped all of our research, teaching, and community engagement. As Keri wrote in our daily de-brief blog entry during camp, “I feel like I’ve learned so much about how to be flexible and respond to a wide range of situations, whether those were technical issues or responding to emotional or behavioral issues. I have also never worked this closely with a team of teachers, and I appreciated learning from all the other fabulous teachers at camp this year. I learned different pedagogical techniques that I am certain I will take into my college classrooms (like Sara’s excellent discussion of how to talk to be a culturally sensitive educator).”

After camp, we drew upon our individual histories and anticipated futures to pursue our distinct DMA-inspired projects. These research projects addressed a range of topics, such as professionalizing new teachers in alternative ways, exploring digital humanities projects in our field, and identifying structures to foster community engagement in higher education. We also used this camp as a research site for publications (Chamberlain, Gramer, & Hartline, 2015; Sheridan, 2015), conference presentations (Gramer, 2015; Hartline, March 2015; Hartline, October 2015; Sheridan, March 2015; Sheridan, April 2015), grant proposals (Sheridan, Gramer, & Hartline, 2014-15; Sheridan, 2015), dissertation projects, and even awards.¹⁰ DMA likewise shaped the graduate students’ teaching trajectories: one

9 In this way, DMA started as what Engeström, Engeström, and Vähäaho (1999) call individually-focused knotworking as opposed to collectively-focused knotworking. As I argue, this focus shifted during DMA both in a given year as teachers took on more responsibility and over several years as Dr. Andrea Olinger takes over as point faculty person for DMA in 2016.

10 Elizabeth Chamberlin, Rachel Gramer, and Megan Hartline won the Carolyn Krause Maddox Prize in Women’s & Gender Studies, University of Louisville. I won

person chose to teach a digitally mediated class, others included community-engaged projects in her undergraduate teaching, and another continued her interest in teacher training as an assistant director in the writing program. Finally, graduate students pursued their community-engaged work in future projects in ways they had not before (e.g., a community-engaged Art as Memory collective project that three DMA teachers participated in).

These possibilities demonstrate a *knotworking* collaboration in that participants brought their own histories and agendas to a com-

mon project and applied what they learned on subsequent individual and collaborative projects, unbraiding and, at times, re-braiding with other DMA participants (and others) in new ways. As DMA teacher Rachel Gramer (2015) noted, there seems “a ‘need’ for present and current professionalization, to come together and disband across time, space, contexts (and not just with ideas, but also with knowledge of tools and administrative systems for getting work done in institutions—no easy feat).” Gramer continued, “For me, the notion of groups coming together and dispersing as needed is something that happened with DMA as a whole, and

In terms of community engagement work, I think that DMA has really ignited a spark in me to continue this work. I would appreciate the opportunity to replicate this project at another institution when I graduate from UofL. That said, I feel like I have a lot still to learn about this kind of work. For instance, because the tasks were divided up so much from the outset and because Mary P already had such good relationships established with the schools, I still have a lot to learn about the “behind-the-scenes” work or how to get a project like this one started. I would like to continue having conversations with Mary P and other faculty who have started and sustained community engagement projects to learn more about these aspects of community engagement. I feel like DMA has been an excellent experience in getting to carry out a community engagement project, though, and I have appreciated the chance to design and teach this program and hope to have an opportunity to do a similar project in the future.

– Keri, 2015 Camp Blog, <https://dma2015research.wordpress.com/2015/06/25/day-nine/>

the University of Louisville’s Gender Equity Award, the Dr. Mary K. Bonsteel Tachau Award in 2015 largely based on my work with DMA.

then again in our smaller groups (pedagogy, tech). And then these experiences spread into other projects with other folks in different configurations,” which included curricular, extra-curricular, and community-engaged projects. As Gramer pointed out, the “doing” that happened in DMA facilitated other kinds of “doing” (e.g., teaching, researching); having developed skills and dispositions central to community-engaged scholar-teachers, these graduate students sought out additional opportunities for deep learning (possibly threshold experiences), often in community-engaged projects.

This knotworking happened on timescales beyond any one iteration of DMA. During the second annual DMA, one graduate student returned, and four graduate students and one faculty member joined as new DMA teachers. I continued as an initial leader, especially with ongoing structural aspects (e.g., securing funding; selecting teachers and community partners; negotiating for space and resources; liaising with community partners and outside publicity). Meanwhile, the returning teacher, Megan Hartline, took on many leadership roles related to the everyday, informal mentoring of new DMA teachers.

As the camp approached, power again shifted away from the more seasoned participants and became better distributed across all DMA teachers, who again chaired the various subcommittees needed to ensure DMA's success. The following year, this knotworking reconfigured yet again as participants and participation roles continue to change. Dr. Andrea Olinger was the primary faculty member; one teacher, Michelle Day, returned, and four were new; and, our DMA knotworked group again braided together, pursuing goals determined by new participants with new priorities, new histories, and new projected futures. What remains constant is the opportunity for deep learning, both with hands-on experiences to renegotiate power relations, thereby allowing participants interested in community engagement to wrestle with the complexities of such labor, and with opportunities for reflection, thereby helping participants articulate the dissonances and possibilities such profound and uncommon opportunities for feminist-infused knowledge making can provide.

CONCLUSION

If we in Writing Studies share the threshold concept that doing is the leading edge of learning, the question for our field is how do we foster the type of doing/learning that can change the way people orient their thinking and themselves. Threshold experiences are designed to do just that, and these experiences may be particularly beneficial when we encourage students to wrestle with threshold concepts seldom modeled in traditional education structures, such as concepts surrounding community engagement. Yet to provide graduate students with these experiences that

generally exceed the course of a semester, we need new models of graduate education. Knotworking collaborations within feminist community-engaged frameworks—particularly with attention to power dynamics, participation roles, and knowledge creation—provides one model of such a threshold experience, as DMA illustrates.

As a feminist community-engaged

project, DMA not surprisingly follows Rich's exhortation that a research institution "should organize its resources around problems specific to its community" (1979, p. 152). For example, DMA attempts to loosen the barriers between the University of Louisville and the surrounding community by inviting local girls who may never have been on a college campus to a free, two-week camp, where they are provided with meals, technology when they leave (e.g., an iPod touch), hands-on opportunities to learn about and play with top-of-the-line equipment, and conversations about possible local resources and structural obstacles girls face in their education and in their communities. We teachers are provided with opportunities to develop long-term partnerships with local schools so that we can better learn with and from this community about what resources they find available and what is needed for girls and ourselves, individually and collectively, to become genuine problem-solvers. Together, we explore how shared experiences with digital composing can help create structures that call for and temporarily create more interesting, equitable, and engaging worlds for all of us.

It is the *process* of pursuing that goal that marks DMA as a knotworking collaboration focused on the messy efforts inherent in being a feminist community-engaged faculty. Much of this collaboration is premised on creating opportunities to develop new roles and new ways of doing that can lead to new skills and new dispositions.

I'm really glad I got to experience DMA for a second time. Much of the project was the same, but it was also very different. And I liked getting to work on assessment and technology after doing logistics and pedagogy last year. I'm really grateful for the experience to do this type of engaged work—as service, as pedagogy, and as research. I realized over the course of the year that these types of experiences are not universal for graduate students, and I think it's really helpful for those of us who want to do this type of scholarship. And it's a great opportunity to do research, think about pedagogy in a different way, and take on the logistical challenges of administrative work.

– 2015 Camp, <https://dma2015research.wordpress.com/2015/06/25/day-nine/>



Figure 11.3. “J” and “LN” share with Keri Mathis their ideas for the final showcase video. After working at DMA, Keri worked for Dean Beth Boehm to collaboratively run the Community Engagement Academy (Chapter 6, this collection), a project that supports graduates students from across the university for community-engaged projects of their own.

And it is through opportunities to engage in and reflect upon these experiences that we help graduate students learn what it means to be a feminist community-engaged scholar.

This work is not easy. For example, one obstacle we face is addressing hierarchical structures that make it difficult for graduate students to take up new knowledge-making roles. This is the case at DMA. In the first two cohorts, all teachers took classes I taught during the year they taught at DMA; I serve on 9 of the 10 teachers’ dissertation committees and was chair of the 10th teacher’s culminating MA project. Power is present. Although we overtly created opportunities to negotiate this during DMA, the ground work for redressing traditional power dynamics was ongoing.¹¹ For instance, prior to DMA, we incrementally reworked traditional graduate student-faculty roles (e.g., we collaborated on campus workshops and national conference presentations with each of us focusing on our own areas

¹¹ Graduate school often provides thick networks of varied interactions (classes, community projects, shared learning opportunities, social occasions) across extended periods of time, which can facilitate such renegotiations. These varied and extended opportunities are less common for undergraduates. In this collection, see Mathis and Boehm as well as Brandt et al. for examples.

of expertise; I asked graduate students to lead campus workshops on topics where they had more digital expertise than I; graduate students took primary responsibility for segments of a national conference I ran, such as creating a digital archive or co-editing print publications emerging from the conference). At DMA, graduate students took the lead in making a particular iteration of the camp, whether in teaching their specializations to all of us (e.g., Michelle Day’s workshop on trauma informed training; Sara Alvarez’s workshop on culturally sustaining pedagogy) or perhaps just to me (e.g., Elizabeth’s Chamberlain’s digital tutorials; Rachel Gramer’s refresher course on teacher training). After DMA, they accepted my push for research and teaching projects to come out of DMA, but tweaked my suggestions to demystify available power structures for women and girls’ participation in digital media (Blair & Tulley, 2007; Jaschik, 2013; Juhasz & Balsamo, 2012) to pursue projects *they* cared about; building on their understandings of themselves as problem-posers, they asserted their knowledge creation. Throughout this process, these students enacted feminist epistemologies and methodologies within *and beyond* the extended moment of doing DMA. Such threshold experiences, I believe, were facilitated by the conscious attention to modulating power dynamics—a practice that had the added benefit of encouraging buy-in, often a concern if a project feels foisted upon graduate students (Rickly & Harrington, 2002).



Figure 11.4. Elizabeth Chamberlain helps “M” realize her goals for creating her “I Am” project. After reflecting on such DMA experiences, Elizabeth altered how she positioned herself on the job market the following year. (Photo Credit: Stone, 2014)

As DMA illustrates, knotworking collaborations are messy and complex, requiring flexibility and time that exceed more traditional academic experiences. Nonetheless, by providing such alternative models of graduate education, such collaborations encourage graduate students to tactically join together to *do* (rather than solely imagine or read about others doing), which can help graduate students understand themselves and their disciplinary projects in new ways.

Moreover, the collaborative braiding and rebraiding of these deep-learning projects help all of us investigate our future identities as faculty, as we come together in joint activity, then go our own ways, possibly changed for having taken part in the process. Such time-intensive threshold experiences provide an alternative model of graduate education that can pave the way for training future cohorts of feminist community-engaged teacher-scholars.

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