Chapter 1. Why Should Assessment Matter?

Walking across campus to my office, I pass the well-endowed computer science complex and the new fine arts building. On the sidewalk, red inlays display the names of faculty and students in the performing arts who have taken home Emmy, Oscar, Grammy, and Tony awards over the years. The lampposts that line the sidewalk are likewise decorated with banners celebrating the accomplishments of my colleagues with photos of them in their labs, where they test a robot or write calculations on the board. The banner titles herald these faculty as "The Innovators." As you might guess, the award winners are primarily in science, engineering, information systems, or the high-profile performing arts. A recent email from our new president celebrated a leadership appointment in Marketing and Communications that will "highlight our breadth and depth in scholarship, education and *societal impact*" (emphasis added).

All these symbolic messages illustrate the value we place on visible outcomes that have equally visible social impact. A more familiar parallel message in our own field, journals, and departments, however, is likely to note that the liberal arts are in crisis—or to be more precise, face being rendered obsolete, irrelevant to new realities, and underfunded in an age of austerity. And it raises the question: How do we point out our visible outcomes and societal impact? I hear John Dewey insisting that the meaning and worth of the ideas and practices we teach reside in the consequences of holding those ideas. And in the outcomes.

Socially Engaged Education

Our field, especially the committed educators referenced here, has long been working to make a case for many sorts of community engagement. Appearing in rhetoric, communication, composition, and English journals, the proposed responses to the question of our worth can range from assertively defending the scholarly status quo to instead calling us to engage with a public on its own terms around its felt dilemmas. The particular focus of my contribution here will be on a form of engagement that ties the serious study of rhetoric and learning to locally-engaged action—a kind of learning not defined by the acquisition of familiar bodies of knowledge, but by the construction and use of productive knowledge that is measured by outcomes. And a focus, in particular, on a still rare form of assessment based on actual outcomes for the engaged college student.

This chapter starts by sketching a particular paradigm of community-based socially engaged learning emerging in rhetorical studies and educational research: a paradigm in which an explicit goal of education is both judgment and wise action (based on what rhetoric describes as *phronésis*, or practical wisdom). Here

the product of learning includes situated knowledge, and evaluation is based on the test of transfer beyond the classroom. Within this paradigm, we begin to see the unique educational value of courses that can draw students into a purposeful engagement with public issues, community interests, exigencies, and people. When students begin to take this engaged stance toward their own learning, they move toward the goals Linda Adler-Kassner and Peggy O'Neill set for the field: "We . . . must learn how to communicate our knowledge effectively beyond our own discipline and specialties so we can affect the discussions being held in state legislatures, departments of education, corporate boards, public commissions, and public forums" (qtd. in Welch 703). Such learning, I would add, also includes how to listen for and understand those needs.

In her excellent analysis of the public turn in composition, Ashley Holmes shows why it has emerged as such a powerful model of community engagement. *Public Pedagogy in Composition Studies* lays out a probing introduction to Henry Giroux and his "critical analysis" of the neo-liberal logic of our culture that promotes consumerism and individualism. In response, Holmes' case study research shows us ways "public pedagogy" can also allow students to enter and "engage public spaces as a method of analysis and critique" (13). The "spatial shock" of entering those spaces can not only reveal social-produced assumptions but trigger reflection on our own positionality (25). Nevertheless, as Phyllis Ryder argues, "the university [also] operates in a space saturated with neoliberal justifications for its purpose: to boost the economy, to create good workers, and to create its 'products' efficiently" (qtd. in Holmes 16-17). Recognizing that the problem is not just "out there," is one reason the notion of "location" and the "relocation" of the classroom has gained prominence. As John Ackerman and David Coogan's *The Public Work of Rhetoric* makes explicit, that work "is not shaped in our treatises and classrooms alone but in the material and discursive histories of communities outside of academe" (1-2).

Nevertheless, giving social significance a central place in a liberal curriculum will face two hurdles. First, if we attend to Dewey's insistence that the meaning of an idea resides in the consequences of holding that idea, then we must be able to articulate and show *what* those consequences are. How do we understand, much less track, those outcomes in which learning is measured not by tests and papers, but by rhetorical *praxis*: socially situated inquiry, dialogue, reflection and action?

Second, to complicate this agenda, a focus on outcomes has taken on a new, politically loaded meaning in contemporary education. "Outcomes" has been appropriated as the God-word of a neoliberal agenda designed to produce (and selectively subsidize) quantifiable, marketable skills as defined by the corporate sector and the ever-growing educational assessment industry.[1] Nancy Welch and

1. To put this market-based approach to education in a historical context, Carolyn Commer's gripping study of the controversy raised by the 2005 Spellings Commission report tracks the heated reception of the Department of Education's attempt to increase "accountability" in higher education. The red flag that aroused educators was not only this

Tony Scott's edited collection *Composition in the Age of Austerity* offers us competing arguments for how our field should respond to this "felt sense of crisis . . . in writing education" (4). In a review of those essays, David Grant notes how some of the most vigorous critiques reveal the engine of neoliberalism at work, actively shaping "how policy has changed to reward outcomes rather than inputs, where the educational emphasis on outcomes is typically placed in opposition to 'experience'" (12). To be more specific, experience is a valued outcome in a neoliberal education when it is transferrable to a marketable *work* experience. And those institutional forces that control cuts in funding, staff, and courses devalue any effort to create a traditional, if somewhat unspecified, "broadening experience" by asking instead for indicators of success that can be measured by assessment. So here's the rub: The assessment these institutions have in mind is based on functionalist measures associated with the neoliberal premise Scott describes as "the embedded commonsense principle that most spheres of human life are better perceived, managed, and evaluated as markets" (qtd. in Grant 8).

Fortunately, that is not the only way to play this game. Deborah Mutnick's response to austerity calls us to "address these problems through on-going work . . . [that can] reclaim assessment and perform it on our own terms" (qtd. in Welch and Scott 40). I think of this as a call for grounded-theory building in which we must create both an expanded image of what we are after (an expanded theory of knowledge) and the methods to recognize it. This image, philosopher Sandra Harvey argues, makes a difference: it "answers questions about who can be a 'knower' . . . what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge . . . [and] what kinds of things can be known" (qtd. in Shah 14). Imagine, for example, an expanded image of knowledge, its knowers and its tests that might recognize the standing of local, rural, impoverished or indigenous knowers, and their experiential, cultural, situated knowledge. It might include a grasp of things a feminist science would see as having alternative evidence-based explanations.

Some Problems with Assessment

A different criticism of our current assessment tools comes from Aimée Knight's recent argument for an asset-based assessment approach to community development, that is, one focused on strengths rather than the community's deficits or on problems the institutional partner sets out to "solve." Like Adrienne Maree Brown, Knight prioritizes the slow work of building relationships versus critical

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attempt at control, but its basis in a "market discourse." In *Championing a Public Good: A Call to Advocate for Higher Education*, Commer explores a revealing repertoire of argument strategies that shaped this still unfinished argument (e.g., from dissociating quality from the market measures of quantity, to framing desired outcomes in terms of ethical values as opposed to technical expertise). At stake is the contest between a managerial frame for assessment versus the academic and humanistic values that support the public good in a deliberative democracy.

mass. In her rich presentation of strategies and tools for building truly reciprocal relations, she argues that our current methods of evaluation put the university's gains (publications, grants, even student learning outcomes) over "community-building." (22). So in developing community partnerships she proposes three guiding principles: 1) focus on communities' strengths and assets, 2) prioritize co-creation of knowledge with partners, and 3) work towards change in the process of community work. (16) . And in her assessment of students, what matters is whether they are prepared to participate in civic life as "agents of social change" (49). She notes a pre/post survey that asked if the experience motivated them to subsequent community engagement and action, "more that 80% of students felt the experience 'greatly influenced their attitudes and beliefs about their capacity to create change'" (88). Did they do so?

In that spirit, the present study explores an alternative image of assessment based on cases that will let us test drive a variety of alternative assessment methods. First of all, such an image locates the meaning of the ideas one learns as John Dewey does: in the consequences of holding them, which will in turn demand a much more situated assessment of outcomes. Secondly, this Deweyan image of assessment captures a distinctive intellectual capacity that is best learned through communal activity. This is not to say that such capacities would not be "marketable," but Dewey's end-in-view is an education designed for citizenship. Such an education demands "a clear consciousness of a communal life" and activities "whose consequences are appreciated as . . . a good shared by all" (*The Public and its Problems* 149). The "training for citizenship," he observes, "is formal and nominal unless it develops the power of observation, analysis, and inference with respect to what makes up a social situation and the agencies through which it is modified" ("Ethical Principles" 127). Finally, by tracking the consequences of engagement at a more cognitive level, this image of assessment reveals some significant outcomes that are not limited to the direct *transfer* of knowledge, but as we will see, can entail students' *transformation* of that knowledge in response to emerging personal and community concerns.

Engaged education has a unique potential to fuse civic and social, personal and intellectual outcomes into an expansive version of the humanities. Discovering more ways to track these consequences of publicly engaged learning can, I believe, offer a new road map and tools in our search for public significance of the liberal arts in its "crisis." Helping build such a case is the focus of this study.

Making the Case for Engaged Education

For some, this engaged image, which extends what matters in the humanities, will seem perhaps too constraining compared to an unfettered life of the mind. In an impassioned defense of traditional scholarship, Kathleen McConnell's argument celebrates the freedom of academic professionals to do "academic inquiry [that] serves rhetorical invention by acting as a placeholder for the unknown," which

is expressed, as she defines it, as "endless gestures toward unspecified possibility" (52-53). This stance, she notes, is a clear departure "from more civic-minded, pragmatic notions [of invention] such as the one Hartelius seeks to revive . . . [through training] in rhetorical strategies" (52). E. Johanna Hartelius, to whom McConnell refers, does indeed define higher education's problem as precisely its lack of "relevance and responsiveness to societal exigencies" (153). Explicitly concerned with pedagogy, Hartelius argues that academic "silos" and the critical orientation that dominates education (focused on the "critical" analysis of texts and their ideology) won't prepare students to actually intervene as social agents. Hartelius' alternative builds on a rhetoric of classical invention and contemporary inquiry, situated in a "climate of exigency" (162). Here, in contrast to traditional acquisition, learning is shot through with uncertainty and ambiguity. In this situated and social space, students must build bridges between academic and lived knowledge. To deal with the problems this demand for inquiry and invention poses, her students are cast "as the agents of education" (171).

From a somewhat different perspective rooted in a feminist analysis of advocacy and leadership, Jane Detwiler, Margaret LaWare, and Patricia Wojahn argue that this elevation of scholarship (which privileges elite institutions) and the concomitant devaluation of teaching, much less "service," is a gendered choice. Their alternative vision of disciplinary leadership exhorts our field to create interdisciplinary collaborations with schools and community organizations. Even our graduate programs, some argue, "should be attending to the collaborative skills needed to build community-based research programs" (Miller and Murray 437).

The demand for an *engaged* education is raised a notch when we look at the situations students will face. Carolyn Commer's study of the Spellings controversy gives us an impressively actionable account of what "public-facing leadership" could look like when we choose to enter, as she says, "education policy-making, with the goal of helping those in higher education create new pathways for public engagement . . . [when we take] a *participant approach* to policy theory" (*Shaping Policy* 21). To do that, our students must be prepared to deal with the fact "that most education policy problems are fundamentally *rhetorical* problems. . . . because they are marked by uncertainty and require people to use language to appeal to particular audiences, to discover shared values, and to invite others to take particular actions that have material consequences" (*Championing* 4).

Garret Stack shows us how such mediation must work in environmental education, training students to become "transformative public advocates." To do this means working as "knowledge negotiators" facing a wide variety of arguments while at the same time drawing the public into "addressing conflict and re-framing a shared problem" (Stack and Flower 3).

In an extensive review of the "crisis discourse" in the liberal arts, Timothy Barouch and Brett Ommen pose the problem as a long-standing question of identity: Is rhetoric a critical discipline or a practical art? If the former, is its current version (which they say identifies scholarship with the discourse of a

"negative critical stance") actually equipping students to negotiate "liberal public culture" (164)? Speaking from communication studies, they dissect the recent "genre of 'defenses of a liberal arts education'" that attempts to "*justify current educational practices* . . . rather than *consider changes to the tradition*" (162). They contrast rhetoric as a practical art with the "obstinacy" of continuing to identify our value with our critique of liberalism and contemporary culture—a stance which merely "presumes that knowledge of conditions of oppression will lead to emancipation" (168).

Barouch and Ommen's alternative to such education raises the bar from critique to actual engagement. Education for engagement would prepare us to face what Albert Hirschman calls the "successive eruption of problems and crises" that emerge in society and the "*steady diet of conflicts* that need to be addressed," which society must learn to "manage" (emphasis added, qtd. in Barouch and Ommen 170). Here, managing is the key.[2] Barouch and Ommen envision a "new mode of liberal art" built on developing rhetorical praxis, with the goal of "capacity-building as equipment for living within and among limits" (173). Their students, for instance, would demonstrate the ability not only to recognize the element of risk in any rhetorical act, but to respond with the socially required practice of "creation within constraints" (171).

Barouch and Ommen's expectation for a "concrete" response does point out a limit to the "inventional curriculum" Hartelius proposes, in which invention is the art of "creativity, discovery, and intellectual production" (173). Engaged rhetorical education can indeed offer "equipment for living" in the form of a rhetorical praxis that, attuned to conflict, builds the capacity to make wise choices in the face of uncertainty, risk, and limits (173). However, Barouch and Ommen also point out that this ideal of "equating invention with intellectual production" won't necessarily lead to change or "produce things in the broader world of contemporary liberal constraints"—unless we are also able to couple those "abstract ideas, general knowledge, and theory . . . [with] concrete objectives" (176). A good example of a "concrete" response would translate an idea or an ethic into a workable methodology. For example, Aja Y. Martinez argues that the use of "counterstories" from marginalized speakers hold "the potential for more democratic representation [that] honors diverse ways of knowing . . . and expanded civic participation to include historically silenced people" (28).

Celebrating the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*'s one hundredth year of publication, Robert Asen traces a similar "melioristic turn" in public sphere scholarship and its growing sense of mission. In moving from the traditional *application* of theory (which operates by "abstracting itself from the practices it seeks

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2. Their language of "managing conflicts" may seem at odds with Janet Atwill's view of rhetoric as what she calls "a transgressive art," the art that transforms limits and conflicts into new pathways of possibility. However, what both these have in common is a situated art of responding to conflict with *praxis*, with reflection and action.

to understand"), this mission starts with a reflexive *critique* of its own methods and concepts. Moreover, it seeks to use theory not only to *read* the world but to *shape* it, which, it turns out, requires "recognizing the mutually informative relationship of theory and practice" (134). In line with this significant shift in speech and communication studies, Asen issues a methodological call for fieldwork and innovative methods that can, for instance, capture "the complexity and variety of relations between multiple publics" (141).

For Nathan Crick, engagements that shape the world involve the process of deliberation. Crick builds a rhetorical rationale for this next step, which takes us directly into the world of community engagement. With John Dewey, he would locate such rhetorical work in that liminal zone where the conflict between new situations and the comfort of habitus becomes illuminated by our impulse toward creative change. Setting this vision in tension with the status quo and its habits can "stimulate intelligent deliberation about possible lines of action in the future" (Crick 301). Rhetorical education can prepare students "by having them consciously encounter new situations . . . that stimulate the imagination and the will . . . [and] acts of intelligence" (302-3). In Crick's study, set in a rhetorical classroom, these conscious encounters can lead us into deliberation which, as Dewey envisions it, "concerns 'the nature of ordinary judgments upon what it is best or wise to do' or more precisely any 'dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing possible lines of action'" (qtd. in Crick 303). This educational ideal of deliberative rehearsal is further expanded to include Dewey's "ethic of communication—that is, an ethic that necessitates taking the perspective of others into account" (Crick 304). In Dewey, Martinez, Asen, and Crick, we see an expansive image of learning and that depends on encounters with others, with conflict, and the need to act.

Back in 2016, I was delighted to find that Crick's essay in *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* was placed next to an account of my own effort to put parts of this rhetorical pragmatist agenda into practice. Devoted to what I called "difference-driven inquiry," mine explored a series of community think tanks that organized and documented cross-cultural, cross-hierarchy problem-solving deliberations on a shared problem (Flower, "Difference-Driven," 318). Out of this growing "public turn" in writing studies, a rich body of research has offered new maps for documenting education for rhetorically based action.[3]

3. For a sense of the varied forms this move to engagement is taking, we might start with Thomas Miller and Joddy Murray's excellent introduction to a special issue of *College English*: "Reimaging Leadership after the Public Turn." Nancy Welch's unflinching analysis of the prospects for public rhetors in a resistant social climate sets a challenge: if, as her title asks, "the point is to change it," what are the links among service outreach, community engagement, and out and out activism? Steve Parks' fine account (and critique of the limits) of my own form of community work argues for a switch to social activism with a laser-focus less on education than on a working-class network mobilizing specific, local, achievable political change ("Sinners Welcome"). Jeffrey Grabill and Ellen Cushman take inventive collaborative digital approaches to "being useful," while studies by John Ackerman and David Coogan,

Unseen Outcomes of Community Engaged Education

These lines of argument for engaged rhetorical education would integrate rhetoric's theoretical thinking and its pragmatic art with the challenges that mark contemporary culture and the risks, values, and uncertainty our students are facing. A pragmatic art would not consign the humanities to the limited (and limiting) paradigm of "course knowledge," which equates knowledge with what appears in texts, lectures, discussions, not to mention tests and papers, which can be easily evaluated. What one learns in rhetoric and composition would not, for instance, be exclusively identified with topics such as grammar, style, and genre, the history of rhetoric or its disciplinary concepts.

This is not to downplay the value and necessity of this sort of foundational knowledge at all. And acquiring this sort of knowledge is, of course, one outcome our institutional apparatus is already well designed to support and measure. On the other hand, the paradigm of engaged education takes students beyond recall, description, analysis, or critique by asking them to create *situated* knowledge through purposeful personal and public interaction with others. That is, it allows them to *integrate* their academic knowledge with experience in ways that will *instantiate, test, challenge, or adapt what they are learning.*

This book explores one particular version of this paradigm I will refer to as *community engaged education*, defined by its ability to create a dialogue between academic research and theory and experience, particularly experience with actual others who differ from oneself. Let me elaborate what these terms mean in this context. The theory, research, and academic arguments we investigate in a course can include powerful concepts, such as the rhetorical situation, transfer, contact zone, ideology, as well as theoretical perspectives, from feminism, cultural studies, or cognitive rhetoric. These are in turn linked to general methods, such as rhetorical, cultural, discourse, and/or activity analysis, and to the more specific tools of grounded-theory building, critical incident interviews, process tracing, or counterstories. When the academic theory one learns moves into engagement with a community (especially when that community is not one's own), experience becomes the educator. That is, engagement with others across difference initiates a dialogue that can teach the *situated* meaning(s) of a theory (such as *transfer)* by instantiating it in practice. At the same time, that dialogue may also challenge, reinterpret, or rewrite academic theory and its assumptions as well as generate new, more adequate understandings.

We see this paradigm of engaged education at work in multiple forms of public

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Nedra Reynolds and Johnathon Mauk take us into the nature of publics. For new research coming out of different engaged agendas, see Ashley Holmes on the practice of public pedagogy, Elenore Long on the challenging process of "early uptake" in building responsive community relations, Jennifer Clifton on rhetorically based community/classroom dialogues, and Rachel Shah (*Rewriting*) on reciprocal partnerships, and others we will see in our discussion of tools.

engagement from community literacy projects and writing centers to partnerships with schools, community centers, non-profits, tribal councils, and neighborhood activists. It speaks through multiple discourses, using writing, multimedia, web and digital tools, in academic and local publications, public forums, and community publishing. But beyond this evidence of an energetic civic "turn" in academic publications, its lasting educational value lies in its call to ground students' intellectual work in a practice of inquiry and deliberative dialogue beyond their home turf, and to do so in the service of wise action in the context of wider, diverse relationships. This kind of hybrid engagement, where research, theory and experiential learning take to the street together, cannot be limited to merely *participating* in service, local projects, or activism. Engaged education calls for a form of praxis built on an *intellectual/experiential dialogue*. And its larger end-in-view must be realized in *outcomes* which are not necessarily limited to material or political ones, but can include engaged public, civic, and community understandings built on that dialogue. Such understandings become ones a student can act on and take into their personal and professional life as well. Although our institutional apparatus is not well designed to track those outcomes beyond the classroom or make our case, new work on transfer can be one promising place to start.

How Does (Does?) an Education for Engagement Transfer?

Much of the contemporary discussion of educational outcomes is couched in the terms of transfer: Is prior knowledge carried over (or not) into new situations? Yet for all its clear importance, the nature of transfer is cloudy: Its meaning has undergone substantive re-conceptualizations and shifts in focus; its process and what triggers it are under debate; and the teaching or training designed to produce it has had mixed success. The research I have noted below reflects some of these critical points of disagreement. On the other hand, if we choose to read these differences as giving us what are inevitably *situated* accounts (rather than broadly inclusive *definitional* ones) we can uncover more useful evidence about the *varied* kinds of intellectual work, shaped by the particular tasks, contexts, and writing our students may face. And, I will argue, reading this research for its accounts of public consequences can also reveal some outcomes of *different* forms of engagement.

How Does Transfer Work?

Our traditional accounts of academic transfer (when it is not simply an automated thought triggered by association) involve applying skills you just learned whether it is to the next assignment or problem set, to a subsequent, more advanced class, to a related situation, or to an essentially new context in which perhaps only a few elements overlap. Perkins and Salomon say this process of transfer can motor down either a low road or a high road. Embarking on the high road typically calls

for metacognition: actively attending to the cues that call up relevant knowledge. For example, suppose you have just been asked to conduct a cross-cultural interview and write up your interpretation of what transpired—a not uncommon task students will meet in all kinds of teamwork, counseling, consulting, or customer service. Of course, there *was* a discussion of this topic in your course readings, but in practice . . . .

A central problem that troubles the transfer research is not the failure to dredge up or use prior classroom or school-based knowledge, but even noticing that it is relevant in a new situation. If the parallels are not explicit, it remains tacit (Bereiter "Knowledge"). In this cross-cultural encounter, our interviewer must not only notice the telling interactional cues (about cultural expectations, for instance) that might or might not call up past learning. She must then call on metacognition to apply it (which could also include an awareness of what she *doesn't* know or potentially problematic/inaccurate assumptions). When this takes the form of explicit declarative knowledge, metaknowledge might include what the interviewer has (or hasn't) learned about interview techniques, as well as connections to past experience, or to the challenge this particular intercultural situation may present. Meta*knowledge,* then, allows the interviewer to represent what they know in ways that lets them think, evaluate, or talk *about* it—if asked. The term meta*cognition,* on the other hand, refers to mental action. Although carried out at varying degrees of awareness, metacognition is the thinking act of calling up and knowingly applying a repertoire of skills and strategies, from a general skill of talking across difference, to strategies learned in a class, such as how to frame a problem or draw out the interviewee's situated knowledge. Metacognitive work can be the high-performance engine of transfer.

However, we should bear in mind that most studies of transfer in our area have been conducted on the transfer from first year writing to subsequent courses or from a course in professional writing to an internship. The unit of analysis is typically either a target task, or the writers themselves (often in terms of their "disposition" to transfer to not), or the contextual features that shape performance. These three foci (on the task, attitude, or context) may offer little insight into the rhetorical or strategic work of the writer. Compare this, for instance, to an approach to teaching transfer in which Craig Moreau starts by documenting the strategies for innovation used in actual workplace teams ("Teams"), translating those into teachable rhetorical moves and then tracking the (successful) transfer of these "practices for innovation rhetoric" in professional writing classes" ("Teaching" 12).

Moreover, recent research has argued that the notion of "transfer" itself is problematic, given its image of a static packet of knowledge to be applied relatively intact across tasks, as when the school genre of proposal-writing is neatly transferred to supposedly parallel tasks in an internship or job (nice work if you can get it). But in fact, these tasks are more likely to call, first, for the recognition that what you learned in school actually applies to the new situation (e.g., is

proposing a new collaborative agenda to an inner-city community group likely to call up the proposal writing assignment you did in college?). In studies of transfer in technical areas, this recognition often meant discerning the "pragmatic relevance" of your "how-to" knowledge to new problems (Bassok and Holyoak 69). Second, even with an awareness of the connection, you will likely be forced to reconstruct what you do know for a typically new, context-bound purpose.

In an effort to go beyond the limits of transfer as direct importation of specific skills or genre features, researchers are proposing new metaphors and ways of conceptualizing transfer as a more constructive process.[4] The expanded act of transfer they document suggests a useful framework for tracking some of the outcomes of engaged education. It may demand the prior work of recontextualizing and integrating ideas across disciplines in which transfer is a rhetorical act (Nowacek). Or transfer might involve *repurposing knowledge* for a new task (Roozen). Or it may require *relearning how to write* and the various kinds of *transformation* Doug Brent's student interns had to undertake.[5] To cross that shadowy divide from school into a new multi-tasking, multi-reader rhetorical environment at work, they had to figure out how to translate their "academic skills into (workplace) practices" (589). To do so, Brent argued, required a repertoire of "highly general strategies for managing new tasks" (589) and "more principles and more conscious awareness of the rhetorical moves [they could] make" (590). Yet, as Brent points out, student writers were frequently unable to articulate these kinds of complex adaptive choices or strategies. The absence of articulation apparently makes a difference. When asked to revise a troubled publicity document, his inexperienced writers depended on the swift, automated slide into rewriting. The experienced writers, on the other hand, displayed the additional ability to recognize, often name, and reflect on choices and alternatives. Of course, the act of diagnosis is a cognitively expensive option. And in our process tracing studies of experts and novices revising, the experienced writers did not always turn to diagnosis. It was, however, what we soon dubbed as "the expert's option": a reflection of the writer's capacity for strategic choice when it was needed (Flower et al., "Detection" 47). And when writers must become, in Rebecca Nowacek's metaphor, "agents of integration," reshaping, repurposing, or resituating their knowledge, strategic choice becomes their ace in the hole.

In the atmosphere of challenge and uncertainty that often surrounds transfer,

4. The following studies offer helpful reviews of this literature, showing some of the different ways in which such transformations can be parsed: Elizabeth Wardle on repurposing ("Creative"); Doug Brent on transformative learning for internships; Anne Beaufort on mental schemas and heuristics (*College Writing*); Ryan Roderick on self-regulation; Kathleen Yancy on reflective meaning making (Introduction).

5. Useful parallels to this contrast in kinds of knowing appear in the work of developmental psychologists Scardamalia and Bereiter, who show how young writers must learn to move from what they call knowledge-telling to knowledge-transformation that takes a larger set of constraints into account (such as a reader's expectations).

it is hardly surprising that a transformative effort will also involve a *disposition* or willingness to engage its demands (Roderick). Such a disposition is affected, as Neil Baird and Bradley Dilger show, not only by the student's expected return on the effort, but also by their sense of ownership and self-efficacy, as well as the easiness with which they face complexity or difficulty (706). Moreover, the past "knowledge" we call up is typically embedded in personal experience, often saturated with its associated affective elements, ranging from curiosity, *ah ha* moments, or confidence, to uncertainty, incompetence, or anxiety (Efklides). So to assess any act of transfer as a significant educational outcome, we must first consider the first consider the contextual, cognitive, and affective demands the individual had to deal with.

Challenging the Assumptions of "Transfer" Itself

At this point, our image of socially significant outcomes gets raised a notch as we begin to see how engaged classes that link academic theory with experience may support a kind of transfer that can reach across tasks, contexts, and time. King Beach enters this debate by significantly expanding the whole unit of analysis beyond the individual and/or the task, redefining transfer as a *sociocultural* interaction between people and their contexts (an interaction which can, in fact, change those relations). As in the case of cross-cultural interviews or a community/university collaboration, writers, whatever their prior knowledge, are being plunged into a network of dynamic, often contradictory forces. In such situations, transfer, as Beach reconceptualizes it, becomes a "consequential transition among social activities" (104). In practice, a transition means stepping beyond mere application of familiar practices into "the construction of new knowledge, identities, ways of knowing and new positionings of oneself in the world" (113). These transitions can become *consequential,* as he uses the term, "when they are consciously reflected on, often struggled with, and the eventual outcome changes one's sense of self and social positioning" (113-14). That is, when the consequence of this reconstruction is the alteration of actual interactions.

To get at another aspect of this complex dynamic, Elizabeth Wardle uses the concept of *creative repurposing*, in which students make the strategic choice to take a "problem-exploring" versus an "answer-getting" approach to new, ill-structured problems (1-2). In the problem-solving stance she observes, students question not only their own habits of mind, but assumptions derived from prior schooling. Like Beach, her theorizing is based on an expanded cognitive and socio-cultural image of learning developed in activity theory (a lens to which we will also turn).

For instance, these "consequential" situations (i.e., ones that demand creative or reconstructive thinking) often involve a shift from one setting or activity system to another, such as from school to work.[6] Or perhaps your situation is itself is in flux,

6. A recent fascinating review of transfer focused on teaching for "information literacy" shows us why community literacy earns a blue ribbon for transfer. Conducting their

responding to new circumstances or to the impact of your own presence, strategies, ideas. (e.g., in the midst of conducting that cross-cultural interview, something appears to have triggered a new but hidden agenda for your interlocutor. Or halfway through a series of interviews on a community issue, you realize the focus of your own inquiry or perhaps the social/political climate for this cultural exchange has shifted.) You can no longer respond by merely "applying past knowledge" or genre cues but must actually figure out how best to engage in this shape-shifting, socially embedded literate practice on the spot, in the act of performing it.

Another force that generates a powerful stimulus to transfer—one that a community-engaged experience is uniquely designed to deliver—is an emotional investment in the writing. Exploring the experience of writers, Jonathan Alexander et al. draw a distinction between "affect" as merely a felt condition and "emotion" as "a type of feeling writers consciously ascribe to their composing process and writing lives" (566). Tracking what they call the "wayfinding" of post-college writers (that is, writers adapting and learning in the face of new, unexpected situations) they stress the impact emotion, disposition, and metacognition have on "long-term learning development and writing transfer" (569). One of the key impacts on transfer was "meaningful writing,"—experiencing "the potentiality of writing," the "opportunity to mobilize [it] for real-world interventions" and the emotional investment often linked to the process of inquiry and discovery (583).

What these studies highlight is not simply a difference in how one names the process of transfer, but the highly variable, distinctly situated acts these different researchers are tracking. So in the context of public engagement, it makes sense to look for the kind of high-road, highwire constructive work that might support a transformative transfer.

The irony of transfer research is that most of these studies, whatever aspect of the process they examine, tend to document that transfer fails as often as it succeeds (Wardle; Moore; Beaufort, "Reflection"). Even experienced writers have trouble with this portage, leading Chris Anson to argue that neither prior knowledge, a repertoire of general rhetorical strategies, nor meta-knowledge about the problem can replace evolving, experience-based learning. In fact, Ryan Roderick proposes that we should shift our attention away from the transfer of genre knowledge and its conventions and onto the student's adaptive capacity for "self-regulated learning," that is, "a writer's practices of recognizing, evaluating, and reacting to emerging accomplishments or problems" (414). In the face

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research across disciplines and contexts, this study first identifies four "themes that enhance learning": Preparation for Learning, Active Learning, Metacognition & Reflection, and Social Learning. Three of the four are hallmarks of community engaged education. In the following more detailed of review of sixteen areas of scholarship within each theme—eleven of the sixteen normally turn up in community-engaged projects (e.g., promote perspective taking; problem-based learning strategies, seeking out other's opinions) (Kuglitsch and Roberts, 22-23).

of new tasks, writers who reflect on their own performances can identify conflicts or difficulties, which may lead to significant changes in their goals, strategies, and motivations. They make it "consequential." In his comparative analysis of self-regulation, Roderick tracked writers' responses to problems or conflicts which triggered one of these moments of generative reflection. Although all these graduate students were writing center mentors who had received the same training, they handled their problems in strikingly different ways and with varying levels of adaptive success. Focusing on the successful mentors, he discovered the self-regulating strategies that made the difference entailed a reflective use of the problems themselves. These self-regulators spent thinking time framing the conflict, setting goals, and even envisioning a narrative of progress. In a second, fine-grained study of a student's transition from an MA to a PhD program in rhetoric, Roderick and Moreau saw how self-regulation not only helped the student develop genre knowledge, but construct a new scholarly identity (158).

Cognitive rhetoric offers insight into another transformative practice rooted in the fact that writers must construct (and frequently reconstruct) for themselves an understanding of what an assignment means or a situation demands. The internal "task representation" which experienced writers give themselves is not simply more rhetorically complex than those of novices, it is also likely to recognize conflicting readings of the situation and priorities they must deal with as well as appropriate practices. In effect, expert and novice writers often end up working on strikingly different self-constructed "assignments" (Flower, *Construction* 77). In technical domains, this adaptive, problem-framing expertise also shows up in the quality of one's knowledge representation, which includes seeing the rationales behind actions (Gott et al. 259). Knowing "how to" goes beyond possessing a standard procedure; it depends on a strategic representation of how things function, one which tells you when to use knowledge and why (267). Once again, the issue is not simply whether one uses prior knowledge, but when and how.

Research in psychology, seeking more expanded accounts of learning, can also help us articulate what an engaged education needs to deliver. The studies collected in Douglas Detterman and Robert Sternberg's aptly named *Transfer on Trial* acknowledge that the recall of course concepts/methods and the ability to apply them in a final paper or subsequent course is indeed a useful skill. However, the notion that what we transfer is a symbolic representation or packet of "knowledge" is thoroughly dismantled as an adequate indicator of learning. In an extensive review of educational research, James Greeno, Joyce Moore, and David Smith argue that because traditional approaches to transfer treat prior knowledge as a propositional or symbolic structure abstracted from context, these conceptualizations lack the explanatory power that activity-based theory and the data on situated cognition can offer. Moreover, this activity-based way of conceptualizing knowledge opens a new path for tracking the dynamics that create situated knowledge. Knowledge, they say, would be better understood as "*knowing*" rather than an invariant, stable property one possesses. Knowing "is relative to

situations, an ability to interact with things and other people in various ways . . . In the view of situated cognition, we need to characterize knowing, reasoning, understanding and so on as relations between cognitive agents and situations . . . and learning is improvement in that ability" (99-100).

So what successful learners take away from their classes is not merely the theories, claims, or procedures we teach but models of agents and objects in interaction, knitted together with real-world knowledge, prior experience, and inferences. To transfer that dynamic *knowing* means recognizing the key parallels in a new situation, used as cues to construct an adapted, parallel model for how to interact in this new situation (Greeno et al. 145-55). From this perspective, it makes little sense to speak of the transfer of a knowledge *object* (such as a genre, theory, or practice) when the work in question is the *adaptation of knowing* acquired in school to a new situation in which success is gauged by interacting within a wider social and cognitive activity.

The argument here is that one distinctive outcome of a liberal arts education can be this style of "interactive knowing," which can support Beach's self-conscious, "consequential" transitions that reshape knowledge, relationships, and identity. It endows learners with Barouch and Ommen's *equipment for living*, such as Roderick's strategies for *self-regulation* in the face of problems (and how to represent them), or that hard-to-objectify *knowing* that guides interaction within a social, cognitive, and cultural activity system. An obvious inference from these accounts of transfer in action is that bringing classroom learning into the test bed of a shape-shifting, real world engagement, and reflecting on the feedback it can give is the high road to transfer. Community engagement offers the ideal place to develop this knowing. Nevertheless, to build a persuasive case for an engaged education, grounded in the interactive nature of learning, means that we will probably need new ways to recognize its presence in everyday life.[7]

An Expanded Image of Learning

Studies that work from an expanded image of learning itself frequently draw on activity theory—the legacy of Lev Vygotsky and the influential analytical paradigm of Yrjö Engeström that has stimulated research in psychology, sociology, management, education, and rhetoric. Locating learning and its uses within a more complex cognitive, social, cultural *activity system* lets us see how our disposition, generative problem-solving strategies, reflection, and metacognitive

7. For example, a typical study hoped to prove the impact of a new curriculum focused on global issues and empathy. Its measurement tool, a university-wide outcome assessment based on writing, showed no growth. However, researchers doing a thematic reading of these students' writing, were struck by another kind of knowing—the frequency of students' *reflection* "on their personal experiences" (Branson et. al. 302) Maybe, they suggest, "we had picked the wrong focus for the available . . . outcomes" (302).

awareness might interact with socially and culturally supplied tools, rules, and contexts. Doing so remaps the territory of outcomes, opening paths for assessing the dynamically interactive knowing engagement can create.

As we will see in the case studies and chapters that follow, activity analysis expands the unit of analysis in three dimensions. This lens directs our attention first to an agent acting on an object (e.g., a goal, task, or centering object and its attendant outcomes), which is in turn embedded in a community. Secondly, it calls us to locate these three elements (*agent, objects, and community*) within a larger activity system, which includes *rules, roles* (a division of labor including power and status), and *mediating tools* (both material and conceptual). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this image of activity is characterized not only by the constant interaction among these elements but by *contradictions* or competing agendas between them. Attending to these contradictions turns out to be critical because they are most often the sites where innovation or change happens (Engeström "Developmental Studies"). In fact, as Engeström shows, it is when people attend to the challenges and contradictions within an activity system that they are most likely achieve what he calls "expansive learning," which *embraces* conflict. Unlike that image of transfer in which one inserts a packet of prior knowledge into the appropriate slot of a new task, in activity theory, prior knowledge is much more likely to walk into, as William James puts it, "the blooming, buzzing confusion" of an activity, where contradiction is not only likely, but a force that drives creative change (488).

This expanded unit of analysis grows out of Engeström's combined concern with social justice and highly situated research into the interactions of people at work. His influential framework for analyzing activity systems helps us see rhetorical action embedded, whether we realize it or not, in a network of social, cognitive, cultural, and material forces. It gives us a language for describing how those forces interact in organizations and intercultural or community contexts. And its call to uncover contradictions makes community voices and marginalized interpretations suddenly quite essential.

In response to the questions, insights, and arguments sketched above, this study hopes to reach beyond the limited world and measuring sticks of the classroom to add new pieces to the puzzle of education for engagement and the problem of articulating some of its outcomes. It starts with a reconceptualization of transfer—into an action located in the dynamic interaction between prior knowledge and new tasks, contexts, purposes, and people. This dynamic, in turn, supports a hypothesis about the distinctive potential of engaged education. By embedding the integration of academic and experiential knowledge within meaningful public action, we can uniquely prepare students for taking informed, critical personal agency *within* interpersonal collaboration in a world of complex, value-laden social interactions.

The framework of activity theory can also help extend this educational hypothesis by including a more elaborated, cognitive account of how writers both

interpret the activity of learning (including its rules, roles, and tools) and *respond* with strategic choices. Secondly, in moving beyond the classroom to locate outcomes emerging from these more complex activities of collaborative and community engagement, our unit of analysis will shift from the tasks, genre knowledge, or other bodies of information associated with transfer to asking what kind of "knowing" *was constructed* by a given student and to what *effect*? That is, what does such education allow people to do in both thought and act? Finally, I will argue for conceptualizing our query at times in terms of not only transfer but in some impressive acts of *constructive transformation* as we will see students create new ideas and actions out of their learning.

The chapters which follow will build a case for the distinctive contribution a community-engaged education can make within this expanded image of learning and knowing. Doing so will call for new methods of tracking these broader, socially significant outcomes of learning. So, the case studies of each chapter will also explore a set of informal research methods for documenting what students are making out of an engaged course. Finally, my argument will include research that takes us beyond transfer to what we can describe as *transformations* by tracking what that combination of academic knowledge, experience, and collaborating across difference lets students create and do—sometimes years after the course. Drawing on these cases, we will conclude with an inquiry into what it could mean to teach for transformation.

Chapters 2 and 3 will explore a series of cases that show engaged students in action. These student participants built life tools and new understandings, raised questions, and altered institutional practices, supported by the metacognitive insight to name the change they saw. The cases will demonstrate ways of using the critical incident lens and interviews, comparative coding for frequency, as well as activity analysis, and data-based self-reflection.

Chapter 4 tracks students within an engaged class developing both metacognitive awareness of their own problematic interpretive frames and working theories for ways to change them. It will demonstrate tracking circulation and conflict, grounded-practical-theory building, frame analysis, pre/post comparisons using comparative statistics and visuals, methods of circulating students' results, and situated, re-interpretation by the students.

Chapter 5 will document outcomes in which students are transforming their learning into remarkably diverse personal and public actions. Using critical incident interviews carried out up to ten years after a course-based engaged experience, along with coding for leadership, and a comparison of their key insights with research, it will reveal a rich self-analysis of applied learning

Chapter 6 uses the frameworks of activity theory and grounded-theory building to explore two approaches to teaching not just for transfer but for transformation. It demonstrates how those frameworks can be used for analyzing one's rhetorical situation and collaboration, building a grounded theory, testing for metacognitive awareness, and teaching students to use those tools for themselves.