

Cultivating Places and People at the Center: Cross-Pollinating Literacies on a Rural Campus

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ABSTRACT: Students in rural communities often describe themselves as unsuccessful readers and writers in a university context, yet off-campus their literacy lives may be avidly experienced and richly valued. This article investigates the layered literacies of student clients and writing center consultants on a rural, regional campus in an Appalachian county of Ohio with particular attention to the dissonance between students' success in extracurricular contexts and their perceived inadequacies in academic contexts. The theoretical frame for this investigation draws upon place-based pedagogies, extending notions of literacy sponsorship and multiple literacy strands to a strongly place-identified, age-diverse student body negotiating college composition courses on an open enrollment regional campus. The author describes the varied means by which peer writing consultants and students may work together to construct hybrid academic literacies, highlighting an appreciation for the value of their community-based literacy practices.

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; literacy sponsorship; place-based pedagogy; rural education; writing center

I am observing a writing session in which a consultant and a client, both young men, are struggling to make progress. The client, pleasant but uncommunicative, gives brief replies to the consultant's questions. The consultant, attempting to draw attention to the immediacy of the assignment's central question, asks the writer to talk about how a relationship to audience impacts his choices as a writer. The writer shrugs and grins apologetically, expressing the opinion that he is not, in fact, much of a writer. The consultant, in desperation, grins back and takes an unexpected tack.

Consultant: "Are you a grade A or a grade C sexter?"

Client: "What?"

After a quick flush of initial embarrassment, the writer warms to the task of describing the rhetorical moves involved in texting romantic partners

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and comparing those moves (somewhat more hesitantly) to those used in intellectual writing.

Out of many visits throughout the semester, this was one of the few moments we had with this client in which he was able to take a more active role in constructing a metadiscourse about his own literacy practices, and he did it through applying knowledge of his everyday practices to what he supposed was expected in his basic writing course. The writing consultant, in maneuvering the client outside of the role he had chosen (passive, empty of relevant knowledge), and into a more humorous, self-critical perspective, made it possible for the client to stand with feet planted in a new, third space.

After this session, I began paying closer attention to the role that extracurricular literacies were playing in the Learning Center on the regional, rural Kent State campus where I have worked as Learning Center Coordinator for the past five years. When were they explicitly explored in a session and who brought them up? To what use were they put? When did they have a more subtle, but still apparent, influence? And what webs of connection (or disconnection) gave shape to the hybridization of literacies in these sessions? The consultant's dual role as a literacy sponsor and a member of the client's home community clearly seemed to have a significant impact on the shape of a writing session. In order to understand what was happening, it seemed necessary to consider more fully the ways that writing centers, particularly in small campuses like ours, can become places where community-based literacies and academic literacy practices come together in a confluence of diverse expectations, practices, knowledge systems, and cultural associations.

In our community, everyday literacy practices look like this: Melanie journals for her counseling sessions. Mark watches historical documentaries and discusses them with his father. Nick argues politics in the apartment complex courtyard with his elderly neighbors, while Sarah uses her Facebook posts to share her poetry and songs. Brittany, a mechanic's wife, assists friends with advice grounded in a combination of experience and research on car purchases and repair. Justin analyzes draft picks and interprets ambiguous girlfriend-texts with his brother, and Erin produces textual commentary regularly for her Bible study group. The dissatisfaction both students and professors express with the writing produced in entry-level college composition courses seems oddly dissonant when contrasted with the students' own avid and personally valued literacy lives.

The literacy practices students bring to academia are resources too often left largely untapped; at best, they are acknowledged only so they

may be consciously set aside in the composition course to be replaced by the communicative norms of the university: literacy code-switching. The profoundly personal enthusiasms and deeply felt, shared experiences captured through these literacy practices do not often enough receive our respectful, sustained attention as we assist students in their efforts to develop academic literacy practices.

Some college writing instructors may invite elements of those extracurricular literacies and communicative norms into student writing for portions of the semester in the form of literacy narratives, but the understanding is that, for the most part, the stylistic aesthetics, cultural orientations, and habits of mind characteristic of these literacies will not be incorporated into the students' more "developed" academic work if they are to succeed in later courses. Anne-Marie Hall and Christopher Minnix argue that, contrary to what they refer to as "the bridge metaphor" of the literacy narrative, in which the narrative serves as a "bridge" for "easing students into" more conventionally valued forms of academic writing, we might instead enhance transference by exposing for students the ways that "the literacy narrative [like other genres] gains its power and meaning from its relationship to other genres and the hierarchies of value that shape particular contexts of writing," explicitly demonstrating for students the ways that "Writing a text about oneself (the familiar part) and turning it into a sophisticated critical analysis is a problem-solving skill that transports to other areas of learning" (78). What Hall and Minnix are advocating with their emphasis on the social construction of textual value in the university is a shift in how we encourage students to imagine their literacy purposes in various contexts and transposed to multiple settings.

Regional campuses occupy an advantageous position with regard to the question of contexts for understanding literacy, because the mission of a regional campus is specifically to serve place-bound students in a geographically defined area. This affords professors and students alike opportunities for deeper, more sustained engagement with literacy contexts because so much of the body of knowledge, practices, and values around literacy are shared in common. As part of a discussion of the physical spaces of composition learning and instruction, Nedra Reynolds has pointed out that the "actual locations for the work of writing and writing instruction coexist with several metaphorical or imaginary places where we write" (13). Rather than accepting as "transparent" the spaces and settings of higher education, she argues that we must work to recognize these places and their features, interpreting the layerings of space and place in ways that inform and enrich a critically

reflective approach to writing and writing instruction in the university. For Reynolds, composition classrooms and writing centers are given form by their physical spaces, by the place-based metaphors that shape our thinking about writing, and by the geographies within which our campuses are situated. She, like Hall and Minnix, advocates for a shift in emphasis toward a more intentional examination and use of the contexts of reading and writing as they are learned, taught, and tutored on university campuses which are in turn, as physical buildings and as ideas, situated within layered histories, geographies, and spaces.

I would suggest that when we consciously make similar shifts in our writing center practice, pointing explicitly and regularly to ways that students' literacy lives outside the university give meaning and shape to their emergent academic literacy lives, we are making a subtle but important change. By doing so, we encourage the purposeful valuation and cultivation of extra-curricular literacy practices in the hope that they might thrive alongside and even cross-pollinate with the intellectual work students perform throughout their time in the university. If writing centers are to successfully address themselves to strongly place-identified clients, they must recognize and make use of the unique resources possessed by peer writing consultants who are similarly place-identified. Peer consultants fluent in translating the literacies they have learned *outside* the university into practices useful *within* the academy may prove effective in assisting other students as they attempt to do the same. In identifying approaches to a client's agenda that include a sustained engagement with personal and place-based literacies, writing consultants may then be prepared to "follow more deliberately those 'detours' taken by the writer that challenge our habitual way of viewing the self in relation to the world" as Min-Zhan Lu has suggested (Brandt et al. 54). As both consultants and clients come to view such detours less as evidence of academic illiteracy than as evidence of other literacies with potential utility for academic projects, they open the way to a more personally meaningful, place-based experience of higher education.

This article takes as its starting place a concern with the gap between students' often successful and personally valued community-based literacy experiences and their perceived inadequacy as they struggle to acquire the literacy practices required by their coursework. We have taken an ethnographic approach to the study of these processes in our own writing center, focusing primarily on the work of systematic observation and interpretation. Over the course of two semesters, peer writing consultants were asked to reflect in brief, informal writings about the relationship of their "outside" literacy practices

and experiences to the literacy practices they were engaged in developing as university students. I also participated as a writing consultant, both observing and participating in sessions described here. The ways in which we have shifted our writing center practice to include routine consideration of non-academic literacies are documented in these session reports, reflections, and audio recordings, providing an ethnographic portrait of consultants and students on a rural campus engaged in a project of self-study. The resulting vignettes of consultants' and students' work illustrate the fruitful potential of directing our writing center practice toward the cultivation of what Deborah Brandt terms "hybrid" (182) or "re-appropriated literacies" (179).

The theoretical frame for this investigation draws upon place-based pedagogies, extending notions of literacy sponsorship and multiple literacy strands to a strongly place-identified, age-diverse student body negotiating college composition courses on an open enrollment campus in a rural corner of Appalachian Ohio. I examine the means by which peer writing consultants and student writers may work together to construct hybrid academic literacies, combining an appreciation for the value of their community-based literacy practices with an awareness of academic literacy practices; such an account, I hope, may provide a compelling case for the role writing centers may play in recasting the enculturation of first generation and non-traditional rural college students.

PLACING THE RURAL WRITING CENTER

In Columbiana County, where our Kent State University regional campus is located, there are many kinds of divides and many kinds of conversations that result because of them. There are divides between incorporated townships and villages; between farmers and small manufacturers; between the broad, rolling corn/soy fields and Quaker-born towns *north* of the Lincoln highway and the forested hills and hollows, the Copperhead heritage *south* of the Lincoln highway.

The portrait presented by socioeconomic data shows a county divided within by barriers of opportunity and divided from the surrounding region by deepening poverty and economic isolation. 3.3% of the population of Columbiana County earns a household income of \$150,000 or more annually, while 45.7% of the population report earnings below the county's median wage of \$43,700 (Ohio Development Services Agency). Our county earned mention in *The Upshot's* 2014 analysis of U.S. Census data, ranking it in the top third of most difficult counties for American families to live in,

based on a variety of measures including unemployment, disability, poverty rates, health, and affordable housing (Flippen). Educational barriers present obstacles to available jobs, frustrating area employers as well as aspiring workers. Just 22.4% of Columbiana County residents over 25 reported attaining an associate's degree or higher compared to 34.3% of the broader Ohio population of residents over 25 (U.S. Census Bureau). These numbers are especially daunting given that Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce projects that 64% of jobs available in Ohio in 2020 will require at least some post-secondary credential or degree (3). In part, this is because academic preparation has lagged in Ohio. Though progress has been made in recent years due to implementation of new standards, just 18.7% of the high school classes of 2014 and 2015 in our county graduated with remediation-free ACT scores (Ohio Department of Education), and 81% of students enrolling at our local Kent State campuses in the last year placed into at least one remedial course (Kent State University IR, *Remediation Rates*). These statistics have prompted dialogue throughout our university system and our region, but conversations around retention and improving student preparation are sometimes inhibited by the same barriers they are meant to address.

The writing center is one place where students themselves—peer writing consultants and student writers—may step into the space between these divisions, a third space in which no one is quite on one side or another—and sometimes find ways to do something better than merely cross the divide. The writing center on the Kent State University Salem campus serves approximately 14% of the overall campus population every year, affording us many opportunities for the kind of close engagement between consultants, student clients, and professors that may offer alternatives to failure or, alternatively, transformation and outmigration. Attempting to pause in that alternative, third space as we have done in the process of this study may allow us to take stock of our students' literacy resources, measuring the potential to grow a hardier, more resilient and adaptive academic literacy than the more limited literacies we usually aspire to cultivate for students emerging from college composition courses. If we assume that college student writers like the ones described above possess in some measure “rural literacies . . . the kinds of literate skills necessary for sustaining life in rural area” (Donehower et al. 4) or, in the case of younger students, may be in the process of acquiring them, cultivating both academic and rural literacy may strengthen both for our writing clients and for our writing centers more broadly. In her seminal study of literacy sponsorship, Deborah Brandt remarked the multiple domains and

points of contact that shape literacy in communities—in faith communities, the workplace, and the justice system, for example—pointing to the “deep hybridity” inherent in such overlapping. Brandt suggests that we, as educators in the university, should respond to this awareness by creating literacy models that “more astutely account for these kinds of multiple contacts, both in and out of school and across a lifetime” (179). I would argue that writing centers can and should help students foster a richness of meaning through the cultivation of hybrid literacies, and that we are best prepared to do this work by immersing ourselves as writing consultants in hybridity, in reflection on the layered literacies that we and our clients bring into the university. Such an approach requires an explicit embrace of the moves readers and writers make, and of the relationships and social contexts that lend meaning to lives led on our campuses and in our rural communities.

Rural education researcher Michael Corbett has written extensively about the need to differentiate between the challenges rural students face on college campuses and the challenges faced by other student populations. In reflecting on the contrast between his own educational journey, rooted in an appreciation for mobility and the abstract, thanks to his proximity to the railroad life, and the place-based educations of his students in a rural, coastal community, Corbett suggests that although the “place-specific identity constructions” of rural college students “represent a complex set of resistances and accommodations” (1) to the educational setting of the university, their ability to successfully navigate this territory is uneven and fraught with obstacles. The obstacles posed by the university setting may not significantly impact students fluent in the decontextualized, comparatively rootless identity constructions of the contemporary suburban middle class in the same way that they impact rural students. For this reason, these obstacles—of uncommunicated assumptions about authority, the purpose of education, how to read and study, how to generate ideas and write—may go unaddressed by the university even as they impact metrics for persistence, achievement, and post-graduation outcomes.

The presence of these obstacles at Kent State’s Salem campus is evident in the number of students placing into developmental composition courses and then failing to complete these courses successfully. During the period from fall 2013 through spring 2016, 27% of the students enrolled in composition courses on our regional campus were enrolled in developmental courses. D-F-withdrawal rates during the same period for those developmental courses averaged 32.7 percent (Kent State University IR, *Grade Distribution Reports*). 34.6% of the students enrolled in the first of the developmental

courses never appear in the record of composition courses a second time, suggesting that they dropped out of the university altogether. Why they vanish and where they go, we don't know, because our university, as is the case with many, has no formal method of systematically tracking students like these who fail to persist or graduate. We suspect that they disappear for the reasons they gave us when they missed classes and assignments before leaving: they didn't feel like they were "college material"; they didn't understand "what the professors were asking for" because they weren't like the high school teachers; or that caring for the farm and an ailing father while going to college got to be too much and the family told them that family should always come first. We are sure that the students are still nearby, just down Route 45, but place has played a role in ending their educations just as surely as it played a role in getting them started at our campus originally.

Institutions of higher education in rural areas are often the inadvertent purveyors of two kinds of loss. Lamenting "the routinization of failure, its virtual acceptance amongst typical educators, and the all too common acquiescence in the process on the part of most failing students themselves," (2) Corbett calls for greater attention to the problem of the links between education, rural outmigration, and access to resources. When rural students succeed in higher education, on the one hand, their success may contribute to the problem of outmigration. A recent United States Department of Agriculture report notes that "Rural outmigration is highly concentrated among young adults, especially those possessing or acquiring education and skills" (2). The second kind of loss, failure in the realm of higher education, contributes to a larger narrative of systematic loss and decreased quality of life in areas where access to economic resources has eroded over time.

Identifying Corbett's account as one which delineates "the educational discourse of loss and place," (1) Ursula Kelly emphasizes not only the consequences Corbett has identified but also the ways we interpret those consequences and the inevitability of loss as a result of rural education. For Kelly, loss has transformative potential—but only if it is intentionally addressed within the educational framework. More routinely, we accept loss and failure as inevitable outcomes of the clash between institutional uniformity and the heterogeneity of the students who pass through our doors. If we assume that failure is simply a function of the system as it sorts those that belong from those that do not, there is no mechanism for considering possible paths leading to hybridity, transmutation, or other collaborative imaginings of literacies that might bridge the everyday and the academic. Alternatively, Kelly argues for an "acceptance of loss . . . [that] would create

a space in which one might plan and preserve, turning love of place into an ethic of responsibility and sustainability” (3), viewing loss as an opportunity to create new knowledge.

For an adult entering the university and undertaking the educational project of acquiring a new literacy, some loss may be an inevitable part of succeeding, but complete loss, total change should not be treated as a desirable or unavoidable side effect of assimilation. Collaboration between the student and the university in generating a new, hybrid literacy grounded in both the local and the global may prove a stronger, more resilient foundation than displacement can provide. Because writing centers employ peer consultants who, in the case of commuter campuses especially, are likely to come from the same communities as their clients, writing centers can offer a uniquely place-based form of literacy sponsorship for students.

Writing center pedagogy has long privileged the agenda and agency of the client in a way that would suggest an asset-based approach to each session. Yet we may not always do enough in the writing center to consider the social and practical context of literacy itself. For a symposium published in *College English*, Richard E. Miller suggested that it is important to be “as interested in the expectations that we bring to the activity of writing as . . . in the writing we produce to meet those expectations” (Brandt et al. 50). If we consider the foundation of literacy to be “the culturally appropriate way of thinking” for a given society (Langer 13) and the expectations generated by these cultural paradigms, then we must move beyond discussing skills and strategies, even beyond demystifying one specific cultural context (the academy), and instead invite examination of the multiplicity of cultural contexts layered within the campus setting. In a case study of an off-campus writing center, a space described as “both curricular and extracurricular” (678) Deborah Minter, Anne Gere, and Deborah Keller-Cohen noted that peer tutors often “initially [take] literacy to be a context-independent bank of knowledge of a set of skills” (678) leading them to focus on guiding a writer in developing those skills rather than developing an examination of the *context(s)* of those skills. However, the longer the peer tutors in the study worked in the writing center, housed in an urban community center and serving local elementary-aged students, the more they were challenged to “respond to or manage the surplus of meaning” (678) resulting from the overlap in space usage, the juxtaposition of work and community roles, and the layering of various kinds of literacy practices and values held by both adults and children involved with the center. As the peer tutors gained their own cultural competency in the extracurricular space of a community-based

writing center, they came to see the features of their clients' texts as more than mere deviations from (or models of) academic literacy; rather, they were able to see them as literacy products constructed at the intersection of the cultural contexts of school and home, of decontextualized, national standards-based instruction and their familiar, urban neighborhood.

Writing centers, then, can become a critical intervention for students struggling to participate in the literacy culture of the university at the same time that they strive to find their place in the global economy. By offering a space where students may sort through the layered literacies of their extracurricular experiences, they assist students in finding ways to make use of these literacies for academic purposes, though perhaps in an altered form, and open new ways of considering narratives of mainstream cultural supremacy. A "surplus of meaning" may manifest in student texts in ways often regarded by professors or skilled peers as evidence of disadvantageous differences. In response to this negatively tinged lens, we may very well need "conceptual frameworks that *simultaneously* assert shared cognitive and linguistic competence while celebrating in a non-hierarchical way the play of human difference" (Hull et al. 326); such frameworks could instead shift the focus of a writing session from excising all evidence of difference from a text and toward leveraging that difference productively, converting a surplus of meaning into a richness of meaning.

In the first chapter of *Rural Literacies*, Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell make the case that in higher ed "we need to work with students to help them see the economic, social, and political issues encountered in rural areas as interconnected with the larger social and political patterns present in urban and suburban contexts and vice versa" (30). They advocate such work as the basis of a critical public literacy of greater utility to all students, no matter where they are from or where they choose to locate themselves. Donehower recommends that "By acknowledging how loaded the topic of literacy may be for [rural] students, by exploring ways to validate students' existing knowledge and literate practices, and by encouraging appropriative relationships with the types of literacy we offer," (76) we may be more effective as literacy sponsors serving place-bound students and even, I would suggest, problematize our institutional models of success and failure in significant ways.

OFFERING LITERACY SPONSORSHIP

Many studies have noted the critical role that literacy sponsors may play in the success of traditionally underrepresented students (Brandt; Carrick; Heath; Shepley; Webb-Sunderhaus), and both new literacy and social constructivist learning theories suggest that the educational impact of sponsors is amplified when they share with learners a common set of communicative norms and cultural contexts. For these reasons, writing consultants on local, non-residential campuses may offer their clients a unique form of literacy sponsorship, unique because, though located within the university as successful students, the consultants nonetheless share in common with writers a location within the community.

Deborah Brandt, introducing the notion of literacy sponsorship suggested the tension of power inherent in the role of a sponsor, defining sponsors as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy-and gain advantage by it in some way” (166). Noting that sponsors unavoidably wield disproportionate power in the relationship and “represent the causes into which people’s literacy usually gets recruited” (167) Brandt expressed a sense of unease as a self-declared “conflicted broker” (183) of literacy in the classroom. In the nearly two decades that have passed since Brandt’s initial research, we have sought to make peace with this power dynamic through various reformulations of the literacy transaction, through altering its terms and players. In the writing center, sponsors proficient in navigating what geographer Doreen Massey terms “the simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (3) available to the specific locale of their campus may be particularly effective in constructing together with their clients a metadiscourse about the choices they can make as readers and writers, selecting moves from their literacy repertoire outside the university for adaptation to the expectations of academe and perhaps simultaneously modifying the terrain of academe through manipulation of their local rhetorical space. The discursive nature of these analyses of writing “moves,” informed by the “simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” shared by writing consultants and clients alike, may diminish, to an extent, the conflicted nature of literacy sponsorship in the rural writing center.

Writing consultants in our center, for example, often find writers favoring “short and to the point” as a writing aesthetic that causes problems when they are expected to sustain complex reasoning in essays. Rather than simply explain academic aesthetics and begin the process of re-writing, how-

ever, our consultants inquire into what “short and to the point” means to a writer and why it seems desirable. Many of our clients tell us they learned this style in the military, or as prison guards, or as they completed government documents for various purposes. As a consultant learns more about why and how a writer favors a set of choices, she can help a writer recognize 1) that these are indeed choices; 2) that they can be savvy ones, not “wrong” choices demonstrating their lack of writing ability; 3) that the reasoning behind those choices might have utility in an academic context, even if stylistic adaptation may be needed.

For our purposes here in considering students’ lived experiences of literacy, its mutability and adaptation, the notion that literacy is fundamentally a social practice is key. Understood in this way, the literacy required to assess, for example, the information gleaned in Columbiana County’s most widely circulated newspaper, *Farm and Dairy*, is given form and meaning by social context. An article about valuing antiques (written by one of my student’s mothers) draws upon locally lived experience of history, the rapid passage of generations, and the disruption/repetition of cultural trends as experienced by Columbiana County residents. The writer’s purpose is shaped by her knowledge of a local audience of contemporaries, nostalgic for a past their children may never wish to celebrate and enriched by a material culture which she understands to be changing, though not perhaps in the sense of diminishing which we often associate with change. She advocates for celebration and use of treasured family items, remarking that, “The memories will keep moving forward as we fold these items into our lives,” (Seabolt). For Kym Seabolt and her readers, locally sourced literacy is clearly not simply an all-purpose tool, but one embedded in a social context that includes articles about turkey-hunting and grain storage alongside antique valuation.

Extending our interest in literacy promotion to include development and hybridization of extracurricular literacies shifts our practice toward an appreciation for our students’ potential as adults knowledgeable in their communities who may themselves “fold” literacies, as they may do memories, into their layered lives. Noting the damaging ethnocentrism of skills-based notions of literacy, Francis Kazemek has called instead for an acknowledgment “that literacy is constrained by social and cultural practices and is not merely a private accomplishment” (473), thus liberating literacy education from reductive approaches that emphasize individual effort and “acquisition” of modular, decontextualized literacy practices. Adults in the literacy programs that Kazemek studied were spending time performing reading tasks often identical to those used with primary school children despite

the inappropriateness of such tasks and topics for the literacy contexts of adult life. The alternative, shifting from skills-based instruction to creating socioculturally-motivated, context-based literacy instruction grounded in the adult needs and applications of the students, encouraged students to adapt and revise their existing literacy strategies, has become a model for contemporary adult literacy programs (Hull; Muth; Weiner) though not, typically, in basic or first-year university courses. If we are to create in university spaces the opportunity for students, whether traditional or nontraditional, to make use of their primary literacies, we need forms of academic literacy sponsorship that draw upon extracurricular literacies and social contexts, and we need ways to talk about the academic setting itself as a particular site for literacy within a larger community of spaces where literacy is constituted. Space must be made for conversations about discontinuity and disruption at the same time that we foster an appreciative recognition of the literacies students bring with them into the university.

CULTIVATING HYBRID LITERACIES: THREE WRITING CONSULTANTS IN CONTEXT

As we have observed, university students acquiring academic literacy practices are engaged in a social transaction composed of literacy histories specific to them personally, to the practices and traits of the individual teacher and class, and to the place and time in which they are being educated. Assisting adult students as they adapt their literacy to academic requirements must make *social* sense, not only academic sense, perhaps particularly in communities and on campuses where students aspire not to use education to leave, but to return equipped to succeed there, as many of our students do. The old adage of writing centers, that we make “better writers, not better writing” (North 68) might as well be adapted to include “better connections, not better grades.” In the working class southern towns where she did her ethnographic work, Shirley Brice Heath suggested that both teachers and learners could better “learn to articulate relations between cultural patterns of talking and knowing, and, understanding such relations [could] make choices” (13) when they shared cultural context. The construction of literacy through shared inquiry and relationship makes sense in an education inclusive of situated learning, with writing consultants or tutors assisting their peers in becoming part of the university’s community of practice.

My own investigation of this process has formed itself around the encounters of individual students interacting in our campus spaces, giving

particular attention to the value of multiplex relationships in promoting the formation of hybrid literacies. What Beth Daniell terms “The little narratives of literacy [that] connect composition to culture” (405) can illuminate the dark corners of our classrooms and writing centers. To collect these little narratives, I worked with undergraduate writing consultants employed in our regional campus Learning Center to gather and interpret reflective accounts of writing sessions. I also requested that the peer writing consultants create literacy reflections detailing their own adaptation and use of extracurricular literacies within the university. Most of the material described in this article derives from the consultants’ experiences as developing academic writers and as literacy sponsors working with their clients. The consultants’ reflection papers described the evolution of their tutoring pedagogies and, in the process, remarked the ways that their own literacy lives had influenced their growth as academic writers. I had also instructed the writing consultants in periodic staff meetings to look for opportunities to learn about students’ extracurricular literacies and, where appropriate, make use of those practices in the course of ordinary writing sessions. They were given a specific set of questions addressing conversations about extracurricular literacy to answer in their session reports.

Ultimately, the accounts chosen for inclusion here were selected because the consultants and clients involved were typical of our student population—most of them non-traditional students, none of them having graduated high school with an intention to enroll in college, all of them born and raised in the county where our campus is located. The consultants had each distinguished themselves as being particularly invested in their personal literacy lives, though only one was a self-identified aspiring professional writer. In addition, their ability to represent in their reflections specific aspects of the ways extracurricular literacies had influenced the formation of their academic literacy practices made rendering their experiences for research purposes a more equitable and accurate process, as they provided ongoing clarification and feedback for this article. I have chosen to emphasize the accounts of the consultants rather than those of the clients in large part because I feel they tell in their own words (better than I could and in a way the client writers were not asked to) the story of how the extracurricular literacies they practice off campus influence the academic literacy they have acquired as college students. Three out of the five consultants who were active that year have accounts represented here.

It is worth noting that the remaining two consultants (both traditional-aged students) perceived themselves to be less located in place due to family

background and socioeconomic class, so their accounts of their literacies were strikingly place-less by contrast with the three accounts of the writing consultants represented here. The focus in their accounts is on learning the superficial conventions of academic work (e.g. accuracy in citation style, avoiding the “five paragraph essay”) and acquiring habits of mind characteristic of the disciplines in which they were learning to write.

The accounts of writing sessions in the subsequent section offer, by contrast, a suggestion of how consultants fluent in both place-based and academic literacy practices may help writers explore their extracurricular literacies and make use of them in cultivating academic literacy. These were selected on the basis of a greater availability of descriptive information (some writing consultants wrote fuller session reports than others, and in some cases I myself was the consultant and had available recordings). I only used information from clients whom I’d had the opportunity to observe in session at least once or with whom I had worked myself.

Stacie Crawford—A Literacy with Many Roots, Many Purposes

Stacie Crawford, in her time as a Human Development and Family Studies major on our campus, was one of our most sought-after consultants. Her story suggests a complex of economic and personal motives, the richness of her experiences prior to college, and the value of stitching a college education into the larger patterns of her life. In her reflection, she writes, “I certainly am not an early achiever (way passed [sic] the 20 something mark) . . . I am a mother whose husband is on disability and just want to have some security in a society where the financial climate has gone haywire . . . I certainly have been known to say ‘Algebra 3? . . . Why do I need so much math for Human Services?’ ”

At the time when she was employed in the Learning Center, Stacie had a college-aged son enrolled at the campus, and he was the one who had encouraged her to return to school and get a degree. Stacie entered the university motivated by economic need and was, at first, puzzled by requirements she saw as unrelated to her purpose in seeking a higher-paying job. She seems more willing, however, to mark the value of a broader, less instrumentally driven education when she describes in her account the indirect routes by which she had pursued education in her youth. In relating her “vagabond years” after high school graduation, she refers to her experiences as “an education of a different kind that is irreplaceable.” This contrast between an impulse to education as economic necessity and one driven by curiosity and

a taste for novelty is striking, suggesting as it does one more tension inherent in the acquisition of new literacies. Higher education with its general education requirements and graduation formulas does not always seem to students particularly conducive to either of these more personal educational aims. Even Stacie's emphasis on her age as a returning student points to an assumption she shares with many others—that book-based education is for younger, inexperienced people and may prove inaccessible or even redundant for those schooled in the book of life. For Stacie, travel provided a way to gain knowledge about the world that she could bring back and use in her home community. Her educational experience in the university, though motivated by pragmatic purposes, only became more satisfying as it took on other, more personal, dimensions.

As an adult student, Stacie was initially uncertain whether her ways of thinking and learning would work within the university, an uncertainty refracted into a different shape by friends who worried that rather than struggling to adapt to the university, she would adapt too successfully and so be changed. Prior to entering the university, she was known for her skill at facilitating a Bible study group that met at her house, and she was also an avid reader and poet. As her first writing instructor on the campus, I watched her initial hesitation and nervousness turn to confidence and even joy as she found through her academic writing a new form of exploration not unlike the types of writing she already valued: her inspirational Facebook postings or the contemporary spiritual music she composed. In the composition classroom, Stacie's writing—initially rich with ideas, but fragmented in structure—reflected a mind conversant with textual analysis and a writing life that placed value on the connotative potential of word choice. These characteristics, derived from her experiences as a poet and student of the Bible, became valuable in the service of composing essays, and they were ones that I, as her instructor, emphasized as strengths to be cultivated even as she tried out new skills and approaches needed for academic essay writing. This sense that her skills prior to entering the university were valuable ones helped Stacie relax into her role as a university student, since it did not necessarily require a rejection, as her friends had feared, of her preferred forms of expression, her personal convictions and beliefs. In fact, Stacie describes in her reflection “realizing that there is so much more to know” and that “by knowing something more . . . I become more. Well at least I open the door to the possibilities of more.”

Stacie did indeed find much success. Although she became a high-achieving student in many courses and in her major, a highly-sought-after

consultant in the writing center, she remained a member of her close-knit community as a leader of her Bible study group, a musician performing at local churches, and a good friend to her high school classmates. When she graduated with her associate's degree in Human Services, she celebrated with a bonfire in her backyard attended by friends, family, and professors alike.

Joseph Pritchard—Relational Literacy

Another writing consultant on our campus, Joseph Pritchard, has found his place as an English major and is currently working to complete his honors thesis while his wife pursues a nursing degree. Joe is known in the Learning Center for his patient silences and thoughtful, open questions, his willingness to sit with uncertainty and vulnerability. On Fridays, his sessions often run long as students sit beside him, writing independently while he does his own work, untroubled by the hectic pace characteristic of the rest of the writing center weekly schedule. In his approach to his writing sessions, Joe is thoughtful about how the pressures of “real life” schedules and health problems and family commitments make investing in time-intensive homework assignments (like essays) particularly challenging for students on our campus. His pacing and relational style encourage student clients to treat writing sessions as a social space separate from their college lives (less scheduled, less instrumental) and perhaps resembling more the kinds of personally meaningful forms of literacy he (and they) practice in their everyday lives in the community.

In his second year of college and his first year as a writing consultant, the reflection Joe composed relates the overlap between his on- and off-campus literacy lives and comments on how his own experiences compared to those of his peers. As a self-described “recluse” Joe writes: “I get my sports news from my wife’s dad who’s an encyclopedia on the matter; and I just shoot the shit with my crazy, old neighbors if I desire human interaction.” He compares this to the literacy practices he associates with university work, noting that in his community, “People don’t read, it certainly wasn’t emphasized at . . . [my high school].” Joe does not see his home community as a community of readers, and yet he describes in a brief, vivid burst the literacies prized by his family and neighbors, literacies which he, too, values: sports, politics, history, and outdoorsmanship. In conversation, Joe often refers to the pleasure he takes in online interactions and friendly argumentation with his neighbors.

Before the motorcycle accident that placed him in a wheelchair, Joe lived a physically active life, hunting and fishing and generally (by his own account) not taking school too seriously. But once his mobility became limited, Joe turned to reading as an alternative to the activities he could no longer manage. Reading and writing have since re-formed themselves in his life as social activities connecting him to others in ways that his previous hobbies once did.

The social role of reading and writing practices derives its meaning and shape in Joe's life from the relationship contexts within which those literacy acts take place, and in turn these relationships take their form from the rural town where he grew up and the online spaces which, for many in rural areas (particularly those with limited mobility), provide a valuable alternative place for dwelling and for exchanging information. Continuing with a discussion of what he believes to be his peers' difficulties in acquiring academic ways of reading and writing, Joe describes "main campuses" as "full of scholarship chasers [and] early achievers," noting that regional campus students are more likely to be "rusty on time management (hell, I still am), basic writing skills (still sharpening that sword myself), and trying new things (luckily, I kind of enjoy this)." Joe also writes about the social interchange of his off-campus life with the arbitrariness and performative pressure of on-campus literacies, conditions which favor, perhaps "the scholarship chasers." In Joe's first semester as a student, his ability to see diverse points of view and craft nuanced positions on topics new to him were a strength, even as he struggled with issues of syntax and paragraphing. By the time he became a writing consultant, Joe had forged strong mentoring relationships with several professors in the English Department, having met frequently with them to request assistance in improving as a writer. As a writing consultant, his embrace of a style of interaction more consistent with the laidback, unfocused exchanges of off-campus life simultaneously replicates for many students the more socially-motivated dynamic of interpersonal relationships in the community while still accomplishing the intellectual objectives of the academic writers he is assisting.

Heather Haueter—Reading with and against Place

I will offer one further story of a student writing consultant whose account contributes another facet to the diversity of literacy as it is experienced in our local community and the uses to which place-based literacies may be put when combined successfully with academic literacy. Heather Haueter

entered the university as a developmental writing student and, after a year or so, was recommended by her instructors to be a writing consultant in our writing center. She was known for her blunt but empathetic approach to peer review, her skill at making explicit the conventions of intellectual writing for the university in a way her fellow students found easy to apply.

Her experiences as a student in developmental courses may have provided a helpful grounding for her unique skill in demystifying academic conventions, but her experiences as the daughter and confidante of an alcoholic taught her at an early age that *everything* could be a text, subject to interpretation and re-interpretation. In her reflection, which ultimately became a paper she delivered in a joint presentation with me at the Eastern Central Writing Center Association Conference in 2014, Heather writes, “My literacy does not come from books and what I’ve learned to write came from passion to leave a world I didn’t want to be a part of but had no control over” (Haueter). In Heather’s account, acts of reading and writing become critical for survival, tools for pulling the tangled web of her life apart and reassembling it in ways that made sense.

She describes how her father used to wake her up after returning home drunk because he was looking for someone to talk to. Heather acknowledges that “as bad as that sounds, because we’re raised in world that teaches us that’s bad parenting, it really wasn’t horrible” (Haueter). She portrays her father as “a logical man with a sarcastic attitude [who] knew he wasn’t prepared for the world” (Haueter) and who wished to provide her with a critical perspective on how to read people and their actions. When other children were learning the authority of received knowledge as it was taught by parents, grandparents, and schools, Heather was learning that truth and knowledge were social constructs, dependent on one’s position in an eroding rural, rust-belt economy in which family and future and jobs were ever-changing, and that acts of reading, of interpretation, of that world were essential to survival.

Heather spoke with her dad about this section of her paper before presenting it, perhaps as a way, after years of sorting through her complicated feelings, to acknowledge both the pain and the value of this part of her childhood. She says that gaining access to the messiness of the adult world through the critical eyes of her father as he told his stories late at night played a key role in forming her skeptical, analytical approach to intellectual work, an approach that later was valued and further developed by her university education. Heather writes, “When I was young, I would write poetry to handle the pain and smile through the storm” (Haueter). Her response to the strong emotions of her childhood—writing poetry—planted the seeds

of a fundamental confidence in writing as a meaningful form of expression and communication.

A Meta-Review of Cross-Pollinating Literacies in Practice

Students from rural or Appalachian backgrounds may experience the process of “inventing the university” in the college classroom very differently from suburban and middle class students for whom there may be more overlap in the literacies of home and university, and in many ways this difference may prove an advantage. Discourse in writing sessions about the assumptions and uses of literacy in its various contexts can prevent writers from experiencing erosion and loss, particularly when the conversation is led by peer writing consultants who practice literacy with skill both in the community and in the university. Placing a value on the knowledge that peer writing consultants and their clients already bring to the questions and challenges presented in the classroom represents an inversion of conventional models of literacy sponsorship in which, as Deborah Brandt has described, “although the interests of the sponsor and sponsored do not have to converge (and, in fact, may conflict) sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty,” (166-7). Campuses that enroll significant percentages of their students from their home communities should make use of the full range of their writing consultants’ literacy knowledge, not merely that which they use in classroom contexts. In their study of a rural community college campus, Howley et al. problematize what they term “the deficit views of rural life” (10), suggesting that on rural campuses students find the overlapping system of relationships and connections familiar to them from the home community. The complex web of interconnected relationships and roles evident on such a campus may make it easier for rural students, particularly non-traditional students who may be displaced workers or otherwise economically disadvantaged, to more effectively navigate the challenges of college because they can leverage relationships and operational modes from the community. Howley et al. contend that, as a result of this embeddedness, students under pressure from family, work, and economic distress may be more likely to persist and transplant to the college environment successfully because “rural community members are more likely to respond to each other in ways that do not threaten their multiple commitments but rather support and maintain them” (8). The stories of the three writing consultants described above point

to the rich promise that an embrace of multiplicity in the writing center may offer university students as they construct their academic literacies.

Stacie's story remains, in some ways, something of an exception on our campus. Whatever losses she sustained as her relationships were strained by the changes she experienced were incorporated into the unbroken fabric of her life narrative because of the way education, for her, came to represent continuity with her past literacy life and practices. Stacie, with her bonfire and friendships maintained after graduation, succeeded in integrating her campus and community lives more fully than most. For students motivated primarily or solely by economic need, cultivating academic literacy on a rural, commuter campus may ultimately prove to be unnecessarily difficult if the process can be completed only at the cost of displacement or a devaluation of one's prior experiences. Cultivating a garden of sweet corn, tomatoes, and greens, the familiar things, in one's backyard is a long way from cultivating a soyfield in the monoculture of contemporary agriculture. As Stacie's story demonstrates, when we encourage students to locate and employ their personally and community-valued literacies in the service of their academic growth, rather than displacing those literacies with some imagined, homogenized academic literacy, there is greater potential for productivity and sustained growth both for students and the university community itself.

For Joe, the integration of campus and community literacy has become far more than a success strategy or an area of personally satisfying growth (though it is, of course, those things). Since writing his reflection piece, Joe has published several poems in literary journals and contributed to the growth of an active literary community on our campus and in our county. He speaks often of what it has meant to connect to others on our campus with whom he found common experience and could cultivate shared aspiration grounded in both the local community and a college education. His insight into the range of students' primary identities underlying their "student-at-university" identities and his perception that "people don't read" illustrates the gap between students' perceptions of their community context and university context, but in writing sessions his stylistic embrace of an appreciation for the texture of social exchange and the ambiguous feelings students have for acquiring academic literacy position him as a highly effective tutor. As the experiences and practices of Stacie and Joe suggest, such sponsorship may be most effective when such validation takes social forms recognizable to students and explicitly acknowledges the moves required by these shifting literacy contexts.

Heather's adult experiences of literacy in the community as a single mother offer insight into the ways that critical literacies may be cultivated through oppositional encounters with authority and through storytelling imbued with relationally-constructed meaning. Her literacy practices in the community—producing statements for court and completing paperwork for the county bureaucracy, helping her children with their own educations—became to an extent acts of resistance to what she perceived as the prevailing narrative about who she was and what her potential might be. Just as Heather sought to take control of the narrative of a childhood that included late-night chats with an alcoholic father (parenting which “wasn't all that horrible”), she formed her aspirations around a life of writing in resistance on behalf of others. That very positioning as an outsider became an asset once she decided to apply to her local Kent State campus and pursue a degree in Human Services. As Heather saw it, she was bringing to the university valuable insights and literacy experiences that would enrich her value as a student and professional. Heather continues her account by observing the ways that her integrated, hybridized literacy practices in college enabled her transition to full adulthood as a parent and professional in the community:

Everything in my life has been [a search] for meaning and the exchange of information, but I had never realized it. . . . it all was starting to form a web and connecting in the middle to this one goal: to make a difference. College is my way of trying to make a positive change in such a negative world. (Haueter)

Heather's observations about her application of previous literacy practices and experiences in the development of academic literacy illustrate not only the practical benefits of gaining fluency in academic writing (making progress toward a degree and career goals) but also the healing power of living a life undivided by uneasy barriers between the worlds of on and off-campus. Her ability to read texts critically, taking them apart and then rebuilding meaning, offers another example of the means by which place and community may prepare a student for college in a fashion that the university does not typically anticipate or access.

For Stacie and Joe, continued engagement with their own non-academic literacies and those of their clients offers them what they perceive to be accelerated and personally meaningful progress toward becoming more proficient academic writers. As Heather puts into practice some of her community-based notions about literacy, critical thinking, and identity in

her role as a writing consultant, she advances her own skill and confidence at the same time that she assists other students in doing so. Heather concludes her reflection by noting that “the most compelling literacy . . . [she has] been involved with in the Learning Center is the writing for [developmental writing courses]” (Haueter) because of the value she sees in helping other students gain a more nuanced and compassionate view of others and of themselves. These students’ stories of reading and writing began with literacies they had practiced alone and with others in Columbiana County long before they entered college, and their extracurricular literacy experiences continue to contribute in powerful, positive ways to their formation as academic writers.

TUTORS CO-SPONSORING LITERACY/ HYBRIDITY

Given their tremendous resource base and their rootedness in place, consultants can promote hybridization by encouraging students to explore the literacy knowledge and practice they employ outside the university in a variety of other settings. Doing this requires a willingness to follow conversational tangents and personal stories, indeed to build them into a session’s agenda. In one case, Joe related to me a difficult session in which a student trying to analyze the movie *Freaks* was able to make progress after Joe discovered the student had been avidly following news of an NFL scandal; Joe used the student’s knowledgeable analysis of the news reporting to encourage him to make similar reading moves as a viewer of *Freaks*. As Joe has suggested above, many students also perceive themselves as non-readers and non-writers, so recasting this perception through curiosity about personal and place-based literacy practices valued by the student may help clear the ground of counterproductive notions about the difference between academic life and “real” life. Here follow a few similar cases of consultants assisting students to see the academic moves in light of their extra-curricular literacies.

Adam¹—An Aesthetic Move

A student, “Adam,” who is himself an avid reader and non-traditional student working in manufacturing, brought a nearly-complete draft into the Learning Center, hoping to work on what he felt were problems with how he was making use of his lens text, Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. In working with him, I could see his enthusiasm for the material and that he clearly had synthesized the material in order to investigate U2’s *Zooropa* album as required by the assignment, yet he was not doing so in a way a reader fresh to the material would be able to interpret. As the

writing consultant, I began the session by responding to his stated goal for the session by describing a section in his work where the problem seemed apparent. He responded by suggesting that he was “trying to be vague” in order to produce “better writing” that would not be “glaring” in making the point he wished to make.

At that point in the session, rather than “correcting” his perception of academic style, I asked why he had made the aesthetic choice he was making, where he had developed his mental model of “good” writing. At this point Adam, warming visibly to his subject, briefly described the ending of *The Life of Pi*, its ambiguity and appeal, explaining that the novel was typical of the reading he preferred to do. He explained, “I really like metaphors is what I’m saying as opposed to like a simile . . . Simile dumbs it down.” He went on to explain that he found similes predictable and they don’t “challenge the reader to use his own mind.” He added that he felt it was beneficial to allow a metaphor to play out in his essay because it “leaves a reader time to try and figure it out.” The emphasis on extending time in his essay is also significant, reflecting as it does the different rhythm of Adam’s reading life off-campus, in which ideas and literature are consumed for pleasure, as opposed to the more instrumentally-driven consumption of academic work in university life. Once I understood that Adam wanted to engage his reader as an active partner in interpretation, I could help him identify the moves he needed to make in order to support his reader.

Melody—Why We Write

Stacie was partnered on a weekly basis with “Melody,” a non-traditional student who expressed at first a great deal of self-doubt and concern about writing. She was direct in relaying to us that much of the trouble she was experiencing related to trauma and ongoing medical issues, and that as a high school student she had been “a really good writer” according to her teachers. Stacie, responding to Melody’s visible agitation, reassured her that they would take the reading and writing tasks piece by piece so she could stop at any point if she began to feel overwhelmed. My account here covers multiple sessions over the course of a semester which are summarized for the purpose of offering a longer view of the process of cultivating hybrid literacies.

Stacie began most sessions by asking Melody to read the assigned text aloud and discuss as she went so they could identify any problems with comprehension as they occurred. This had the effect of focusing Melody’s

attention on the act of simply reading aloud rather than worrying about how she was measuring up. Very early on it became clear that she did have some difficulty comprehending, but once she did, she readily connected the texts to her own life experiences and feelings. Because Melody was generating so many thoughts that seemed only loosely associated with one another, Stacie encouraged her to note them down as she was reading. Melody immediately recognized in this common reading strategy a connection to advice her counselor had given her, suggesting that she journal in order to process her feelings. This insight led to a conversation about why both student client and student consultant write, what role the act of writing plays in their lives. Stacie shared that she also keeps a journal of her thoughts, though for her they represent a more spiritual investigation. Both women talked about identity, how it changes in response to experience, and how writing can be a way to track those changes, making sense of them through re-reading and revision.

In their sessions together, Stacie was able to re-direct conversation from the purposes of their extracurricular literacy practices to the question of why we write intellectually, pointing out to Melody that her professor was asking her to use writing to think through the problems of the text, just as she used it in her journaling to process her emotions and make sense of her experiences. Melody noted that her professor did not want her to use lots of “I think” or “I feel” language, and she expressed frustration with the problem of how to represent her own ideas about the text without marking the origin of her thoughts in this way. This led to a brief discussion about the conventions of intellectual writing—why they are different from those of journaling—and how Melody might draw on her journaling practices to develop her reading of texts before using her ideas for more formal papers.

Meta-Review of Tutors Co-Sponsoring Literacy/ Hybridity

What makes these session worth remarking is that, once again, the barrier between these two students was at least partially dismantled by the consultant’s decision to work with, rather than work against, the student’s extracurricular literacy experiences. By encouraging Melody to see connections between a literacy practice she already valued and the new one which she viewed with such trepidation, Stacie helped restore to her a sense of place. Melody had been under the impression that nothing she thought or could write would be appropriate for the assignment, and though she felt it was expected she should transform herself into a college student, she also seemed determined to assert her sense of herself as a survivor. This latter identity

and her healing process were of greater interest and importance to her than her identity as a student. Stacie, in acknowledging the connection between her college literacy experiences and her own non-academic, more spiritual journey, was attempting to demonstrate for the student the possibility of multiplicity, of layered literacies and selves that complement rather than conflict with one another.

Throughout the semester Melody continued to write her way across a spectrum that often resembled journaling more closely than the personal intellectual essay assigned by the professor teaching her basic writing course. Around mid-semester Stacie noted with chagrin that although she had tried her best to show Melody how to make use of her journaling style for pre-writing and then adapt it for her essays, Melody still often chose to turn inward, taking assignments in directions she preferred for their therapeutic value rather than addressing the professor's intent. "But," Stacie said to me, "I think maybe that's just what she needs to do right now, you know? If college is a part of her therapy, that's just how it is. Hopefully when she gets to College Writing I, she'll be ready to change it up a little more."

This consultant's realistic acknowledgement of the gap between the student's purposes and the university's purposes, and her willingness to truly collaborate with the student—which meant, at times, simply offering her choices and then accepting them, whatever they were, without further comment—are exemplary, I think, of many similar stories. Although in other stories it might not be therapy journaling we're working with as a literacy practice—perhaps instead it's politics or religion or story-telling or crime dramas—we need models of literacy sponsorship that include an appreciation for the value of layered literacies in the writing center. In practice, this means that consultants like this one should actively invite those literacies into the discussion so that they can be examined and used rather than resisted. Stacie, while frustrated that she could not assist the student in more rapidly making progress toward success in the class, was only able to make progress with this particularly challenging student because, as the student client acknowledged to me, Stacie had established trust with her by respecting her choices and constructing with her a way for talking about those choices. This trust kept her engaged in her class and engaged with the writing center despite her ongoing extracurricular struggles. In this case, Stacie, by accepting the dissonance between the student's intentions and the university's requirements, was able to continue engaging the student in a conversation about the dissonance itself. This remained productive for the student, helping her continue with her university education.

Differences in purpose may be one challenge that writing consultants sensitive to the idiosyncratic contexts of place and personal history may effectively address; differences in aesthetic and intellectual style may similarly benefit from an approach to literacy sponsorship informed by curiosity and a receptivity to context. Early in the session with Adam, I had clearly expected to assist him in understanding typical academic essay moves like transitions and claims sentences, moves that would help him bridge between the two texts and give the essay a recognizably academic cast. Instead, the session shifted focus to acknowledging and making use of his interest in offering less explicit guidance for his reader, a guidance more similar to the spiritual adventure novels he favors, works whose meanings “you’re kind of left trying to decide” and which, perhaps for thematic reasons, offered an appropriate aesthetic for an essay in which he clearly had engaged in his own spiritual adventure of sorts.

If instead I had viewed his moves as mistakes to be corrected, we might have missed developing a deeper understanding of his intellectual project in the essay, a project mirroring the spiritual quest of both works and adopting something of the Socratic flavor of his preferred recreational reading material. Not only did we gain some needed perspective on the project he was pursuing in his writing, but through metadiscourse about the writing process, Adam also became more aware of himself as a purposeful decision-maker balancing the challenge of satisfying his own aesthetic preferences against the needs of his academic audience.

In each of the above sessions, writing consultants and clients perceive a lack of continuity between their familiar literacy practices and those they must adopt within the university. In the case of Adam, he retains an aesthetic from his recreational reading that influences his academic writing. Making him aware of the moves he’s making as a writer, their source and their use, assists him in adapting his aesthetic more intentionally to academic requirements. In this way, he is able to develop rather than erase his distinctive writing style. For the sexter mentioned much earlier in the article and for Melody, active investigations into their non-academic literacy practices evolve into conversations about their identities as academic writers and introduce modes of critical thinking that can be adapted for use in academic contexts.

TOWARD A PRAGMATICS OF PLACE

A recent article by Marc Scott written in collaboration with peer writing consultants at Shawnee State University in another corner of Appalachian Ohio suggests that building rapport with first generation college students is fundamental to success and may look different with Appalachian students than building rapport with students of other backgrounds. In particular, Scott and his consultants recommend altering the politeness norms of the middle class university writing center to more regionally appropriate norms, for example, offering a more direct explanation of *why* a particular feature in a paper is successful, then making a clear and direct transition to what is *not* working in a paper and why (58). They also describe writing consultants speaking in regional dialect themselves as they tutor (“this part needs revised”) (55) and the value for writers in seeing their own linguistic and literacy journeys reflected in that of the consultants whom they trust to assist them along the way. Extending this discussion of language and social behaviors to embrace the entire complex of literacy practice, we might strive for what Kurt Spellmeyer calls a “way of reading that restores a sense of connection to things, and with it, a greater confidence in our ability to act” (168). Spellmeyer contends that such a “pragmatics of reading” accomplishes the “most essential work of the arts” (168), thus affording students access to their cultural inheritance as a tool for making sense of their contemporary context. Likewise, pragmatics of writing on a rural campus requires an attention to the relationships and social contexts that shape literacy practices on the campus and in the community and a critical examination of loss when—and if—it occurs. Such an awareness supports students’ ability to act and make decisions with an authority derived from knowledge grounded in place, relationship, and the academic literacy they are in the act of acquiring.

In his handbook for students, *ReWriting: How To Do Things with Texts*, Joseph Harris unpacks for his audience the “moves” of intellectual writing and reading, emphasizing the need for them to work with the understanding that “Our creativity . . . has its roots in the work of others—in response, reuse, and rewriting”(2). For students learning to identify and make moves between and within multiplex literacies, there is much to be gained from Harris’ approach of explicitly commenting to students upon the pragmatic workings of intellectual reading and writing; by sifting the pragmatic from the conceptual, he makes possible the comparability of these moves to the more familiar moves of students’ community-based literacies. A student who composes music for her faith community may readily recognize in Harris’

descriptions of forwarding or “taking an approach” the moves she makes in referencing a line from a well-known hymn or riffing off a favorite inspirational writer’s work in order to bring those insights to a religious context. Harris calls upon students to make conceptually sophisticated choices about their writing moves as readers and writers informed by their own evaluation of the rhetorical spaces they occupy. For the student steeped in making these same moves for other purposes outside the university, the act of naming the moves and demonstrating their utility for intellectual work may be game-changing. Writing consultants fluent in the use of these moves both on and off campus are more likely to see the potential for making these connections.

In our writing center practice, then, cultivating literacy hybridity requires an intentional pursuit of several aims that may inflect our sessions with a slightly different feel.

- *Establishing community-based identities as writers and readers:* As the experiences of Joe and others described above suggest, when students arrive at rural and regional campuses, they often do not identify as successful readers and writers simply because they do not recognize their non-academic reading and writing practices as having value in an academic context. Many student writers expect, early in their academic careers, to write only “what the teacher wants.” Others, like Heather or Adam, may see themselves as successful readers and writers but lack an awareness of the utility of their community-based literacy practices. Writing centers serving strongly place-identified clients may benefit from inquiring into the literacy identities of their clients in order to help them tap into their competence as literate adults, in this way establishing a fertile ground for the cultivation of academic literacies. A writing center that asks not only, “what do you know about this?” but also “*how* do you know it?” may offer students new ways to ground their authority in the classroom.
- *Leveraging our multiple relationships:* Similarly, part of training writing consultants on rural campuses should include drawing their attention to the complex of relationships and knowledge they bring with them into the university, helping them appreciate the ways that their community-based social contexts may animate and enrich their roles as writing consultants and literacy sponsors on the campus. Successful peer tutors like Stacie, Joe, and Heather ground much of their literate practice in community-

based social relationships and histories. Their awareness of the contrast between their forms of social, literate exchange and the social literacy exchanges of the academy give them an edge as they seek to make sense of why they think as they do about the questions posed by their professors. The result may be a generative disruption, both of their position in the academy and their position in the community.

- *Making use of dissonance and a surplus of meaning:* Writing sessions should routinely include questions not only about what a writer hopes to accomplish, but about the choices and histories leading up to what a writer has already done. In this way, dissonance between a writer's accustomed literacy practices and the practices favored in academic settings may lead not to displacement of known practices but instead adaptation and hybridity. A writer might choose to be restrained and direct in language in one portion of an essay while elaborating and taking calculated risks in another. Complementary plantings and hybrid cultivars may, in the end, result in more lively and productive academic work.

Writing centers on rural campuses must cultivate connections between consultants and student clients with particular attention to creating space for the inclusion of the multi-layered literacies of community belonging that, if consciously propagated and combined with academic literacies, have potential to transform both the lives of students and of their university communities. The key here is that notion of cultivation: without planning and intention, the literacies that grow will be wild and variable in their use or else monocultural and lacking in resilience. Because of their position within the academy, writing consultants are uniquely positioned to do this work of cultivating places—and people—at the center.

Note

1. All students were invited to remain anonymous or be named in the article. Consultants chose to be named individually, while clients either had no preference or indicated they would prefer anonymity. The names here given for consultants, then, are their real names while clients' names are pseudonyms. Consultants reviewed the article and, without exception, gave feedback approving the accuracy of the representation of themselves contained here, at times even offering additional insight.

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