

Part I. Foundations

“In dreams begins responsibility.”

– W. B. Yeats

In beginning any new occupation, I believe there is almost an instinctive moment when the future is imagined. It is not surprising, then, that my first “significant” publication spoke in terms of “fostering new collaborations in literacy.” Nor did I realize at the time that this essay, as with many others that followed, would itself be a collaborative effort—taken on with my dear friend and colleague, Eli Goldblatt. I set this essay apart from the others that follow to mark its utopian nature. Its willingness (arrogance?) to imagine a future for a field which, to be honest, had barely noticed my existence. In that sense, “Writing Beyond the Curriculum” is clearly written from the position of an outsider.

“Writing Beyond the Curriculum,” then, might be considered an attempt to create a disciplinary apparatus that would be able to recognize how composition and rhetoric, striving for disciplinary legitimacy, had been produced through a commitment to the “non-traditional” student, but not to with a consequent valuing of the “non-traditional” community. To put it another way, in this article, I began a public argument (first articulated in my dissertation) that with a different constellation of “scholarly influences,” the field might come to understand how systemically marginalized intellectual traditions, critical sensibilities, and collective advocacy practices might reshape its future. How such a vision might then lead to different programmatic structures, partnerships, and publications linked to the insights and needs of surrounding neighborhoods.

But for that to occur, strategically, key concepts in the field had to be expanded. Enter “Writing Across the Curriculum.” The term had to be pried open to create the space which could enact programs that recognized not only that everyone was an intellectual, ala Gramsci, but that everyone should have their position as intellectuals supported by actual resources. A recasting of WAC that would invite a full representation of intellectuals to discuss what is the literacy and advocacy work that needed to be locally. It was for that reason that cultural studies scholars, such as Raymond Williams, are invoked in later essays to recognize how communities too often pushed to the wrong side of privilege actually contain the very insights required to actualize rhetorics of social justice, equity, and equality.

There was also a more immediate goal. At my university and, perhaps, within the academy, there was a sense that scholarship and community engagement were separate entities. In a university striving to demonstrate its Research 1 “chops,” there was a strategic need to demonstrate how the emerging community engagement work at the *Institute for Literature, Literacy, and Culture* was producing “scholarship.” That the new relationships being built in the immediate

community surrounding the university and beyond were supporting the knowledge and pedagogical aims of the institution. This is why the goals of community partners are somewhat proceeded (and most certainly embedded) within significant scholarly voices; a pattern we tried “to flip” as the work developed. In this way, the essay operated on both a local and disciplinary level.

In that sense, “Writing Beyond the Curriculum” initiated a long-term strategy which would be enacted throughout the work discussed later in this collection. And as the work continued in Philadelphia and, later, Syracuse, “Writing Beyond the Curriculum” became an ethical compass that help to navigate the complex relationship between composition, rhetoric, disciplinarity, community, advocacy, scholars, and intellectuals. As will be evident in the essays that follow, I did not always traverse these terrains successfully. I made many mistakes. Hopefully, though, the essays demonstrate a consistent commitment to learning from both university and community-based intellectuals. Hopefully, the work that followed “Writing Beyond the Curriculum” demonstrated that the new collaborations in literacy being created were responsive and responsible to the dreams of my partners and partnering communities.

Featured Essay

“Writing Beyond the Curriculum: Fostering New Collaborations in Literacy,” with Eli Goldblatt, *College English*, vol. 62, no. 5, May, 2000, pp. 584-606.