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Finding Our Places, Defining Our Places: Service Learning and Ecocomposition in the First-Year Composition Classroom

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FINDING OUR PLACES, DEFINING OUR PLACES: SERVICE LEARNING AND

ECOCOMPOSITION IN THE FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Heidi Ann Stevenson

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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ABSTRACT

Title: Finding Our Places, Defining Our Places: Service Learning and Ecocomposition in the First-Year Composition Classroom

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This dissertation studies a service learning model based on the work of Thomas Deans as a possible way to implement ecocomposition as defined by Sidney I. Dobrin and Christian R. Weisser. Writing-intensive service learning projects, which doubled as needed writing for community sites and graded classroom assignments, were designed and coupled with reflective writing to enable students' exploration of their dynamic, reciprocal relationships with environment and writing holistically. Through qualitative case studies, I provide multiple perspectives from myself, a co-researcher, and student research participants. I report this data in narrative form in order to explore not just the ideas presented in the data, but also how that data is situated ecologically.

The data chronicled a variety of experiences with service learning, teaching, and qualitative research. The exploration of interconnectedness to environment through service learning resulted in positive writing experiences for some of the student research participants as perceived by them and the researchers. The data indicating less positive writing experiences is analyzed in consideration of the subsequently published scholarship in service learning, ecocomposition, and related theory and pedagogy.

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Possible solutions are proposed to the problems indicated in the form of refinements to the service learning model.

Ultimately, this dissertation proposes that a service learning model designed to implement ecocomposition can cultivate motivation to explore the multifaceted interconnections to one's environment, confidence to write in complex rhetorical situations, and interconnectedness to environment that informs traditionally academic work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation explores ecological metaphors and interconnectedness. I'd like to honor some of my most immediate interconnections here, ones that directly contributed to the quality of this study:

First, deep gratitude to my advisor, Claude Mark Hurlbert, who continued to believe in my work. His guidance, patience, and hard work were all crucial to the completion of this document. Earnest thanks go also to my committee, Gian S. Pagnucci and Michael M. Williamson, who provided layers of insight that informed this final document in valuable ways.

My colleagues at Northern Michigan University and fellow writers and thinkers in my community have also been a constant source of feedback and support, and I thank them all. You gave me a safe and inspiring place from which to write, and I would have been lost without your unscrambled brains, eagle eyes, and kind words.

Teresa Hunt mentored me through a Master's degree and my first experiences teaching composition. On the way, she stressed two things: I would make a great composition and rhetoric scholar, and "comfort is secondary" when it comes to shoes. To my teacher, mentor, colleague, and friend, the loss of whom I feel every day: the first one stuck. I hope this dissertation makes you proud enough that you can deal with my choices in footwear.

Kelli Custer: you and I found ourselves on similar journeys. Your intellect, energy, empathy, and strength directly contribute to this document. They contribute to who I am as I write this. I thank you here in words, but truly acknowledgingyou're your

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND, THEORY, PRACTICE, AND RESEARCH

Prologue

In the spring of 2003, I began a qualitative study of a college first-year composition course with a service learning component in order to complete my doctoral degree in English composition and rhetoric at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The service learning component at Rockville University (the name has been changed to protect the identities of my research participants) contained a variety of service learning projects from which the research participants could choose. All of the projects, though, were writing intensive, and functioned as necessary pieces for local organizations and class assignments simultaneously. I acted as a teacher researcher. That is, I aided in the design of the course and continued to act as a consultant and partial facilitator for the service learning portion of it. A teaching assistant co-designed the course with me and acted as instructor. I observed during the days when service learning was a focus for the class activities. When I spoke in class, it was as the person helping to coordinate the service learning projects, not as a teacher who had control over the students' grades. I collected journal entries from the students who chose to also be research participants, from my co-researcher, and from myself; I also collected class assignments that dealt with service learning, and conducted a variety of kinds of interviews.

My decisions to research what I did, the way I did, and report it the ways you see here are all chronicled within this narrative document. It was written over the course of several years while I continued to work, network, and interact in the field of composition. For this reason, I was sometimes unable to discuss or cite the sources most recent in the field to the date of this document's completion in the earlier chapters. They could not

become part of this story until they were published. While creating some minor inconvenience, this approach is of great value to me in my search for meaning.

You are about to read the story of not just a literature review, a rationale for a study, the reporting of subsequent data, and my conclusions, but also my entire dissertation journey—what I learned about ecocomposition theory and service learning during my Ph.D. coursework and reading for my comprehensive exams in composition and rhetoric, how my experiences affected my decisions about my dissertation's design and writing, how I decided to take on this project—a qualitative study of a first-year composition class with a service learning component inspired by ecocomposition and reported in narrative form. You are about to read how the research itself changed my opinions on service learning and ecocomposition, what lessons I have taken away from the whole experience, and my attempt to create meaning for you, the audience.

How I came to my decisions about writing this dissertation is just as important to share here as the decisions themselves. I write this as a research study, but also as a chronicle of my evolution as a scholar, writer, and instructor that others may choose to compare to their own, especially if they are interested in ecocomposition and service learning. I can point to two things that influenced me to feel this way from early on in this project. The first was an article I analyzed as part of a class assignment in my doctoral coursework on research methodology: "Black (W)holes: A Researcher's Place in Her Writing," written by Karen Norum. She implements a very different format in her article than I do here, creating separate vertical columns to contain different perspectives on the same topic, homelessness: her personal autobiographical narrative about her experience with homelessness, a narrative containing interview data from two currently

homeless research participants, and a third person point of view write up of some secondary research data on homelessness in the United States.

Her arguments for doing so affected my decision to use the format that I do here, intertwining my personal narrative with both primary and secondary research data to explore my topic, service learning, as a possible practice to bring ecocomposition theory to the first-year composition classroom. Norum argues that identifying and examining our biases through explanation of our experiences is crucial. Explanations of past experiences can enrich the understanding our readers have of our current research. In addition, locating those biases is helpful to the researcher/writer, in shaping a study and coming to meaningful conclusions: "Rather than work against us, these biases direct our research...they help us identify stories. They help us choose what to describe. They help us identify the beginning and ending points" (319).

I wanted to share the story of my entire dissertation experience in an effort to help my readers understand as much as possible about what influenced me to be interested in this subject matter, why I designed the study this way, and why I came to the conclusions that I did based on the data I collected. I could have shared only the literature I found relevant, a single rationale for this study, data, and then the conclusions I made based on that data. Prompted in part by Norum, though, I decided to do my best to help you understand the choices I made at each juncture—why I chose to review this literature, how I came to rationalize this study in this way, how I chose data to include, and how I came to these conclusions.

Sharing all of this gave me greater opportunity to reflect on my experiences and decisions. Often, this process helped me identify biases that were affecting my thoughts

on the project. This, in turn, led me to reconsider my decisions and conclusions at times. Other times, it reinforced them. Always, it deepened and enriched my own understanding of the process and the outcomes. You, the reader, may be more receptive, and likewise more dismissive of some of my conclusions with this richer understanding of how I came to them. I believe that is in part because you come to the reading of this document with your own rich set of experiences. I believe acknowledging all of this will enable all of us to find more meaning in this document.

There was a second major influence on my decision to take a narrative approach here that included contextual information about my experiences and my surroundings: ecocomposition, and my conviction that it could be a relevant and valuable theory to my own writing, not just the writing of my research participants and future students. I was studying theories of composing, and I was composing an academic work myself. Up until my Ph.D. work, I had been used to studying theory and pedagogy as it applied to me—as in how it applied to my fiction writing. I still see myself as a writer of narrative, a storyteller with a Master's degree in creative writing studies and literature. My graduate studies leading up to my doctoral work in composition had been in the interest of applying academic knowledge to my own writing, not someone else's. Studying composition theory at the doctoral level, then, studying theory in which scholars theorize about writers and their writing processes, I could not help but think about how it applied not just to my future students in composition courses, but also to me and my own writing. I am not that different from the students I teach; I would argue that none of us are.

Ecocomposition became the theoretical background for the kind of service learning practices I decided to research in a college writing classroom, as well a theory

I kept in mind when crafting my dissertation. I could not help but think that the ideas I was applying to the student writers I studied also applied to me. Consider this Derek Owens quote, from some of his writing in ecocomposition: "To think of ourselves as separate from our environs is a bad habit we need to break" (149). I wanted to find ways to help students acknowledge and study the nature of their connectedness to the elements of their environment that were affecting their writing, and in turn, how their writing was affecting their environment. In designing this document, I felt I needed to explore the same things—not just the academic environment in which my study took place, but the nature of my connectedness to it. Telling my story, sharing my entire dissertation journey in this document, became imperative to me if I were to make it a complete document, one that demonstrated how my study and my conclusions based on it affected and were affected by elements of my environment. I could not remove the study from its environment without losing important information. I needed to tell the whole story.

Thich Nhat Hanh wrote to his friend, a research scientist going through a time of personal and professional identity wrangling, "The wave lives the life of a wave and at the same time, the life of the water. When you breathe, you breathe for all of us" (132). If I wanted my students to acknowledge this dual responsibility, to acknowledge that they were an individual writer with a unique identity, or wave, but also part of a greater whole, the world, the water, and that these things were constantly affecting and being affected by each other, I needed to do the same myself. I needed to acknowledge that I was more than an individual making meaning by conducting a study and writing about it. I needed to acknowledge, and further, to consider seriously, how the study and how I have been affected by context, the greater whole, the world, the water.

In designing a study, collecting research data, and making conclusions, I feel as though I am "breathing for all of us." I feel I am doing so in the grander way that Thich Nhat Hanh meant, but perhaps on a smaller, more immediate scale, too—I am studying, thinking, and writing for myself, and my readers. I want to acknowledge my role as not only an individual making meaning of data here, a wave creating form out of water, but also as someone who was changed by that process—a wave whose identity is in part determined by the water. I designed this study hoping for no less for the research participants, working with pedagogy that was designed to implement ecocomposition. I thought this service learning component might make their writing more valuable to them and their audience. I want this document to be valuable for myself and for my audience, too.

I do not think that this dissertation contains Answers, or Truths. The ideas here and the process of coming to them, though—collecting qualitative data, and making conclusions based on it—changed the way I think about myself. It changed the way I think about myself, writing, the teaching of writing, first-year composition courses, service learning, ecocomposition, and qualitative research. I commit all of it to paper in the hope that my readers will find valuable answers and truths of their own, even if they differ vastly from mine. I hope that seeing the story of these ideas and conclusions coming into being allows you to come to your own conclusions. I am not here to tell you what any of this means in an indisputable, universal sense. The only thing I believe I can do is tell you what these experiences meant to me, at this particular time. In the end, I find that more valuable than trying to impose a singular meaning on the data I have

collected here. Instead, I would like to share the whole story of my inquiry and meaning-making process.

Theory: Ecocomposition

It was the fall of 2001. I came to my doctoral coursework in composition and rhetoric as a newly graduated Master's student with an academic background in creative writing and literature; however, I had an experiential background in teaching composition. A teaching assistantship during my M.A. had provided me with four semesters in the composition classroom. I had fallen in love with the practice, and during that time I had also fallen in love with the pedagogy, the theory, and the history of the discipline. There was no doubt in my mind that I would seek out a doctoral program specializing in composition studies; I felt passionate about the teaching of writing, and I was hungry for composition theory that would enable me to be the most effective writing instructor I could be. I wanted new theoretical ideas I could tie to practice and apply to the classroom.

My doctoral coursework in the Composition and TESOL program at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania offered no shortage of such theories. Each semester filled my head with new ideas and classroom approaches to consider. I was continually excited and inspired. I was thinking hard about my future teaching practices, but, admittedly, none of the theory I was reading was jumping off the page and suggesting obvious correlating classroom practices. And then, a course titled "Teaching Writing" introduced me to ecocomposition.

At first glance, it appeared to present another writer identity to consider in the classroom, that of the nature lover or environmentalist. Initially, my class discussed it as

an element of ecocriticism, a "critical approach to studying nature writing" (Dobrin and Weisser 25). What I knew of it operated with common understandings of the words "ecological" and "environment." These words referred to anything associated with nature, the natural world that had not been interrupted or altered by human industry. Much like the gender issues of feminist composition theory or the power structures of critical pedagogy, ecocomposition appeared to concern itself with how nature and environmental issues affected the processes of a writer.

I read more about ecocomposition, starting with Marilyn Cooper's 1986 essay, "The Ecology of Writing." Instead of asking students to respond to pieces of nature writing, Cooper redefined ecocomposition, proposing an ecological model of writing processes themselves. For Cooper, an ecological understanding of a writer's situation paid attention to the writer and surroundings in a holistic sense; the writer and all the parts of those surroundings were connected and constantly interacting with each other. This understanding solved the problems she saw in the then-current cognitive process model of composition—there, the idea of audience, of the writer's very process, was singular, artificial, and static.

In an ecological model of composition, scholars would have to think about the writer's "environment," or metaphorical ecosystem, much the same way biologists thought about a literal ecosystem—it was alive, and trying to examine it by examining one isolated part was counterproductive when all of the parts were constantly working together and affecting each other. A significant factor for me here was that she treated the writer as a part of that "eco" system, another dynamic, ever-changing, and interconnected factor of that complex environment. This aligned it more with post-process theories of

composition than ecocriticism and nature writing. As Thomas Kent maintained, "all post-process theorists hold three assumptions about the act of writing: (1) writing is public; (2) writing is interpretive; (3) writing is situated" (1). Kent's third tenet, especially, struck me as descriptive of Cooper's ideas.

I was intrigued. Cooper's ecocomposition, like other concepts in post-process theory, worked with the understanding that a writer's identity and environment were engaged in an ever-changing, dynamic relationship. Using the ecosystem metaphor offered me more productive pedagogical options than the post-process theory with which I had thus far become familiar. Stepping back and examining the writer's identity and surroundings in Cooper's ecological terms suggested to me that my future students and I should be studying *all* of the ways in which writers were interconnected with each other and their surroundings—holistically—instead of trying to pick them apart or address them individually.

In my earlier teaching efforts, I had often felt overwrought at the prospect of trying to address and honor the many individual student identities in one composition classroom. Cooper's theory suggested a much more feasible and beneficial approach. I could find ways to help my students assess their place in their metaphorical ecosystem, how it changed continually, and the active role they had in that system. In doing so, all of the elements of their identities and their environment could be acknowledged in a writing classroom—not individually, but nonetheless productively. While those elements would be forever changing, the fact that our students are intricately and dynamically interconnected with their environment would not.

I sought out more recent work on ecocomposition. Dobrin and Weisser's *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition* built on Cooper's model. It continued to define ecocomposition in a way that addressed the concerns I had about the divisions among other approaches I had been intrigued by earlier, such as critical pedagogy, feminist composition theory, and cultural studies in composition. Dobrin and Weisser stated outright much of what Cooper's work had already suggested to me. They stated directly that "environment *precedes* race, class, gender, and culture" (32). Further, they posited that the writing itself was an integral, active, dynamic element of that environment: "Discourse creates environment and environment creates discourse" (32).

This was a significant addition to the ideas in Cooper's essay; writing itself was an active, dynamic part of the metaphorical ecosystem, along with writer identity and the many parts of the surrounding environment. Edward M. White, who summarized Dobrin and Weisser's approach in his foreword to *Natural Discourse,* explained: *"*They see such competing notions as cultural studies or identity formations coming under the umbrella of ecocomposition, since the notion of place precedes all others" (qtd. in Dobrin and Weisser x). I was beginning to conceptualize possibilities for classroom practices led by this theory.

The authors went on to ground their definition of ecocomposition in Ernst Haeckel's 1866 definition of the term "ecology," which was "the total relations of the animal both to its organic and inorganic environment" (9). For me, the word "total" was significant. It worked to once and for all negate notions of "eco" as referring solely to our traditional understandings of the physical, natural environment. Ecocomposition's roots were in the study of nature writing; Dobrin and Weisser's use of Haeckel's definition,

however, urged compositionists to think of the prefix "eco" in terms of Cooper's metaphor, to think about all kinds of places—physical, but also social, political, virtual, etc. Their use of the word "total" also worked to keep the focus holistic, to study the interconnectedness, not the individual parts.

This was theory that truly excited me. Ecocomposition moved me past the personal "sticking point" I had come to in my study of other composition theories throughout my doctoral coursework. I wanted to create a classroom that cultivated awareness of students' total relations with environment, and opportunity for a study of how they and their writing were active agents in that environment. As writers, they were interconnected with their environment. I wanted to help my students study those relationships between themselves, their surroundings, and their writing.

Other ideas being discussed in composition studies at the time *Natural Discourse* was written reflected a similar post-process turn, but no other work appeared to take such a comprehensive approach. Nothing else seemed to depict the complexity of the relationships among self, writing, and environment so completely and, to me, accessibly as ecocomposition. bell hooks' engaged pedagogy combined traditional expressivism with critical pedagogy. Like Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, she implemented praxis, but her ultimate goals, I thought, were similar to Peter Elbow's, enabling personal freedom for each writer. I saw another attempt at reconciling similarities in Donald McAndrew's 1996 article, "Ecofeminism and the Teaching of Literacy." He defined ecofeminism as "creating liberatory political and social construction for those who deplore the denigration of nature and women" (367). He also gave a brief synopsis of feminist ecotheology in the same article, quoting another author: "Many spiritual

ecofeminists see the major problems of our time not as political, economic, or social, but spiritual, and they call for rethinking of the relation of humanity and spirituality to nature (Christ qtd. in McAndrew).

McAndrew's work circled in closer to Cooper, Dobrin, and Weisser's ecocomposition when he said, "To gender, race, and class, we should now add nature, and in the process create a contextualized web of social, political, and natural concerns" (377). He was beginning to complicate previously simple ideas of environment; however, he was still examining individual concerns.

I left my reading on ecocomposition agreeing that "self" could be defined meaningfully through its relationships to its surroundings. I felt that that writing's active role in environment was something that should be studied in a composition classroom. I felt the interconnections among writing, identity, and environment were likewise worthy of study—perhaps even study within my dissertation. I had decided to pursue this degree out of a desire to find composition theory that inspired in me ideas for effective classroom practice; now I was interested in proposing a dissertation study which allowed me to continue doing so. I had to ask myself, then: how might I implement ecocomposition theory in a composition course? If I wanted to study an application of this theory for my dissertation, what practices might I study?

Practice: Service Learning as Writing With and About the Community

Discursive ecology in action. When suggesting possible pedagogy to follow their definition of ecocomposition, Dobrin and Weisser proposed "discursive ecology," which "asks students to see writing and writing processes as systems of interaction, economy, and interconnectedness" (116). They went on to say, "We feel that the most progressive

and dynamic forms of ecocomposition urge students to look at their own discursive acts as being inherently ecological (117). From there, the discussion continued by presenting ways in which audience must be addressed for students to see their discursive acts as ecological: "In order for students to become familiar with the power of language and rhetoric and see that their words also have impact in discussions of environment and place, assignments and writing tasks must be provided which encourage students to write for audiences other than their teachers" (142). I needed to think of ways that such writing could happen in a college first-year composition classroom.

When I was introduced to service learning in composition studies through later coursework, I knew I had found something promising. This was pedagogy I could study if I was looking for a possible implementation of ecocomposition theory in my dissertation. The initial definitions of service learning that I read were loose, and even in the brief introduction I received to it in class, I could see that it had already been implemented in quite a variety of ways, but I had not encountered any scholarship that directly examined it as an implementation of Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition, or more specifically, discursive ecology.

Definitions of service learning. Because I was now interested in studying service learning in my dissertation, I continued reading and investigating on my own, and designated service learning as one of my areas of study for my comprehensive exams. I found a lot of material to read that discussed service learning within secondary education in general and within higher education in general. There was a limited amount of published writing on service learning within college composition courses at the time. I read general books such as Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles, Jr.'s *Where's the Learning*

in Service-Learning? and composition-specific books like *Public Works: Student Writing as Public Text,* an anthology edited by Emily J. Isaacs and Phoebe Jackson. All of it helped me understand how service learning could fit into educational settings. Once again, I found myself reading and synthesizing, then stepping back and trying to create a useful timeline and overall context. It was helpful for me to review service learning in general first, and then look at what composition scholars in particular had to say about its place in our field.

In the most general sense, service learning was a form of experiential learning that asked the student to perform, investigate, and/or comment on some sort of community service. Thomas Huckin provided more details in his summary of the definition put forth by the United States Congress in the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993: "Service learning is a method by which students learn through active participation in thoughtfully organized service; is conducted in, and meets the needs of the community; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum; includes structured time for reflection and helps foster civic responsibility" (50). This definition stressed "active participation," and "civic responsibility," which both spoke to my supposition that immersion in total environment, which was larger than the classroom, would be a potentially direct, comprehensive, and therefore effective way to implement Dobrin and Weisser's discursive ecology in a classroom. Discursive ecology stressed "interaction, economy, and interconnectedness" (116) and enabled students to see writing as "inherently ecological" (117).

Service learning's roots were commonly traced back to the Progressivism of John Dewey, who believed education is "a process of living and not a preparation for future

living" (7). The aims of his experiential education included shaping students to be "eager to direct the course of change, flexible in their attitudes and dispositions, willing to experiment and to question inherited traditions and values, and socially involved and tolerant of others" (Gutek 326). Dewey's assertions that community was "integral" to education, and that community involvement was crucial for students to feel motivated to be active within their community, echoed much of the Freirean ideology that had resonated with me earlier on in my studies. Like Freire, Dewey felt that interaction with the community was a vital starting point "to question inherited traditions" and for thinking about one's world critically.

History of service learning. Learning some of the history behind service learning's introduction to higher education helped me understand how it had gained support and established a place within college curriculums. Experiential learning that could specifically be called service learning was initially implemented at universities in the 1960s and 1970s. Much of this was spillover from activists of the era that were also college students, and from organizations like the Peace Corps, created by John F. Kennedy, and VISTA, the Volunteers in Service to America, a group initiated by Lyndon B. Johnson in 1964. The first college work study program was started in 1965, at the Metropolitan State College of Denver (Metropolitan State). In 1969, the Atlanta Service-Learning Conference was held. This conference was an early attempt at defining the potential relationships between community service organizations and secondary schools, colleges, and universities. Sponsors included the Southern Regional Education Board; the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; the Atlanta Urban Corps; the Peace Corps; and VISTA (Titlebaum et al.).

I could see how the activism of this era would influence educators to include all

kinds of experiential education in their secondary and higher education curriculums.

While the theory behind service learning like Dewey's experiential education was much

older, noting where some of the newfound attention to service learning had come from

enhanced my understanding of its current place within higher education. It likewise

enhanced my understanding of how any dissertation research I did on service learning in

an educational setting would be received. The more current applications of service

learning in higher education were born of attempts at bringing social activism into the

classroom. This told me again that my interest in service learning might be interpreted by

some as an interest in bringing a social activist agenda into the courses I would research.

Janet Eyler and Dwight E. Giles offered a more current historical critique that

explained why service learning had gotten so much recent attention. They cited common

critiques of higher education as a whole, such as those from The Carnegie Foundation for

the Advancement of Teaching, which emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. A common

observation was the lack of connectedness in higher education and the related lack of

application of what is learned:

> [Lack of] connectedness resulted in the compartmentalization of
>
> knowledge by discipline, preventing students from experiencing the
>
> relationships among various modes of knowledge; subject matter was
>
> walled off behind disciplinary borders and not applied in any integrated
>
> way in academic study or to social issues. Students also experienced a lack
>
> of connection between classroom learning and their personal lives and

between classroom learning and public issues and involvement in the

wider world. (13)

They went on to say soon after that "service-learning is an obvious response to the reform

critics of higher education" (13). There was a more specific reason for the amount of

service learning work being done, programs being instituted, research being conducted,

then. The many books and articles in the 1990s and 2000s about service learning were

due to more than a renewed interest in John Dewey and experiential education. The

recent interest in service learning was in part a result of critiques such as those from the

Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

I could logically assume that most of the service learning I was reading about was

designed to solve problems regarding a specific kind of lack of connectedness that

students were experiencing. I knew that I had seen the lack of connectedness between

"academic learning and public issues and involvement in the wider world" myself, with

my own students in the past. That had been part of the impetus for my interest in critical

pedagogy, and subsequently ecocomposition, and now service learning. I felt as though

much of the wider current interest in service learning was due to reasons similar to my

own after reading the work of Eyler and Giles.

Applications of service learning in composition. With this recent historical

context in mind, I knew I needed to turn my attention more specifically to service

learning within composition courses in higher education in order to define exactly what

practices I wanted to study in the classroom. I found Thomas Deans' *Writing

Partnerships: Service Learning in Composition* while compiling my comprehensive

exam reading list. His theoretical justification for using service learning in a composition

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course was quite similar to my own. The models he provided for service learning in a composition classroom helped me connect specific practices to composition theory.

Deans defined three different models of service learning in composition. The first he discussed was "writing for the community." This method "brings college students into partnerships with nonprofit agencies, where the students undertake what are essentially mini-internships and compose purpose-driven documents like grant proposals, research reports, newsletter articles, and brochures" (53). This model sounded as though it could effectively address the lack of connection between academics and the outside world that was problematic to the educators discussed in Eyler and Giles. In turn, it could help students focus on Dobrin and Weisser's "interaction, economy, and interconnectedness" (116) if they had a chance to interact with their community, and therefore see the impact of their writing somewhere besides the classroom.

Once that writing was completed, though, this model provided no specific practices for further reflection. Without that reflection, it seemed to me there was great potential for the student writers to fall into the habit of "following orders" without thinking much about the kinds of writing they were doing or the places for which they were doing it. It would be easy for students to see this as nothing more than a less-convenient variation on a traditional classroom writing assignment.

Deans' second model for service learning was "writing about the community." Here, the writing was purely reflective, and came after the student had engaged in community service. The focus of this reflection could be anywhere from "processing the powerful emotions prompted by community involvement to critical analysis of the root

social forces that put people in need" (85). The service itself did not necessarily need to be writing-intensive.

If I had still been solely interested in bringing critical pedagogy into a composition classroom, I could see possibilities for this kind of service learning—it could provide the action, and then reflection important in Freire's praxis. I could not see where this model alone, though, could be a possible implementation of ecocomposition, discursive ecology specifically, because the students' writing would still solely function in the classroom setting. They would be writing to a traditional academic audience. The service learning work would not provide an opportunity for students to have a direct impact on their surroundings outside of that classroom with their writing. It would not illustrate the transactional, "inherently ecological" nature of that writing between student and environment.

Lastly, Deans discussed "writing with the community." Deans based his entire chapter about this service learning model on the Community Literacy Center, which was a collaborative effort between Carnegie Mellon University and Community House, a settlement house in Pittsburgh. The service learning work here involved "people addressing dilemmas through writing" (111). It was a carefully planned combination of the first two of Deans' models, I thought, involving the direct action of writing for the community with the useful reflection of writing about the community. Some examples of the CLC's writing with the community included a magazine written by area teenagers and their college student mentors, and a public forum called Community Conversation where teens, mentors, and other members of the community practiced their rhetorical skills and voiced opinions on local issues (112).

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This model, writing with the community, was initially the most exciting to me. The first two, writing for and writing about the community, had positive aspects, but could not stand on their own as practice that fulfilled the theory I was interested in studying, ecocomposition. Writing for the community did not guarantee the work necessary for students to explore their interconnectedness, and writing about the community did not provide writing-intensive work, which I felt was fundamental. I wanted the students to see that their writing was affected by and affected their environment. I liked the idea of focusing on writing that interacted with the students' surroundings, and then providing opportunities for writing reflectively about that interaction, which was how Deans described writing with the community. He referred to it as "literate social action" (112).

The more I thought about this, though, the more I realized that Deans' writing with the community was like the writing about the community in one respect—appealing to me as a critical pedagogue, not an ecocompositionist. If I, my students, and the people at the service learning sites all had static, predictable identities, if we could all see the problems that needed to be solved the same way, if we could easily agree on what "true, positive change" would be, which community sites were most in need of our service, and then all feel intrinsically motivated to enact that change, then writing with the community as described in Deans' text would be ideal. But if we did not agree on all of these things, which was much more likely, then I would be making those decisions for them by choosing sites and projects, and in effect enforcing an agenda on the student writers. I needed a service learning model that would allow me to acknowledge the real intricacy of my students' identities, and the complicated, reciprocal relationship they could have with

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any service learning site, any facet of their environment at all. I wanted to honor my students' complex identities, and be open to anything in which they were interested, in order to study service learning as a possible implementation of ecocomposition.

I came to understand at this point that Deans' theoretical interest for pursuing service learning was more entrenched in critical pedagogy than mine. Indeed, Deans explained, "My approach balances discussions of composition theory, critical pedagogy, and rhetoric…" (1). He soon after argued for a "need for writing teachers who imagine composition as a site for social justice work to push beyond the traditional genres dictated by the academy" (8). My initial interest was primarily based in critical pedagogy, too. Over time, though, my theoretical base had expanded; the concerns of critical pedagogy were still important to me, but I thought ecocomposition more realistically and comprehensively addressed the relationship between writer and surroundings. Critical pedagogy only addressed this in part. I wanted to think of writing with the community as a possible way to put Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition theory into practice, which had to allow for more complex and evolving interests than critical pedagogy on its own could.

Even Dobrin and Weisser at times seemed focused solely on the concerns of critical pedagogues, though, asserting that "one of ecocomposition's very reasons for being is to inquire into ways to bring about political, social, and/or environmental change" (86). What truly excited me about ecocomposition was that I thought it could be all-encapsulating. It provided a theoretical space where all kinds of discourse, and all of the aspects of one's identity and environment where discourse took place were relevant,

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important, and interconnected, and therefore the writer as an entire complex human being, not just a "soldier for change" in a specific realm, was respected and encouraged.

If a student's interests did not fall under my definition of what was significant in a sociopolitical sense, it would not be problematic to me as a researcher of ecocomposition. One of the most important parts of creating a theoretical base in ecocomposition for me was acknowledging that my research participants' identities would be more multifaceted, complex, and in flux than other theories seemed to allow. I wanted to shape my research plans around service learning that fostered a truly comprehensive view of "environment."

The service learning model I would study. I concluded that I would need to formulate an approach to service learning that drew on both writing for the community and writing about the community. Writing with the community did that, but my personal vision of service learning would distinguish itself in that I would remain cautious about forwarding specific agendas. I would utilize this approach thoughtfully as an ecocomposition researcher, not a critical pedagogue. For instance, if a student's true interest was to complete writing for the community at a service learning site like a nonprofit music organization, and then write about the role of music in a community, I wanted to honor that. Would that student be tackling what most people commonly think of as a serious sociopolitical problem? Probably not. But would that student have the option to pursue something in which he or she was interested? Would that student have the opportunity to explore the facet of his or her identity that was connected to music, and perhaps see how that interest changed, was connected to other interests, other parts of his or her identity? Would that student perhaps be moved to put more time and energy into his or her writing, and be more likely to learn how powerful written communication can

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be? Ecocomposition, as a study of the connectedness among and dynamic nature of all of the elements of our environment, our identities, and, in turn, our writing, told me this was worth studying.

Deans maintained that "generative combinations of paradigms within the same writing course are certainly possible, and by all indications quite promising" (147). He warned against any sort of mishmash approach, however, and favored this practice only when it "weave[s] a fabric of distinct yet related pedagogies to address distinct yet related literacy goals" (147). As long as I kept goals in mind, I felt I could mix practices, or utilize both writing for the community and writing about the community combined to fit my concept of ecocomposition. I needed to make sure I kept a clear view of how theory translated into practice throughout the planning of my research—at these earlier stages during my reading for my comprehensive exams, and also when selecting and designing individual service learning projects.

I began to envision service learning projects which were always writing-intensive and in which that writing aided an agency and/or fulfilled a need for it. The work of that agency, or the need that agency had, did not necessarily have to be of obvious and widespread sociopolitical significance. It just needed to be important and engaging to the research participant. The writing done for the sites would also be turned in as a class assignment. Alone, this practice constituted writing for the community. In addition, the research participants would complete pieces where they reflected on the agency, the writing, the effect that writing had on the agency and total environment, and relevant issues of their choosing. This again, alone, was writing about the community.

These kinds of projects, I thought, had the potential to immerse students in the environment that included their site, and could give them a chance to explore their connections to numerous parts of their environment, depending on the site—economic, cultural, political, and musical, to borrow from the aforementioned example. The possibilities were many. These were the kinds of projects I would be most interested in studying as a part of my dissertation. I had come to the conclusion that such projects held the greatest promise of being a way to implement ecocomposition in the composition classroom.

I began to think about my dissertation research itself in more detail. After reading so much theory and pedagogy, it was clear to me that my specific theoretical reasons for wanting to study service learning in a college composition classroom dictated some particulars of my research. I needed to find a way to study the specific model of service learning I was envisioning, one that I saw as a potentially effective implementation of Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition.

It would be hard, I thought, to find something with all of the necessary elements present already in action. I decided at this point that I wanted to find an opportunity to design my own composition course with a service learning component. I needed to locate a program in a college or university that would allow me to design a section of one of their composition courses. Then I needed to have the freedom to include my very specific model of service learning as part of the coursework. I knew this might be a difficult opportunity to find, but I felt it was essential, considering my needs. It would make my study ultimately more valuable to me, and hopefully my readers.

Research: Participants, Questions, Methods, and Site

      Research participants: First-year composition students. I was still in the process of preparing for my comprehensive exams as the fall of 2002 turned to winter. I was also starting to draft my dissertation proposal. That process demanded I determine more details. I had done my reading about service learning with particular attention to college composition courses because I was working toward my degree in the hopes of teaching them. I had not narrowed down the population I would research more than that, though.

      I was just getting a chance to teach again, this time at IUP. One of my courses was a sophomore-level composition course, but other than that, all I had ever taught was first-year composition. As an MA teaching assistant at Rockville University, I had been surprised to hear that many full-time faculty members did not like to teach first-year composition courses. Some thought it was a nuisance; I thought it was a privilege. I loved to read the writing of these students who were striking out on something so new, students who were often at such interesting crossroads in their lives. I began to think studying this model of service learning in a first-year composition course would be particularly interesting.

      I thought more about what I had learned teaching four semesters of first-year composition at RU during the completion of my Master's degree. The vast majority of students in first-year composition tended to be first-semester or second-semester freshmen. Often, they had left home for the first time, were living in an unfamiliar place, a brand new environment, possibly with a new geography, climate, set of social norms, and cultural values. They were suddenly responsible for their own survival and

interacting with parts of their environment in new ways because of this. The first-year

college students I taught during that time were thinking hard about who they were, why

they were in college, and what they would try to achieve there. It was an exciting time to

be a part of their lives, and I had always felt as though their first-year composition course

had the potential to help them articulate some of the important thoughts they were having

during this time. I had also felt, though, that the way that their university experience was

set up for them could hinder this opportunity for learning about their own identities.

Often, in an attempt to make the transition between high school and college easier

for new students, universities make everything they can possibly need available on

campus—food, a post office, entertainment, etc. There may be little to no need to leave

the physical boundaries of the campus. Students can easily remain unfamiliar with the

community, and, therefore, the culture, surrounding the campus. Their interaction with

many parts of their total environment can become limited in this way.

This trend toward separating the academic world from its surroundings was

prevalent as I examined the rhetoric of goal statements for college first-year composition

courses at a random sampling of institutions including the University of Michigan-Flint,

the University of Texas at San Antonio, and the University of Minnesota. Their intent

was likely not to create or denote separation between campus and community;

nonetheless, the language of the goal statements suggested such a separation. Many were

stated in terms of "academic writing," implying a separation between academe and the

rest of the world. The University of Michigan-Flint described their first-year composition

course as emphasizing "the development of the student as a confident writer and an

academic thinker" (University of Michigan). Freshman Composition I at the University

of Texas at San Antonio "focuses on academic writing" (University of Texas). The University of Minnesota began their course description by saying, "freshman composition helps students make the transition between high school and college by introducing them to academic writing" (University of Minnesota).

I was feeling as though many universities, perhaps inadvertently, discouraged exploration of the community outside of the university campus. Providing daily necessities on campus kept students from leaving. Stressing "academic writing" in composition courses insinuated that they would only need to know what helped them succeed at the university. Obviously, these were casual and preliminary conclusions, but I thought they were corroborated by the critiques of higher education cited by Eyler and Giles that had problematized the lack of connection between academic work and "the outside world."

I decided I wanted to see what would happen when service learning gave first-year students an opportunity to directly connect with the entirety of their new environment; to pretend that environment was not greater than the university would not acknowledge a great deal. Adding a service learning component to a first-year composition course seemed as though it could provide an opportunity for that more comprehensive immersion in environment. Not only would students have the opportunity to explore their total environment—they would have the opportunity to examine their active roles in that environment by writing for and about community sites.

At the time, many universities, like the University of Arizona, DePaul University, Indiana University, and the University of Hawaii were saving service learning for their advanced writing courses (Deans, *Writing Partnerships* 220-229). I could see the value

of service learning projects there, as well, but I was keenly interested in the effect service learning could have on the writing done in a first-year composition course, during this intriguing time of identity probing and path choosing in many of those students' lives.

All of the reasons I wanted to research service learning were doubly so for first-year students. Service learning could provide a kind of immersion in their environment and a kind of forum where their identities and places in that environment could be explored. A course that stayed within the confines of the university and focused solely on academic writing could not do this, I theorized. Also, upper-level courses might target more specific populations within the campus community, such as students of certain majors (students for example who are taking a composition course in a specific kind of writing, like creative writing or technical writing). First-year composition, with its status as a gateway course, would have the capacity to house a much wider variety of service learning sites, and giving students a wide range of choices was important to me.

I had decided some fundamental things about my dissertation during the course of reading for my comprehensive exams and working on a proposal: I wanted to study one specific application of service learning in a college composition course that carefully and thoughtfully borrowed from the first two of Thomas Deans' service learning models, writing for and writing about the community. I wanted to see in what ways this application of service learning might be a sound practice for implementing ecocomposition theory as articulated by Dobrin and Weisser. Considering what I was most interested in studying, a first-year composition course would be the ideal place for this service learning component to be housed. Considering how many specifics I had already decided, I would probably be best off finding a higher education setting in which

I could design my own first-year composition course with a service learning component to study.

Research questions: Multiple perspectives. With all of this in mind, what role I would play in this classroom, what kind of data I would collect, how I would collect that data, and how, ultimately, I would report it, would depend much on how I focused my research questions. What, specifically, would be valuable information to collect in this context?

I would not be able to test whether service learning was just "good" or "successful." The definitions of those terms would be too complex in the project I was envisioning. Each student would have his or her own goals and values that would shape his or her own satisfaction with the experience. What seemed like a positive learning experience to me may not seem so to a student, and I wanted to acknowledge that. Also, a student might have what he or she deems a "great" service learning experience, but not demonstrate relevant learning to me. What I really wanted to know was what goals and values each student brought to the experience, and how they were affected.

I had always been intimidated by the prospect of conducting my own research if it involved creating rubrics and crunching numbers, of squeezing one profound, final answer out of my data. These were foreign, unfriendly concepts to me, an English major, who had remained firmly entrenched in the humanities throughout my postsecondary education. Somewhere along the line, though, I had subconsciously accepted this as the only definition of worthwhile research.

My research methodology course at IUP and subsequent reading had worked to broaden my perspective. The field of composition studies is unique in that it straddles the

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line between the humanities and the social sciences (Johanek 22). During my coursework, I was presented with many studies in the field that utilized a variety of qualitative methods as well as quantitative ones. The kind of data I wanted to collect for this study would be decidedly qualitative; I did not only want to know whether or not a student felt connected to the environment in which he or she was writing; I wanted to know *how,* or how not. Somehow, though, I was still not feeling completely convinced that my work would be serious and substantive enough if it did not involve statistics and graphs.

After examining my own biases, which included a preference for qualitative research methods, but a nagging fear that qualitative data would not be "enough," and then examining my own decisions about this research project, which included a desire to unearth ideas about student and instructor experiences, I realized that, in the most basic sense, I was interested in human reactions to the theory and pedagogy I wanted to apply to a first-year composition classroom. I was looking for pieces of data that would be quite individualized, that would be difficult for me to lump together, interpret, or quantify. Instead of attempting to make any sweeping conclusions, I needed to design research that would help me, personally, come to tentative conclusions that felt valuable. The most definite answers I could hope for would be my own conclusions on how my research questions were answered. I could present them to others, in fact would be required to, and would attempt to do so in a way that would provide a meaningful reading experience, but seeking out numerical data, or definitive "yes/no" answers, would not be a logical endeavor for my inquiry. I wanted to know more than just "yes" or "no." I wanted to know why, I wanted to acknowledge when those involved in my study disagreed, and I wanted to explore that disagreement.

List of questions. With this in mind, I drafted a set of questions, and got feedback on them from my director and the research group with which I was meeting. After rethinking, re-visioning, and editing, I settled on the following for the questions around which my study would be centered:

1. How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their writing? How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within a university setting, and outside of it?

2. How do I, in turn, think the service learning component is affecting the research participants' writing? How do I think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within the university setting and outside of it?

3. Ultimately, do I think adding a service learning component is a successful way to implement ecocomposition in a first-year composition classroom?

Articulating these questions, getting them down on paper, confirmed for me that I was not looking for simple answers. The data I wanted to collect would not be easy for me to quantify, nor would that give me the kind of information I was seeking. I was asking for opinions and impressions from multiple people, "multiple social realities" (Lincoln and Guba 230). I would never be able to say for sure whether or not the participants in the study and their ideas about writing and college education were or were not affected by their service learning experiences in the profound, life-altering way for which some proponents of service learning pedagogy hope. I did not want to make that my aim, though; rather, I hoped to present a detailed chronicle of my experience, the

reality I perceived to be created by my interaction with these students, and what it led all of us to believe about all of these things. As a student of literature and creative writing, I had often taken away new ideas and fresh perspectives from my reading of novels, short stories, poems, nonfiction, etc. I felt confident, then, of the idea that this chronicle, this "story" detailing my gathering of data, the experiences and impressions of my research participants, and my conclusions based on it all would be of value not only to myself, but also to other composition scholars and instructors, too.

I wanted to see if the research participants would find value in a service learning component within their first-year composition course. I was interested to see what they deemed valuable. I also wanted to see if I saw evidence of their service learning work being a worthwhile addition to their first-year composition course. My definition of "worthwhile" was determined by how well I saw it working as a practice for Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition theory. I would be looking for evidence that the students came to new understandings about their places in the world: in the university environment and beyond. I would also be looking for evidence that they came to view their writing as ecological, transactional, and as a potentially active, or even powerful force within their environment. In turn, I wanted to see if any of them came to understand that their writing could enable them to define or redefine their places in their environment. I wanted to see if the data would suggest to me that the kind of service learning projects I was envisioning could be a viable way to put Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition theory into practice. I began to think of service learning as a potential way to put ecocomposition into action.

Research methods: Qualitative case studies. My next step was locating the right

qualitative research methods that could provide me with in-depth answers to these

questions. My subject matter, my own existing preferences and biases, and now the

research questions I had created led me to believe that creating an overview of qualitative

research methodology in composition studies would deepen my understanding of how

that methodology could be used to elicit meaningful data in my specific study.

I also wanted to get a contextual understanding of how my choice would be

received within the composition studies community. With such a wide array of research

practices and such spirited continued debate about the merit of each one, this seemed

particularly important in anticipating all of the audience reactions to my document, and

addressing concerns different members of my audience may have. I was, after all,

creating a document not only for myself, but also for this very audience in order to

provide answers that, while complex, would still be a useful contribution to the field of

composition studies.

Context of qualitative methods in Composition Studies. Research in the field of

composition studies first moved toward an adoption of qualitative practices in the early

1980s, according to Stephen North, whose book, *The Making of Knowledge in*

Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field, gave me a good idea of the historical

framework of the methodology used by many of my peers. The impulse at that time was

to capture a context-bound event in writing, the same way that anthropologists did in

their field. This was done in the hopes of turning it "from a passing event, which exists

only in its moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscription and can

be reconsulted" (277). The movement was justified by Kantor, Kirby, and Goetz in 1981,

who asserted that research about education was research about human beings, much like anthropology, and, therefore, education researchers should adopt methodology more appropriate for its subject matter (North 274).

This made sense to me, too. People are by nature subjective. Trying to pretend that they were predictable, like chemicals in a Petri dish, and that the classroom provided a controlled setting, like a lab, sounded foreign to me. In the interest of getting my dissertation proposal ready to submit, though, I needed to consider the bigger picture of research methods within composition studies.

Cindy Johanek's 2000 book, *Composing Research: A Contextualist Paradigm for Rhetoric and Composition,* helped illustrate another viewpoint in composition research methodology for me. Instead of touting the value of only qualitative research methods in the field of composition studies, Johanek argued that the context of the study was crucial. She began with the interesting disparities she saw in the way research was treated by the two disciplines in which she double-majored as an undergraduate—English composition and cognitive psychology.

This led her to a conclusion about research in composition; it almost always favored qualitative, naturalistic research methods. She continued to point out, "a stronger commitment to one kind of knowledge has made us dangerously less responsive to other kinds, and, therefore, less dynamic in our quest to define our field" (14).

In arguing for a "contextualist paradigm" for composition research, Johanek was in part arguing for a place for the research methods she herself preferred—the quantitative methods she was introduced to through her cognitive psychology coursework:

A new look at *research in context* will enable us to understand the potential of diverse research forms, to realize that numbers indeed may tell a story, to accept the terminology of scientific inquiry on its own terms, and to engage in the pleasure of asking wide-ranging questions and seeking their answers (23).

The professors with whom I had studied research methodology had voiced a wide range of opinions. Through my coursework and reading, I could see that the field of composition studies still employed a wide variety of methodological approaches. Instead of jumping into a historically vast and complex discussion rife with philosophy and politics, I knew I needed to make an informed decision about not only my beliefs, but what kind of research I—a beginning researcher with an academic background in the humanities, in particular creative writing—was best suited to design and conduct and conduct well, and also what methods would best help me gather the kind of data I was seeking.

I had felt from early on that I wanted to use qualitative research of some sort, and I was beginning to be able to articulate why, more specifically. Scholars like Johanek suggested that the shift to qualitative research design in composition studies was due to the creative writing and literature backgrounds of English scholars (14). I would readily admit that having that background made me feel familiar with the kind of researching and writing I was interested in doing for my dissertation; after all, she admitted that her affinity for quantitative research methodology was due in part to her undergraduate work in cognitive psychology. I knew that out of the wide variety of research methods available to me, I had the best chance of conducting qualitative research well.

I personally could not attribute the attention to qualitative data in composition studies purely to the fact that many of us had a love for stories, though. I knew that I had to pursue methodology that would allow for the study and presentation of multiple viewpoints. I wanted to write about my own conclusions and those of my research participants. I wanted to present the whole process of the study in rich detail. My background, research topic, and questions made me feel as though qualitative research was the right choice for this dissertation.

Case studies: The qualitative method I would employ. After making the decision to use qualitative research methods in my dissertation, I read through John Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions.* While he was not writing specifically about research methodology in composition studies, now that I knew that I wanted to conduct a qualitative study, and knew more about why I did as a composition scholar myself, I felt his general descriptions could help me. After reading through his definitions and descriptions of biographies, phenomenological studies, grounded theory studies, ethnographies, and case studies, I concluded that conducting case studies would give me the kind of answers for which I was looking.

He defined a case study as "an exploration of a 'bounded system' or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (61). This appealed to me for the same reason that North's words had, written over a decade earlier. Utilizing multiple sources of "rich in context" information would allow me to honor the fact that I was studying human beings in a particular context. Case studies would also enable me to gather kinds of data I felt were important, and through methods with which I felt more comfortable; further, they

would enable me to report my findings in a rich, qualitative format that would allow for complex, sometimes even contradictory ideas. Creswell provided a useful outline of a representative rhetorical structure for case studies, including many narrative elements with which I was already familiar. I would describe the time and place of the study, identify the issues at hand, describe how the study came to be, share the data via further narrative format, identify my key issues, and make assertions (186-187).

I thought more about the use of case studies and how they enabled me not only to use qualitative methods, but, specifically, how they enabled me to employ narrative writing. I needed to stop and engage in some study and introspection at this point. My understanding of narrative and use of it, until now, had been in a different field of study. I had a Master's degree in creative writing. I had studied and written narrative fiction and creative nonfiction. It dawned on me that I was in the process of "changing narrative gears" here. I needed to explore narrative inquiry and prepare myself for a new approach to this familiar kind of writing.

During my early doctoral coursework on research methodology, I had been assigned the task of finding scholarship outside of composition studies that addressed research methodology and found Karen Norum's "Black (W)holes: A Researcher's Place in Her Writing." Norum argued for the worth of narrative as a research tool because it allows us to explore our biases (319).

She presented her research on homelessness in three columns. One was written in third person point of view and showcased secondary research data such as facts and statistics on homelessness in the United States. Another column was a write up of an

interview she conducted with two homeless teens. The third column was a first person narrative about her personal experience with homelessness.

This article about narrative's place in the greater whole of research methodology was an interesting visual example of how different kinds of research writing compare to each other and, significantly, how they can inform each other. Reading Norum's article had opened my eyes to possibilities within my own research. In my quest to present a multifaceted, complex look at my topic, narrative could be a familiar kind of writing to employ. It could also be distinctly valuable.

Norum's work had piqued my interest at an early point in my coursework; now, in the planning of my dissertation research, I thought about it again in more detail. I was planning work that would strive to combine all three of the kinds of writing she showcased, but in one seamless document. I needed instructions on how to do so. I needed to see more examples of this kind of writing.

D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly's *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Narrative Research* explored narrative inquiry in research methodology at length. They defined the term and the process of conducting narrative research with essays and concepts from different disciplines including anthropology and psychology, specific concepts that informed narrative theory, narrative examples, and information that delved into the specifics of presenting case studies. They did all of this with a "storied" approach themselves in order to "show," not "tell" what researchers employing narrative inquiry do (xiv).

Seeing how Clandinin and Connelly illustrated the value of narrative inquiry in education research, the social sciences, and the humanities gave me more of a specific

idea of how I might gather data and include it along with relevant literature in a narrative dissertation. Norum's three columns on homelessness led me to pursue examples of seamless narrative research writing. Clandinin and Connelly included an entire section titled "Turning Inward, Watching Outward" (86). It discussed examples of multi-columned accounts of experiences: field texts recording events and reflective journal notes recording inner thoughts, feelings on the experiences. The worth of these multifaceted viewpoints was explored, but Clandinin and Connelly's book went on to elaborate on how the process continues. They discussed at length how one proceeds to combine these multiple viewpoints. This book would be a valuable resource in not only planning my research, but in continually unifying my narrative approach with my research topic.

In Nicholas Mauriello's doctoral dissertation, *The College Writing Peer Response Project: Diversity and Conflict in Online Writing Environments*, I found an extended example of how narrative and research writing can be employed to meaningful ends. Mauriello worked to represent multiple viewpoints from his research participants alongside his own and the relevant published scholarship. He told the story of his experiences with his research participants, of his process of making decisions in his study's design, and the story of his process of reading and thinking his way through relevant scholarship. He referred to his narrative research writing as "reflection-in-action" (10). Seeing this longer narrative document written with such similar goals and audience expectations as mine increased the confidence I felt in my decisions.

Soon after my decision-making process in designing this dissertation, another composition-specific source in narrative inquiry was published. Gian Pagnucci also

argued for the worth of narrative in the making and sharing of meaning in *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*. Clandinin and Connelly had combined essays from multiple disciplines, examples of narrative research, and their own writing in order to show how narrative inquiry works. Pagnucci also included multiple forms of writing: theoretical arguments, his own stories and even poetry. He did so to illustrate the worth of narrative in our teaching and in our research (2). Like Clandinin and Connelly, he "showed" how narrative can work, and made the case for doing so by saying, "I want my stories to argue that stories are worth arguing for" (69).

I had come to this study as a scholar with a creative writing background. After considering these sources, I felt ready to think about narrative in this new way. I went back to Creswell's specific guidelines for embarking on case studies and employed them as instructions for my own action. Much of what he suggested centered on locating a site, the boundaries of the case or cases, the boundaries of how much time a researcher would spend researching, and what kind of data would be collected. I already knew I was looking for a first-year composition class to study—one for which I could design the service learning component. This is what Creswell referred to as "identifying your case" (63). I wanted to conduct my research as a series of case studies on individual research participants, but they would all be members of the same college course.

I began to explore the most serious option I had considered so far for a place that would let me design part of one of their courses—Rockville University, the university at which I had been an undergraduate and completed my Master's degree. Will, the head of the English department at RU, had spoken to me casually about conducting my dissertation research there when I had been back from Pennsylvania to visit. It sounded

like a promising opportunity to design my own first-year composition course with a service learning component, something I had determined as necessary. While my alma mater could indeed be construed as convenience sampling, I needed control over the design of the course, and that was ultimately more important to me. Still, I needed to consider carefully whether this research site would be viable, considering Creswell's remaining guidelines.

Research site: Rockville University. Creswell suggested that I establish a rationale for selecting this case. I began putting profile information together on RU as a potential site. Rockville University is located in Rockville (the name of this town has also been changed to protect the identities of my research participants), a small town with a population of approximately 20,000 people. RU is a four-year, state-funded school that had an enrollment of about 8,600 people at the time. A large percentage of those students had traditionally been natives of the surrounding region, and many of them commuted from homes that were anywhere from 5 minutes to several hours away. This resulted in a largely homogenous population on cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic levels. In recent years, however, there had been a large push to recruit in surrounding areas, even surrounding states, in order to increase enrollment. To a greater extent each semester, courses consisted of a mix of "locals" and students from significantly farther away.

RU had recently opened the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership, which, among other things, aided in implementing service learning campus-wide by helping instructors communicate with agencies in the community, providing presentations and seminars for instructors interested in service learning, and providing funds for service learning-based research. At the time, few, but increasing numbers of instructors had

implemented some sort of service learning into their courses. These courses ranged anywhere from English to education to courses about learning disabilities (Academic Service Learning). The campus at large had nothing but positive, hopeful feelings toward service learning practices.

As a former teaching assistant at RU, I was familiar with the way their composition courses were organized and the way they functioned within the curriculum. I knew a lot about the student body. I was familiar enough with the community to have background knowledge of some of the potential service learning sites suggested by the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership—significantly, how well they would serve my need to create specific service learning projects that were based on an ecocomposition-inspired combination of Thomas Deans' writing for and about the community.

Everything in the profile looked promising for my study. I began exchanging e-mails with the department head in earnest, and within months, he was able to offer me a perfect opportunity. I would be able to design a first-year composition course for RU, and a teaching assistant could act as the instructor while I observed (at RU, teaching assistants are given complete autonomy over one course per semester for four semesters of their Master's degrees). He provided me with a list of TAs who indicated they would be interested in collaborating on the research with me.

Knowing that one of the TAs could teach the course was a relief. I could act solely as an observer, only participating in class discussions about service learning and helping to coordinate work with the sites. Having the simultaneous duties and interests of an instructor and a researcher could have difficult implications. I had to be able to let the

class unfold as it would. If I were also to teach the class, I would feel the need to jump in and fix problems that might occur, which would, in effect, rob me of data.

Co-researcher: Mapping out classroom places. I chose to work with Richard Hunt (my research partner's name has also been changed to protect his anonymity). I had known Richard for quite some time. We had been acquaintances while working on our undergraduate degrees at RU. Richard had gone on to spend time elsewhere before returning to RU as a Master's level teaching assistant in the English department.

Creswell recommended determining the boundaries of the study ahead of time, "how it might be constrained in terms of time, events, and processes" (64). Time would be determined by semesters for me. I decided to study two subsequent semesters of the same course, or two different sections of EN 101, taught by Richard during his Fall and Winter semesters at RU. This study would be constrained, or limited, by the fact that my data would come from two separate groups of students. A longer study might provide more in the way of complex, interesting data, but after these two semesters, Richard would be graduating from RU. I hoped my committee would find two semesters' worth of data sufficient, upon reading my proposal.

EN 101, the first of two required composition courses for all students, was described in the 2003-2004 Course Bulletin as aspiring to accomplish "development of students' abilities to read and discuss, and to write paragraphs and short essays about significant subjects. During the semester, each student writes a minimum of 5,000 words" (Undergraduate Bulletin). In our course design, which would be collaborative, Richard and I had to make sure we fulfilled this description from the bulletin. We also needed to communicate about how the specific service learning component I wanted to study would

exist within a class structured around his teaching methods. These considerations also fit under Creswell's boundaries of the study. Richard and I started talking about both of these things via e-mail.

We very quickly came to an initial understanding of how the course would work on a day-to-day basis. Richard would teach very much the same way he had for the first two semesters of his time as a TA at RU. My presence in the classroom did not need to change much about that. He would still be solely responsible for covering the material he saw appropriate for a first-year composition course, for facilitating assignments, including the ones functioning within the service learning work, and for grading. The only change would be adding a service learning component that worked harmoniously within his existing syllabus. I would be there to aid in the coordination of this, to help explain to the students what service learning was and how we would approach it, to help them through their daily working with those sites, and of course to gather data.

The students would be working on projects that fit my definition of service learning as influenced by Deans' writing for the community and writing about the community; they would be completing writing intensive projects that functioned both for our class and a community site, and also writing reflectively about their experiences. These assignments would also be a source of data for me. I wanted to examine their writing, to see if the projects enhanced or even expanded their understanding of any element of their environment, in my opinion. Creswell divided possible kinds of data for a case study into four main types: interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials (123). These would be valuable documents to my study.

I saw myself conducting a great deal of interviews. I thought that beginning with group interviews would help me get a good sense of with whom I wanted to speak on an individual basis—who provided more information I found relevant to my research questions, and who would be most forthcoming. I also planned to conduct interviews with Richard. This would mean my data set would be emergent; I would have to collect some early data from many students in order to effectively assess which ones would be most informative to the study.

Observation was also going to be fundamental to my data collection. I would not be a true participant observer as I would not be participating in the class activities the same way all of the students would. I would be a teacher researcher, in the sense that I would be studying the course from the perspective of a teacher, not a student. While I was not teaching the course, I would be in the classroom as the service learning coordinator, and would therefore be in somewhat of a position of authority in relation to the students. Further, the information I was seeking was pedagogical; I was exploring service learning as a potential practice for myself, a composition instructor that would implement Dobrin and Weisser's definition of ecocomposition.

Since Richard was also an instructor, I asked him to keep a journal so that I would have access to the opinions of someone else examining the course from the instructor perspective. I hoped it would provide another layer to the reality that my research participants and I would be reporting. We might be painting very different pictures in our writing, at times, as we would have very different perspectives on the projects. And of course, as a teacher researcher, I planned to keep my own researcher's journal. My research questions made room not only for the perspectives of others, but my own, and I

hoped this journal would also aid in my continual identification of my biases as they affected my thoughts on the work.

I had determined the details of my dissertation research—what I wanted to research, how I wanted to research it, and where this research would happen, both where the geographical location of the research site would be and from where, figuratively, it would be written. With my proposal approved, I had made arrangements to move back to Rockville.

After thinking about this project for so long, now everything seemed to move very fast. Before I knew it, I was in Rockville, unpacking and reuniting with old friends. Before I found a thrift store kitchen table or bookshelves for my new home, I made a trip to Radio Shack with my father the electronics geek to pick out a digital recorder for my dissertation interviews. I was now meeting in person with Richard to decide the details of our syllabus. I found myself simultaneously settling into a new space and settling the details of beginning my research with my dissertation committee.

CHAPTER 2: FIRST SEMESTER RESEARCH

Before the Research: Thoughts, Plans, and Preparation

I hung up the phone and sat there a little while longer, staring outside. A maple tree shaded this window in my tiny bedroom, with walls that followed the line of the roof down at sharp angles. I was sitting on my bed, my quilt bunched up around my feet. I was still wearing my pajamas. What a strange place to be while discussing the beginning of my research with my dissertation committee!

This phone conference had sounded incredibly convenient, and I was grateful that my committee members were willing to gather around a phone speaker and talk to me about all of the details of this research. When our conference happened, though, it made me realize how valuable that time was in the morning when I had my tea, put on my "professional clothes," and walked to school. Sitting there on my bed, p.j.s and all, I had felt awkward, surprisingly unprepared to talk shop. Was it the pajamas, though, or this foreign act of embarking on my dissertation research itself?

Nothing I had done before prepared me for this; my Master's degree had required a thesis, but not one based on independent research. Along with unpacking all of my belongings into an old, low-ceilinged house, and getting used to new surroundings, rearranging the pieces of my everyday life, I was also embarking on a frighteningly unfamiliar academic pursuit. I had thought plenty about my dissertation, starting with my Ph. D. coursework, and then exams, the proposal process…now I had to put all of that into practice. I was taking on a new role, researcher, and while I had elected to conduct qualitative research, with which I felt more comfortable, the idea was still daunting.

Sitting on my bed and talking to people who had already jumped through this flaming hoop had been downright jarring.

One committee member had suggested that I start my researcher's journal immediately. This surprised me as it was still early in the summer before our first semester of research, but I also welcomed the idea. Committing my thoughts and plans to paper seemed like it might make the whole process less intimidating. I took a notebook out on to the porch later that morning, and I started to write.

What follows is not that journal entry, exactly. It has been transcribed from the original document, which was written on raggedy notebook paper in purple ink. In the process of that transcription, the content was also inevitably altered. As a composer, a teacher of composition, but also a researcher who embraces her existing biases and qualitative research methods employing narrative writing, I cannot deny that revision has occurred here. I am the author telling the story to you, my audience, and I want the words here to impart the meaning I have gleaned from this research as clearly as possible. If our thoughts could be effortlessly, perfectly, and meaningfully committed to paper immediately, the first time we wrote them down, this is what my journal entry from that day would have looked like:

At the suggestion of my committee, I'm beginning my researcher's journal now. I've been in Rockville for a little over a month, and I've already begun work on the class that I'm co-designing with my colleague, Richard Hunt. He'll be teaching the course, so I will get to be solely the researcher. I won't be trying to observe how service learning functions in a first-year composition class, being a researcher, while simultaneously trying to tweak it in the interest of helping my students succeed, or being a teacher.

I know this puts my committee at ease and gets rid of some potentially sticky conflict-of-interest situations, but it also makes me feel weird. I've never been the "researcher" before. Even with a background of research methodology coursework, I feel like I'm going to have to guess at this as I go along, and that worries me. Will my obliviousness affect the quality of the data? Will I spend so much time trying to figure out how to be a researcher that I won't pay enough attention to the class I'm observing? How do researchers act? What can I do to glean the greatest amount and quality of data from the situation?

I am both excited and apprehensive. I got a list of potential agencies from the Center for Civic Engagement and Leadership here on campus, and I've left some phone messages, but I haven't set up any actual projects yet.

Of course, no definitions of service learning in composition, theoretical bases, or pedagogical goals are cut and dry. My intention with this study is not to present a cookie cutter image of the field, something unrealistically simple in the interest of providing simple answers, or even to use the data I collect to conclusively state that "first-year composition is____," or "service learning is_____." Rather, I want to provide a discussion in which to situate my own beliefs and conclusions based on my data.

Going into this study, I am inclined to see service learning as a chance not only for students to learn the variety of different discourses used in brochure, pamphlet, and press release writing, but also as an opportunity for them to use language in the process of defining their impressions of their environment, of defining themselves, and ultimately of defining their place in the world. Ideally, they might get to see how their writing directly impacts aspects of their environment that a traditional first-year composition

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course cannot offer. They will have occasions to think about how their audience will react to their word choices, organization, and presentation of ideas that will be much more varied, and often more immediate than they would if their audience did not transcend the classroom.

On many levels, we are in constant dialogue with our environment—our physical environment, our spiritual environment, our technological environment, etc. The words we write, academic and otherwise, affect the audiences they reach. We, in turn, are changed by the process of writing, and also the writing around us, the things we read— books, letters, laws, policies, road signs…the list goes on. I think words, writing, rhetoric, and communication are all inherent parts of the transactions we make with our surroundings. Perhaps that is why Paulo Freire's idea of praxis speaks to me as a composition scholar—I cannot think of writing without thinking of the dialogue, the actions and reactions that it inevitably produces. Studying written communication, and finding ways to help people learn about how their communication functions within their environment, as well as changes their environment, is exciting to me. I consider ecocomposition, not critical pedagogy, to be the theoretical underpinning for this study, but Freire's praxis is still relevant. Dobrin and Weisser's discursive ecology, which asks students to see their writing as "inherently ecological," also involves action and reflection.

I am also hopeful that service learning can provide a productive addition to composition courses at the first-year level. My research participants will have the chance to explore how language and writing function in a variety of public forums, as well as a chance to write reflectively (and critically, hopefully) about their experiences at these

sites. This is a time in many students' lives when the opportunities afforded by service learning fit well into much of what they're experiencing—being separated from their comfort zones, learning how to negotiate unfamiliar territory, rethinking their identities and their places in the world.

I've already defined this kind of service learning within composition using Deans' terms—writing for the community, about the community, and with the community; I will be combining these approaches thoughtfully, using elements of writing for the community and writing about the community together to enable students to explore the elements of their environments that most interest them. I believe this will enable me to engage my research participants in service learning projects that are writing-intensive, have the capacity to enact direct and obvious change, and focus reflective writing on the experience and the change that occurs as a result of it, but significantly, that also honor their identities, their places on their personal paths. Here at Rockville University, they refer to service learning in which the work is directly related to the work of the course as "academic service learning," or as they commonly call it, "ASL." This is different from service learning in which the project is not related to the course material, for example, a composition student working in a soup kitchen, aiding in the preparation or distributing of the food, and then only writing reflectively about it later—in Deans's words, "writing about the community."

It had felt good to put my ideas down on paper. I had revisited some of my theory, and begun to chronicle my progress, my intentions, my impressions…there was so much to think about, though. This street stayed busy all day. From my porch, it was only a short distance to the pavement of the road. The sounds of the cars screeching to a halt at the

nearby stop sign, revving up, and taking off again provided an appropriate backdrop for my train of thought.

Site coordinating: Creating opportunities for discursive ecology. As the summer continued, I was able to chronicle my experiences, piecing together projects with service learning sites in the community and putting together the nuts and bolts of a syllabus for the course with Richard. In this process, I came to understand two important things more clearly: these sites were much more than just extensions of my classrooms, which complicated matters. Secondly, this particular classroom was my co-researcher's, not mine. I was not the instructor, and would be working within someone else's basic course setup. I had an abstract sense of these facts during the design and proposal of this study, but experiencing them firsthand was different. I was constantly reminded that "teacher researcher" was a new role for me. I was in the process of finding a new place for myself in my own total environment.

The following is excerpted from a journal entry I wrote in July. It demonstrates my lack of familiarity with working with community sites. My true role in coordinating service sites was just dawning on me. I was just beginning to understand the breadth of the specific actions it would take on my part to create service learning projects that worked with my pedagogical goals and also benefitted the sites:

I have a first definite ASL project set up with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rockville. Our students will interview the "bigs" and "littles" they've been matched up with and write a short narrative telling the story of how they were matched, what activities they enjoy together, and how they feel about their experiences with the organization in general. The narratives will then be posted at the BBBS office. This one

really excites me, but maybe just because it's the first concrete project? I keep trying to tell myself that this still qualifies as writing for/about the community in some way, a thoughtful combination of "writing for the community" and "writing about the community" that enables students not only to enact direct change through writing documents for community agencies, but also to fully understand the consequences their writing has for the larger issue at hand. I would like to think that when these documents are posted, they may enact positive change in regards to a relevant problem. For instance, somewhere down the line, children and adults alike will be swayed by reading the documents to participate in the BBBS program and benefit from it. But all I can ensure so far is that the students will learn a lot about how the institution, BBBS, wants them to write for its purposes. They will provide the project, or the writing for the community element; the rest is up to me and Richard. Yikes!

Piecing my theory together with practice is complicated. It's really hitting home that I am the one who has to make the judgment call, to decide how exactly each individual practice associated with each individual project will fulfill the objectives I have set up for myself—writing for/about the community that works as pedagogy to follow ecocomposition.

Students choosing this site will definitely be writing for the community. Now that I am working with this concrete example, I am worried that I will not be able to provide the most valuable practices for enabling the necessary reflection on this project, the writing about the community element that must be combined with the writing for the community part, the testimonials, for true writing for/about the community to occur. I need to think about what kinds of prompts could encourage these students to reflect on

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how their writing might impact the larger issue at hand. Or issues, even—children

without enough adult guidance, but also adults that are moved to provide that guidance,

the value of sibling-like relationships, loneliness…this list could go on forever and ever. I

don't think I'll even be able to anticipate what parts of it will engage each individual

student until I see it in action. This is a part of my emergent design that will be

challenging.

Despite these concerns, I really think this will be a valuable endeavor for the

students. BBBS as an organization is an easy, accessible topic, and therefore an

accessible opportunity to do some primary research, for one, which is something they'll

be expected to do after passing this course. They will really have to think about how the

public will interpret the final document they submit to BBBS, which is in line with Deans'

goal of writing for the community, writing documents of some sort that a community

agency needs—pamphlets, articles for newsletters, etc. The supervisors at BBBS see the

pieces they have requested functioning as testimonial advertisements; I imagine, then,

that the students will have to word their narratives carefully and work to paint each story

in an interesting, positive light, without changing any of the facts. I certainly think it has

the potential to change the way they think about themselves as writers at large. I can

picture this appealing to students who may be interested in education, or early childhood

development, or social work—maybe even students that had circumstances similar to

some of the "littles" themselves, growing up.

Putting my theoretical vision for the course into practice was much messier than I had anticipated. Seeing all of this from my co-researcher Richard's perspective also helped me articulate it and move from theory to practice as thoughtfully as possible.

Below is an excerpt from Richard's journal where he discusses the general theory of ecocomposition coming into practice through an amalgamation of Deans' service learning models. It was reassuring to me to read this, and see that my decisions about practice made sense to another composition instructor:

Heidi will also be looking for particular results in her study. One of the things that Heidi will focus on is what she sees as the "connection between student and environment . . . fundamental to making meaning with writing"—in other words, how (via the process used and environmental influences) a student produces texts in his/her environment. Her wish is for the students to "connect directly with that environment, in all of its complexity." I can see how students could see the writing as significant when producing texts as the service done in the Stanford model [or Deans' writing for the community], *and I see what may be a weakness in the purely Expressivist model of S.L., writing about the community. The students may still ask, "Why are we writing journal entries? How will this be useful to us in the future?" As a result, I now understand why using both of these models may be more valuable than using each separately, even if new students may not have the training or knowledge to "write for the community" with expertise.*

Syllabus design: Multiple perspectives, single document. As our dialogue and work on the syllabus continued, I came to a deeper understanding about my second realization about being a new researcher; this was truly and completely not my classroom, and therefore I did not have to agree with every decision Richard made about teaching composition to research the service learning component of his course. I had never played such a role in the classroom. I had to work hard to stay within my place as

teacher researcher as we pieced a syllabus together over the summer. With fall

approaching, we had a mostly finished draft. I sat down to review it one night in my

home office. It began with the following introduction. Were my interests as a researcher

of service learning covered here?

Academic Service-Learning seems difficult to define in simple terms or even with

one definition. However, central to service-learning is experiential learning through

service to others. In relation to college students and their educations, it seems agreed

upon by scholars in the field that service-learning has the goal of fostering civic

responsibility in students so that they may develop connections to their communities and

the world beyond the classroom. But it is more than an integration of academic and

professional development. "Advocates [. . .] claim that service-learning encourages the

development of cognitive skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and

conflict resolution, through applying classroom theory to real-life situations" (Hilosky,

Moore, and Reynolds 143). In addition, possibly the most important aspect of service-

learning is self-reflection that creates understanding. After a student's service, it is this

period of self-reflection that generates learning.

While I was not convinced that this passage would be rhetorically appealing to

incoming students, I thought that it did convey some general aspirations that Richard and

I both had for the service learning work to be done in this course. I liked that he

mentioned "connections to their communities and the world beyond the classroom,"

because that connection was something I was keenly interested in and something about

which I would undoubtedly talk to the students. I also liked that they were being

introduced to the idea of "self reflection" in this definition. The writing about the

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community aspect was important to me. I wanted to see what the students had to say about their service learning experiences, and if reflecting on the work helped the students gain a deeper understanding of the issues central to their project. At the very least, this passage would generate questions and discussion.

Now on to the nuts and bolts: after careful thought, we had decided to make the service learning work in the course optional. Rockville University did not allow us to list this section differently in the course bulletin; because students would not know that it contained a service learning component until the first day of school, we felt it was fairer to offer students the option. We had hoped that this would ensure a group of truly motivated and willing participants. We worried about sending out students who were uninterested in participating in service learning at all, in gleaning anything from their work, or providing the sites themselves with a high quality of service. When I looked at the way this choice was portrayed on the syllabus, I wondered if it would confuse and/or intimidate students. It was not simply laid out. Richard had listed it this way:

Grading:

> *Non-Service-Learning Students*
>
> *4 Papers* *30%*
>
> *5th, 5-7 page, paper for non-service-learning students*.........*10%*
>
> *Final Portfolio* *30%*
>
> *Journal* *10%*
>
> *In-class Participation*...*10%*
>
> *Grammar Presentation* *10%*
>
> *100%*

4 Papers.._30%_

Final Portfolio ...._30%_

Journal..._10%_

Service..._10%_

In-class Participation..._10%_

Grammar Presentation ...._10%_

...._100%_

NOTE: Non-Service-Learning students must complete a 5th draft. It has no specific due date; it can be done at any time by WEEK 12, and a final draft must be included in the portfolio.

This seemed like an unnecessarily complicated approach to me, at least for first-year students who were probably unfamiliar with syllabi in general to digest on this first day of classes. Considering one set of assignments was complicated enough—but two different versions complete with two different sets of percentages? I didn't want that to turn students off to the potentially new idea of service learning. I wanted them to feel confident that they were making solid, informed choices about whether or not to participate.

I needed to think about how this affected my research. If I objected to Richard's teaching style, was I objecting as a teacher or a researcher? As I teacher, I would have constructed this syllabus much differently. But as a researcher, could I still collect reflective journal entries from the service learning students, as well as conduct group and individual interviews? Could I still write a researcher's journal and ask Richard to do the

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same? Yes. Richard had separated the service learning work from other components of the class, such as his grammar presentations. While this bothered me as a teacher of service learning in a composition classroom, it was actually *helpful* to me as a researcher of service learning in a composition classroom. I knew exactly when service learning discussions would be happening, and exactly when the reflective journals would be assigned and collected. It also liberated Richard somewhat, and let him do what I wanted him to be able to do—teach as he wished, with minimal interference from me.

I had not realized how difficult it would be for me to separate my concerns as a researcher and my concerns as a fellow composition instructor here. I really struggled with it; I had a hard time relinquishing control, even of "the little stuff." In the end, I decided that, even if I found the syllabus confusing, I needed to accept that this plan made Richard comfortable, that it was his course, not mine, and that it still allowed for the potential for a healthy amount of participation in the service learning component. I just had to make sure all of my concern, all of my involvement, and all of my action in and out of the classroom was that of a teacher researcher and nothing else. I was getting a strong sense of my own "control freak" tendencies with this experience. Knowing I was prone to this, I hoped I would be able to identify any behavior that was counterproductive to the study in the future and discontinue it.

I had learned that maintaining a strong sense of theoretical purpose as the service learning practices unfolded, as well as a strong sense of my place as teacher researcher, were imperative, especially since both of these phenomena were unfamiliar to me. Keeping a journal in which I could record my reactions and examine my own presuppositions and biases had been valuable. I felt ready for the semester to begin.

Before The Service Learning Project Work

The first week of classes consisted of a flurry of introductions—students to assignment criteria, students to service learning and my study, students to us and vice versa, students to each other. I had been curious to see how the students would react to the service learning component of the course and the idea of being "research participants." I received study consent forms from ten students. Regarding the service learning component, I had a harder time than I had anticipated gauging whether or not the students were "getting it" right away.

As the second week of the semester began, ideas started to sink in, and important conversations happened among all of us that gave Richard and me a more definite idea of the students' attitudes about and prior experiences with service learning. We had elected to give ourselves these first two weeks to introduce the idea and talk about how the service learning option would be implemented. Students would decide whether or not to participate in the service learning component during Week 3.

In the meantime, the students, Richard, and I were discussing what had guided our decision to use service learning, asking questions, and answering questions. Richard conferenced with the students individually in his office, and reported this in his journal:

I was pleased to have several students talk about community service projects they participated in thru school or church, even one who did an ASL project thru high school, so hopefully we will have many students wanting to take part this semester. I guess my concern for this week is having enough projects for all the students.

I was a bit surprised to hear about how many students were reporting prior similar experiences. Richard sounded as though this led him to believe we would see a high level

of participation in the service learning option. I hoped he was right. Unlike him, I had

not been worried about whether or not we'd have enough sites. I had been worried about

whether or not we'd have enough people to work on the projects. The site contacts had

been very gracious in handing over responsibilities at their organizations to a bunch of

people they didn't know yet, and I didn't want to let them down.

First semester site list. At this point, I had finalized almost all of the sites.

Toward the end of the second week, part of our class discussions entailed going over this

list together:

Final List of ASL Sites, September 17, 2003

1.   **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rockville**

        Project—interviewing brothers or sisters and their "littles," and then writing a

        narrative of how and why they were matched to be posted on site.

2.   **Rockville Diabetes Outreach Network**

        Projects—press releases, articles, etc.

3.   **WRU T.V.**

        Project—writing news stories

4.   **Rockville Children's Museum**

        Project—exhibit development

5.   **R.U. Recreation Program**

        Project—attend a group fitness class and write a testimonial to be posted on site

        or online

6.   **Evenshade Nursing Center**

        Project—interview a resident and assist in writing a memoir

7. ***Rockville Maritime Museum***

   Projects—newsletter articles, research on local maritime issues, events, etc.

8. ***Alliance for Independent Living***

   Projects—press releases, informational articles, PSAs, etc.

9. ***Rockville Home for Veterans***

   Project—interview a resident and assist in writing a memoir

10. ***Grand Middle School***

    Project—tutor students in before and after school homework programs and collaborate on writing projects with them.

Research participant perspectives: Experience and confidence. I stood in front of the class and read these off, providing a brief background for each site. As I was doing so, I began to understand that I had subconsciously thought about this as "the event" after which I could be sure that everyone completely understood what we were doing. Those students without prior service learning experience who needed concrete examples of what we would be doing now had them. I finished my description of the Grand Middle School project. I asked the class if they had any questions. A girl near the door piped up. "How will I know what these people want me to write?"

I wasn't sure exactly what answer she was seeking. "You'll work closely with a site contact person. You will determine the particulars of the project together. It will be a little bit different at each site," I began. And then I realized that she might be relating the same fear about her own writing abilities that Richard had expressed to me before the semester started—that she did not have the "knowledge or training" to produce the kind of writing some of these sites might expect. "Remember that this work is not separate

from our class here. Everything you do is not only for the service learning site. It's also a class assignment, and that means we'll work on them in here." From the look on her face, I had either not answered her question, or failed to convince her that she was capable of successfully completing a service learning project. An uncomfortable silence followed.

I was about to prompt them to ask additional questions when another student, Lori, unexpectedly launched into a speech chronicling her own past experiences with service learning. She had picked up trash. She had visited children in a hospital. None of the work had been writing intensive; rather, if we had similar projects, they would follow Deans' writing about the community model. She spoke of all of her experiences with enthusiasm. "Community service is something everyone should do. We're lucky to get credit in our English class, too, for this."

"What are you smoking? We're doing extra work that other English classes aren't," said a student across the room. I was about to remind them that the service learning projects were not required, but that if they chose to work on them, they were factored into the workload.

Before I had a chance to respond, though, another student, Jacob, jumped in. "I did service learning in high school. This will look really good on your resume. Employers pay attention to this kind of stuff. I'm doing it." His declaration seemed to give the students a lot to think about. The room went quiet again.

I decided to steer them into another kind of conversation. "You have some time to think about this. Let's continue this discussion in small groups. Mr. Hunt and I will walk around and answer questions."

From there, the discussion continued on group by group, but in much the same vein, topic-wise. The next day, they wrote journal entries indicating their choices to participate or not in the service learning option. I was anxious to see what they had to say in writing.

I brought the journal entries back to my office after the class period. If I stayed late, I could read them all and still get them to Richard first thing in the morning. I sat down with the pile of papers, excited and apprehensive all at once. The afternoon was waning. I could hear the rattling of keys, and the "goodbyes" and "see you tomorrows" out in the hallway as other instructors left. I read through the journals, one after another, and then read them again, trying to identify patterns, and, well, evidence. I wanted to see if some of the same themes, both positive and negative, that had been represented in our class discussions were represented here. They were.

"This is a chance to help people." Some students voiced enthusiasm for the service learning component, or more specifically, for the chance to be in the role of "helper" to those less fortunate in the community. One student, Camille, explained her decision to work with the Rockville Children's Museum by saying, "This is an incredible opportunity and I like exploring different and interesting ideas. I don't really know what else I can say. It makes you feel good when you help other people out." I think Camille's final decision to participate in the service learning hinged on it being a chance to "help people out." She saw herself in the place of the "server," the higher up, in the relationship, and decided to participate because she felt obligated.

Noah's entry also voiced enthusiasm for an opportunity to help people; it echoed what Lori had said in our classroom discussion:

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The way I feel about community service is that, if I help one person out, then

great, I helped him. If I help further a cause such as issues affecting the entire

community, then I have helped many people. But for me, helping build an organization

that will help thousands for years to come is a much more fulfilling type of community

service. Instead of helping just a few, my service outreaches to many more people which,

in turn, makes me feel better.

Lori's own journal entry contained much of the same tone:

In the past I have done community service with my school and found it to be fun

and rewarding at the same time. I think by doing community service you realize as a

person how good things are for you and appreciate things more. I think everyone should

do community service at least once in their life.

Later, she took this one step further, saying, "I also signed up for this because I

enjoy helping people out and in doing this I will be helping Heidi out with the final stages

of her education." I was rather surprised to see myself portrayed here as the party "in

need," someone my students could bend down and help.

I had a preexisting bias I needed to admit here. While it was never my intention to

discourage anyone from doing community service, I was starting out convinced the

research participants wouldn't be able to deeply engage with their community via the

writing projects if they saw the people at their site as two dimensional "in need"

characters instead of whole human beings, operating in a complex environment. I was

studying this service learning component as a practice to stress Dobrin and Weisser's

interaction, economy, and interconnectedness in the composition classroom. I needed to

acknowledge that I wanted this to be a successful implementation of current

ecocomposition theory. These journals made me doubt the students would glean a deeper understanding of these concepts, of the complexity of the situations they would be stepping into, for instance.

The office became darker. I reached over to turn on my Target-attempt-at-retro office lamp and read on. By this point, I had plenty of quiet around me. I was completely immersed. As I read further, another interesting pattern emerged.

"I'll learn about 'other' kinds of writing." Several research participants saw the writing they would do for the service learning projects as an opportunity for gaining skills and experience that would be valuable in the workplace. Some of these research participants discussed professional writing skills in particular, while others saw it as professionally advantageous for other reasons.

One student had asked if she could set up a site project for her local fire department, which was already familiar to her as her father's place of work. She saw the service learning as a chance to gain one particular skill—grant writing. "I thought I could help out my dad's fire department and get credit at the same time […] I hope service learning will help me later in life. I feel that by writing grants, I'll have a skill I can take with me and use later."

Jacob, who chose to work at the Children's Museum, said, "I don't know why anyone wouldn't do the service learning if given the choice […]I expect to gain a lot of accreditation for my resume' also. It will be good to give myself some more diversity." Just as he had in our class discussion, he was expressing interest in gaining a line on his resume here.

So far, the contributions to our class discussions and journal entries like these led me to believe that many students saw academic writing and any writing done in the workplace as completely separate, not sharing commonalities, and not contributing to deeper understandings of each other. The third theme I would identify in this batch of journal entries would acknowledge some of the connections between the different parts of their environment.

"I'll get to do "real world" writing." Billie's journal entry was the first I read that tied the writing for the service learning projects back to the writing happening in the classroom:

I chose to do the service learning option in this class because it is a new opportunity and I think it is a one time opportunity. When the service learning option was brought up in class for the first time, I was extremely hesitant about it. After class I started thinking about it, and realized how valuable this extremely rare opportunity is. I think it is a way to see how writing in the "real world" is different from writing in school. It makes you realize that you do have to write things in life and not just in school. The best part about this option is that we are not placed at an assigned site. We get to choose where we want to go and write on something that sounds interesting to you. I chose one that sounded interesting to me and might not fit into what I want to do in life.

Billie made an important connection here that some other students had not; she acknowledged that writing is part of the world outside of academe, saying that service learning "makes you realize that you do have to write things in life and not just in school."

Noah also examined this idea of writing solely in a classroom setting vs. elsewhere. An excerpt from his journal entry follows:

I want to write about something I care about a little. I guess I just want to let my mind really work for a little and not be worried about the grade so much as I am worried about the actual paper and how the community will react to an article written and possibly published with my name under it. I guess I'll see how it goes […]

So far, Noah's journal writing came the closest to expressing an awareness of that "interaction, economy, and interconnectedness" that I had thought the writing for the service learning projects might provide. He was already anticipating the reactions of his site audience and considering how they might shape his exhibit writing.

Deans' ethical framework. After Richard had occasion to read the journal entries, and we were able to discuss them, we decided that the next logical step for those students engaging in the service learning component, regardless of whether they had prior experience or not, was to explore definitions of productive, ethical service work. Richard had decided to use a student service learning text created by Thomas Deans, *Writing and Community Action: A Service-Learning Rhetoric with Readings.* Chapter 6 covered topics like the differences between service learning work and volunteerism, and how a person's ethical framework for participating in community service can determine the nature and quality of it. Deans addressed potential problems concisely in this chapter, saying:

> Rather than adopt a mindset of paternalistic charity or consumerist service, ethical social action seeks to recognize the human dignity of all participants. Sound partnerships are premised on reciprocity; all sides give and receive, all open themselves to learning and growth. Mature social

action is built on such presumptions of equality and exchange […] Before

you engage in outreach work, you should examine default notions of

community service as "doing charity" or "helping the less fortunate," or

"serving a client," for such phrases suggest unequal, vertical relationships

in which servers give from above and recipients accept from below […]

the prevailing spirit should be that of partnership (254).

I liked that these words addressed some of the research participants' tendency to think of

the people at the service learning sites as "the less fortunate." The chapter began with a

reference to Paulo Freire's praxis, and concluded that "responsible community action is a

fragile but generative process that involves both grounded social action and critical

reflection" (253). Deans then moved the discussion on to Keith Morton's paradigms of

service, which are "charity," "project," and "social change."The terminology Deans used

was further evidence to me that his approach was more grounded specifically in critical

pedagogy than mine, but the ideas were helpful for our class to review, nonetheless.

Morton's paradigms in particular seemed helpful to Richard in addressing some

of the existing student attitudes during discussion of Chapter 6. It helped him point out

the differences between our work in class and some of the students' past volunteer

experiences. He wrote this in his journal following that day's discussion:

This chapter fostered class discussion on the terms "service," which, in relation

to service learning, Deans saw as denoting a reciprocal relationship, and

"volunteerism," which was one-sided, and easily fell prey to the "default notions" Deans

names—"doing charity," "helping the less fortunate," or "serving a client."

Richard covered this chapter by giving a long lecture on it, complemented with some Power Point slides. This left little time that day for discussion, but over the next few weeks, I heard new sentiments being expressed. Students were voicing concerns about how to write for their new, unfamiliar audiences. It was interesting to see them appropriate terms from the discussion, like "service" and "volunteerism" and use them in the same context Deans did. Many of them made sure to use the word "reciprocal" after Chapter 6 when discussing their service learning work.

During the Service Learning Project Work

Research participant perspectives: Frustration, motivation, and connection. September waned, and the students began the process of making contact with their sites. Some students had immediate success, and some became quickly frustrated by their inability to contact anyone. I found that each situation was its own intricate equation of student and site contact people's personalities, experience levels, and motivation. This was a piece of that "complex environmental messiness" I had been so excited about, right? It made me thankful for pursuing a research methodology that allowed for emergent design, because it allowed me as a teacher researcher to individualize journal prompts for different students facing different issues. As a teacher that might someday utilize service learning, I felt sure I would do the same, not to glean data, but to help my students along in their inquiries.

Making connections and determining project work. Callie listed her individual struggles with contacting Grand Middle School in the first part of October:

First I got the wrong number so that kind of set me back. Then once I finally got the correct number I started to call and the lady was not there. I have called a couple of

times and eventually just left my name and number because I realized that I wasn't going

to be able to get a hold of her anytime soon. This is really annoying!!

Mae's journal entry about the same site was turned in on the same day:

This past week again, I have yet to get a hold of my contact, Amy Patterson. I am

sort of getting frustrated with the fact that I was very excited about doing this and now

it's losing its flavor because I still haven't done anything. It's adding to my list of

inconveniences and more things I have to do and now don't want to. This past week has

been a living nightmare for me and I want to forget about doing it. I wish it was easier to

get a hold of the site and get started. Maybe if last week wasn't so draining then I would

have more patience, I don't know.

Arnie was preparing to do his service learning work at Grand Middle School, as well:

I have been having problems with my service learning activity. I am supposed to

go to a middle school and help kids, but there is no project as of now. I called there like

15 times and I finally got a hold of her last week. She told me to just come there and find

some kids in the lunchroom or whatever and talk to them and tell them what I am there

for. This was pretty confusing because I thought we were going to have a project there.

All three research participants were expressing frustration with this site. It was a

tough call for me; I was not sure whether or not I should jump in and "fix" this by

contacting the site myself and determining some of the details for these students, or

whether that was some of the important work within this part of the environment I needed

to observe them negotiating. I eventually decided the former was a teacher reaction, and

the latter reaction, to let them iron out the kinks in their project, was more appropriate

from my place as researcher. I had spoken to the site contacts myself at Grand Middle

School before the semester started, after all, and I knew there was at least a basic structure there in which the research participants could work.

Tanya was trying to make contact with Big Brothers Big Sisters:

I'm really excited to get started with this. I think it's going to be really good, and it was a really good idea. I've called a few times, but still have not been able to connect with my contact person. I am doing BBBS. I called once, and they told me she wasn't there, and to call back a different time. So, I called back at the time they told me, and there was no answer. I waited over the weekend because I didn't think there would be anyone there, I guess I should have tried still. I called yesterday, and the girl said she wasn't there again and to call back a different time. But this time, I gave them my name and number, and I asked them to have her call me. She has not yet returned my call, but I am going to try again tomorrow if she doesn't call before then. I want to get started on this because I am excited, and I don't want to be behind, because it will be very hard to make up.

Whether Tanya realized it not here, she was sitting back and staying in a passive position at this point. She was still waiting for someone to tell her what to do. The simple act of leaving her name and number with the agency was presented in her journal as an assertive action, but, especially when dealing with nonprofit agencies, often run by dedicated but overworked people, it was apparent to me that the participants would have to become persistent and assertive. Again, even if part of me wanted to do this work for them, I felt like it was necessary that I step back. They were learning how to interact with a part of their environment outside of the classroom.

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Ellen, a student who had been excited about working with the Diabetes Outreach Network, hit her boiling point early on in the site contact experience:

I've contacted my contact person from the Diabetes Outreach place, but she isn't really any help. I really am lost right now. I need to e-mail her again to make a time for us to meet. We will then be able to get information down and decide what we want to be able to do. She's kind of left everything up to me and this is yet another strain on my back that I must do. I've got so many hassles right now. I don't have a car, so I don't know how I am supposed to get there. I can't keep relying on other people for rides. I'm thinking maybe I should just do the extra essay for this class. I've got too much going on right now. Anything extra…just has to wait.

Ellen expressed very practical concerns about time and logistic feasibility. What bothered me especially about Ellen's entry here, was that she saw "everything being left up to her" as a "hassle." It was intentional and a necessary part of the service learning projects, as far as I was concerned. I wanted Ellen to be the one determining the boundaries of what she would do for the Diabetes Outreach Network. I was sad to see her give up without understanding that part of the service learning, or seeing the value of it; however, I understood her concern over how this would fit into her daily schedule. I was sorry to see Ellen drop out of the service learning work soon after this journal was written, but it was her decision to make. If I would have intervened, I felt as though she wouldn't be getting the same valuable experience as the others in determining the logistics of her service, and that I would have been overstepping my place in the classroom.

Working as the service learning coordinator, in part, as well as a researcher was tricky, I was learning. It was up to me to decide when the problems students were having necessitated my intervention as coordinator, and when they were just a difficult but acceptable part of the service learning project work. I reviewed these cases. The most assertive thing any of the research participants did was leave their name and number. They never e-mailed their site contacts and gave them a specific deadline by which they needed to be contacted. They never actually visited the sites. At this point, the answer I had to my first research question, "In what ways is this service learning component affecting the students?" was that it left them clueless and frustrated at not having a plan predetermined for them. Instead of fostering assertiveness and critical thought, it fostered resentment.

I thought it was possible that all of the students in these journal entries were taking a passive stance because that's what they were used to doing. Their site contacts became surrogate instructors of sorts. They seemed to view them as another authority figure, someone who needed to assign them something to do. When their site contact did not call immediately and provide them with an assignment, they became irritated and felt cheated. Callie and Mae expressed frustration at their site contacts not calling them back. Arnie never considered the possibility that the project would not be there, finished, determined, ironed out and waiting for him, like a detailed class assignment, printed on paper and handed out by an instructor. They all saw this as a roadblock, something preventing them from completing their service learning projects. Despite prompting from both Richard and me, none of them saw establishing contact and working out the details of the project as something they needed to do, a responsibility of theirs, part of the

assignment, something that might take action and/or ingenuity. I tried to spin this in an appealing way during class discussion, saying that the more of a hand they all had in designing their projects, the more those projects would be valuable and interesting to them personally.

I knew my biases were at work here. I had hopes that this service learning component would put ecocomposition into practice, and a part of that would be providing a place for the students to be active participants in the various elements of their environment. I wanted this service learning component to provide them with experience in thinking proactively. I wanted them to approach their projects the same way they would have to approach other situations in academe and beyond—in their personal and professional lives. Very few relationships of either sort that I've encountered have mimicked the traditional student/teacher role, yet that's how they were inclined to treat this aspect of the service learning. I wanted them to experience immediate success, initial failure, whatever, but *learn* from it and move on to think about these places, their own identities, and the relationships between the two in new ways.

Site visits. With or without this kind of action on the parts of the research participants, the service learning work began. My place as service learning coordinator in the classroom required different actions of me from site to site, and depending on how assertive and active the students had been in setting up their own projects. Arnie made me fear that some of the research participants would carry their trend of passivity over to their service learning work when he said in his journal, after visiting the site for the first time, "It has been enjoyable, but just a little unorganized because you are on your own almost the whole time. I am going to keep going there and get the most I can out of it."

Camille's transition from contacting her site, the Children's Museum, to visiting it, to setting up a project was by contrast quick and seamless:

My first contact with my site was when I called on Thursday afternoon. My contact person James seemed very nice over the phone. He told me to come in as soon as I could so I could get started. I told him Friday would be a good day and he said any time after 10 or before 3, because at 3 he was going to play with Lego's.

I was nervous on Friday when I arrived at the Children's Museum. He just so happened to be outside when I arrived. He was very friendly; he told my boyfriend to join us so he did. James gave us a tour of the museum. It is a very creative and interactive place not only for kids but for adults. He explained how different exhibits were developed and who created them. I was so excited. Towards the end of his little tour he showed us the human body and my boyfriend went down the slide while I pressed the fart button. That was a lot of fun. The last thing he showed us was the kitchen, my second home. They do cooking with kids and when they have parties they use that also.

After that we all sat down to figure out what part of the museum I should work on. I told him my major was hospitality and it all fit together. We were discussing cleanliness and how long we should wash our hands for. So my job is to decorate the cabinets with different kind of information on being clean, playing, bacteria, and safety in the kitchen.

Camille's site contact at the Children's Museum sounded helpful. It also seemed as though Camille was enthusiastic in her own right. Because of this, I was inclined to give her some of the credit for the haste with which this project was initiated.

Noah offered this report of his first visit to the Maritime Museum:

I have talked with my service learning person a couple of times and even went to

meet her yesterday. She is a very nice lady and is very into this project and wants me to

help with the new part of the Maritime Museum that is being added. The new section of

the museum has to do with lighthouses. She gave me a CD with thousands of entries on it

from the many lighthouse attendants from 1873-1947. I assume so far that it was changed

over to electric at that time. I am really eager to begin my research and writing.

Noah sounded markedly more excited once he had personal contact with his site

in general—his contact person, the place itself, and the information with which he would

be working. I found myself thinking that maybe we needed to work harder to make the

sites more "real" for the students earlier on. Now I would have to think about what "real"

meant. It seemed like encouraging as much direct contact as possible, and locating the

strongest area of interest at each site for each individual student as soon as possible

would both be important, based on what I had seen so far. Face-to-face time and enabling

students to find their own interests within the site provided intrinsic motivation to push

forward. It enabled them to be more active and assertive in setting up the project.

Callie and Mae both made it over to the before and after school program at the

middle school, like Arnie. Both reported positive experiences with similar effects to

Noah's once they had done so. An excerpt from Callie's journal entry after her initial

visit follows:

I got acquainted with the kids and asked if they wanted to write a story about

themselves so we did. The kid that I got to work with was quite the character. He talked

my ear off. And of course kids that age can't exactly stick to one story so it's not the best

but we got through it. I always thought that kids in elementary and middle school were

relatively similar no matter where they are from. But even after my one visit to the school

I have realized that is not true. Kids from my hometown are not as outgoing and kept to

themselves because they are from a big town. I don't think that they experience as much

as the kids here. This might be just because the town is too big so there is not enough to

go around for everyone. But after visiting these children I have realized that they are a

lot more knowledgeable. The kids here are very outspoken and know exactly what's going

on. Talking to these kids was almost like talking to an adult. It was scary. But it made me

realize that the environment that people are brought up in does influence their education.

Callie not only sounded much more enthusiastic about her site; she was already

thinking critically about part of a bigger picture here, about how environment can shape

identity. I wondered, as I read this, if she had taken this thought further—if the middle

school students here were different, wouldn't she, then, be coming to RU with a different

disposition than other students? She seemed to get a little closer to this idea in a slightly

later entry, in which she said, "I really enjoy learning new things from the kids. I feel like

it is just another class for me. Sometimes the kids know more than you and they can teach

you in weird ways." Still, I wanted to hear more specifics. I needed to think of ways to

get the students to think critically not just about their sites and the people there, but also

about themselves and how the issues their site work brought up were relevant to them.

Mae also sounded surprised that the students were so willing and interested,

saying, "To my surprise, it wasn't as bad as I thought. The kids for the most part were

cooperative." Then she went on to draw some conclusions about how her work at the site

tied in, or didn't, to the "big picture" of why we were doing service learning:

My only complaint is that I don't really feel like I'm doing anything for the community. To me is seems like an unorganized activity thrown at us because there was nothing else to do. Having them write a story was random. Even after the task was completed, I felt that neither the boy I worked with nor I gained anything from each other. If I would have helped him with his homework or something to that extent, it would have been different. Because he didn't care about the assignment, it meant nothing to him; he wasn't expecting to learn something, so he didn't.

When I first read this, sitting in my office, I wanted to scream, "Mae, you did this, too!" I saw this activity as rife with opportunities to discuss writing, to "tutor" a student in writing, but I felt like, since Mae saw it as worthless, she didn't take anything away from it. Teaching a middle school student how to create a story could certainly be a learning experience for a college student, in which not only creative writing, language, and literacy could be explored, but also a chance to exchange ideas about the cultural, social, geographical, etc. influences in the story. I didn't scream, to my credit. I kept reading.

After we finished our stories, the kids sat down to play some card games. I joined them. At first we played war, and then the kids got bored. So I asked them if they wanted to learn another game. I taught them a card game I used to play when I was a kid called Egyptian War. Teaching them this new game was exciting and interesting to me. Not the actual work, but getting to know these students and their lifestyles was something new for me.

Here, I saw that Mae did think critically—in new ways about her own environment, about the people in her community—just not during the story project itself.

Her interaction with the middle school students still provided her with a chance to learn about how the members of her community differed from her. It was a start. Richard made an interesting point in one of his researcher's journals around this time, about why some students were having positive experiences such as Noah's, Callie's and Mae's at their sites, while others did not:

Perhaps the problem is that some of the students really aren't interacting with people. They have been given a project, like any other school assignment, and in the end they will simply hand it in. They aren't engaging in communication with anyone. And the students who seem to be the most productive and excited are those who are working with people as part of the project. The BBBS participants are talking with Bigs and Littles and the Grand group is talking with kids. And Camille seems to have very close contact with the agency contact at the Children's Museum,, so putting the students in projects where they have to interact and become part of new discourse communities seems to make the project and entire experience better.

He was right. Upon reading this, I realized many of my research questions, and actually, my overall interest in service learning in relation to ecocomposition, hinged on something more specific than "experiential education."

Researcher perspectives: Tying practice to theory. I needed to sit down and think hard about the specifics of this service learning model. I needed to back up and think about all of the projects on our list, and what the ones providing students with the most positive experiences had in common.

Personal interaction. Through examination of the research participants' reactions to their service learning work, I was beginning to understand that close human interaction

provided them with much more intrinsic motivation to think critically about the elements of their environment that were prominent at the site. Some sites asked for the students to do more individual work, and in theory, I had still thought these kinds of transactions—primary and secondary research, formatting a pamphlet or a Power Point, would be enriching. The students who seemed to be having the most valuable experiences, however—valuable to them in terms of being interesting and enriching, and valuable to me in terms of providing opportunities for exploration of and interaction with their environment in some way—were the ones that were in closer and more constant contact with other live people, whether they be their site contact or other people involved with their site, such as the students at Grand Middle School, or the "bigs" and "littles" at Big Brothers Big Sisters.

These live people added a "real," immediate element that seemed to motivate the research participants. They could communicate with their writing subjects, whereas their subjects were static in a more traditional classroom. The communication was one-way when a student read about a research subject before writing about it. I began to examine all of the students' experiences with this in mind. If the data suggested that this was right, then I had just taken a substantial step in tentatively defining a model of service learning that put ecocomposition into action. At the very least, I had redefined the term "direction interaction" as "personal interaction" for myself.

I saw more evidence that the personal interaction here was key in a journal entry Callie wrote about her work at Grand Middle School around the same time:

I have not gone back to the site yet but I am really excited to. I am excited for two reasons. The first is because I really like to work with children and just love being

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around them. The second is because I really enjoy learning new things from the kids. Other than that it is going great and I am really glad that I picked this site because I am not only learning but teaching the kids and doing what I really like to do. So hopefully I will learn a lot from this and they will learn a lot from me. That is my goal.

At this point I started to think differently about the three different models of service learning Thomas Deans discussed—writing for the community, writing about the community, and writing with the community. Deans had maintained that combinations of paradigms could work if they were thoughtfully executed; my thoughts about the way I wanted to combine writing for the community and writing about the community to create a practice that implemented ecocomposition theory were changing. I had started with the assumption that I would create projects that implemented elements of both writing for and writing about the community in a way that allowed for exploration of and interaction with relevant elements of the students' environments. I was realizing now that my model of service learning would need to be defined much more specifically.

I sat in a coffeehouse in Rockville, hundreds of miles away from the coffeehouse in Indiana, PA I had frequented while articulating the theory behind my dissertation research. It was almost noon, and there was an increasing amount of hustle and bustle around me. I took a minute to listen, to stretch out the muscles in my back, and to think.

Here I was, with new ideas now that my theory had started to translate to practice. I was interested in service learning in composition because of its potential capacity to engage students with their environment, and I was interested in the idea of making this a part of college students' early academic experience for all of the same reasons. But face-to-face human interaction had been something I had either taken for granted, or lumped

together with other kinds of interaction—interaction with abstract concepts, ideas, research data, etc. when I was planning my research. I was seeing a lot of evidence that, especially at this point in their lives and academic careers, the students in first-year composition benefited from service learning in which close contact with someone at their site was stressed.

Maybe this was because they needed a little more guidance? Reassurance? I had touted the value of dropping these students on their butts, so to speak, and letting them figure out everything for themselves; was encouraging more personal interaction a step backward? I sipped my Sumatra and thought of the examples the research participants had provided so far. There was a difference here. The students like Camille and Callie weren't having anything done or determined for them. Callie's main interaction was with the middle school students she was tutoring, not someone in a position to supervise her work or help her in any other way.

It was the simple difference between communicating with other living beings instead of abstract ideas or projects. Working with other people literally animated the process for these students. The more interaction of this kind a project included, the more excited the students seemed, the harder they were willing to work, and the more rewarding their work was to them. Tanya went from being frustrated and frazzled over her work with Big Brothers Big Sisters before meeting with her interviewees, saying, "This week I'm so stressed out, I have so much going on. This Service Learning deal is stressing me out. I don't know how I'm going to get it all done," to saying, after she completed her interview with her "big" and "little:"

I never really thought that BBBS made that big of an impact on the people's lives until now. The service learning experience made me realize that it did. I was in the program in high school for two years, and still it was never clear to me what the purpose of the program was. Just interviewing the little, I could see how much this program meant to him. Just seeing his face while he talked about his big brother really showed me that this program was good for the little kids. I'm glad I chose to do this for my service learning project because now I know what this program means to people, and what the purpose of it is.

I thought of Dobrin and Weisser's terms once again: interaction, economy, interconnectedness. When we took the human element out of the practice, the service learning projects were less effective; the students lacking that human element, face-to-face communication, seemed much less interested, immersed, and motivated. If the site contact at the Maritime Museum had been more distant and less enthused, I was sure Noah's research on lighthouses would have felt like little else than an imposed research paper topic. What better part of that messy, multifaceted environment with which to interact, and on which to see the results of one's writing, than other human beings, with their own ever-changing sets of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, histories?

The human element here contributed significantly to the dynamic nature of the environment in which this writing was taking place and affecting. This was what excited me about ecocomposition; from Cooper's "Ecology of Writing" onward, ecocomposition theory concerned itself with studying the dynamic relationships, the reciprocal connectedness between writer, writing, and environment. Without that human interaction,

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these service learning projects were more static, perhaps even in danger of appearing like and functioning like modified classroom assignments.

I decided that from here on in, differentiating between indirect and direct human interaction was important in the service learning taking place in the course I was studying. That personal interaction needed to be a substantial component of my research participants' service learning projects, if those projects were going to give them an opportunity for ecocomposition-inspired practices.

Lori, Noah, Callie, Mae, Arnie, Billie, Tanya, and Camille were discussing their time at their sites and the writing they were doing at length, and they were doing so consistently. As I had only received ten voluntary consent forms, I felt thankful to have such forthcoming students in the class. I decided to follow their cases for the remainder of the semester. Of course, I needed to stay open to the possibility that even within this small set, some of their cases could turn out to be more informative than others.

Dialogue. I would soon learn that I needed to define "personal interaction" even more specifically. I had started this study under the impression that all of the site projects required interaction already, exactly as they had been set up. Billie, who had chosen to take on RU's Recreational Facilities group fitness program as her site, was required to "interact" with a class full of fitness enthusiasts, and this was certainly face-to-face, live human interaction. But when it got down to the writing of a testimonial that Recreational Facilities could use in their advertising material online, she sounded lost. "It is a lot harder trying to write on the classes than I thought it would be. It is so hard to try to explain some of the things that we do. It is hard to just find some words to describe the basics of the class. I definitely didn't think it would be this hard."

After trying to put myself in her shoes, I came to realize that Billie's interaction with people at her site, while direct and immediate, did not inform the writing she would do for her project directly. I was adamant that these students determine the structure and content of their writing assignments themselves. After all, I was studying this kind of service learning with an admitted existing bias—I suspected it might give them a chance at having a positive, interactive educational experience in which they were not being spoon-fed, sitting back and waiting for some instructor *or* site contact person to make a Freirean deposit. But Billie was clearly not gleaning the inspiration or motivation from the personal interaction at her site that others were. What was the difference?

Relevant dialogue. When Billie was engaging in the postures of her yoga class, she was not talking to the instructor or the other participants about her experience. She was not dialoguing with that environment verbally; therefore, she was not immersed in a way that informed her writing. Immersion in environment did not always entail dialogue. I thought back to some of the theoretical discussions of dialogue that had occurred during my doctoral coursework. Michael Holquist, in his attempt to define the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, asserts that "dialogism's master assumption is that there is no figure without a ground" (22). In other words, we only come to know the nature of a thing, including the self, by what it contrasts with, what makes it different from "the other." We make meaning of our own experiences, within language and otherwise, through dialogue with others. I looked back through the chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that discusses dialogue, and came across a quote of Freire's that summed up the necessity of dialogue in these service learning projects nicely: "Without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education" (74).

I felt this is what determined how valuable the service learning projects could be to the research participants in terms of providing ecological writing experiences. They needed to engage in not only personal interaction, but also direct dialogue about the subject matter of their writing projects. The students needed to feel knowledgeable enough about the sites to produce writing that fulfilled the assignments and fulfilled the sites' needs. They needed to engage in dialogue that could provide them with language with which they could articulate the ideas central to their project work. The dialogue also needed to provide them with the language to describe their places, actions, and interactions at those sites for their reflective writing.

There was a significant difference between the loose definition of interaction with which I had started this research and interaction that involved this kind of dialogue, dialogue in which the students came to understandings of the subject matter at the site through communicating with others, through obtaining and sharing knowledge and ideas, through understanding themselves and the work they were doing, the "figure," by understanding the "ground" that helped define those things. I needed to make sure they had opportunities for this sort of dialogic activity at their sites; such activity directly engaged them in a reciprocal relationship with their environment.

This helped me narrow down and articulate exactly what I would need to stress in order to make a service learning component in a first-year composition course useful and productive as defined in my terms, as practice for ecocomposition theory. For this semester's group of research participants, it meant I would have to be willing to step in and change some details of their service work if I wanted to study sites with truly dialogic activity. I would have to do this quickly. The semester was winding down, and more and

more final projects were getting close to being done. Different sites had different due dates for the work the students would be producing. I would only be able to make limited changes at some of the sites.

 In Billie's case, it was simple; instead of sending her to the class to participate and then leaving her to her own devices, I encouraged her to interview the fitness instructor afterwards and ask about the language instructors used to describe what was happening in the class. We talked the day I returned to her the journal entry that had detailed her frustration. I caught her on the way out the door after class.

"Billie, can I speak with you about your project? I read your last journal entry," I began.

She looked defeated at the thought of her service project. "I need help. I know you want us to do this on our own. But it's hard."

I struggled, for just a moment. Sometimes being a good researcher, even a good teacher went against my instincts. I liked helping people. Sometimes I just wanted to fix everything for them. "You do need to do this on your own. But I would like to adjust your assignment. You are interacting with people at your site that know as much as you do about the fitness classes, and even if they knew more, a yoga class does not offer many opportunities to speak with the other participants. Let's see if interacting with someone that can tell you more about the language that describes the class and the program can make things easier."

I went on to suggest that she ask the instructor if she could stay after class for a minute and answer some questions. I warned her that there was still much she had to determine by herself—what questions would she ask? What would she need to know to

write a good testimonial for Recreational Facilities to use on their website? What kind of descriptive language would be specific enough, but still easy for her audience to understand? She still looked worried.

This change, though, enabled her to ask questions about terminology, to learn about the discourse of this particular community, and finally to explain what happened in the class to a general audience using a new understanding of that language. That understanding seemed quite enriched by her dialogue, however brief, with the fitness instructor. Even though she had looked worried after our conversation, her final document impressed me. It indicated to me that she had asked thoughtful questions of the fitness instructor. Billie had started off voicing concern about her abilities to write not only persuasively, but also descriptively, in her testimonial for Recreational Facilities. She ended up providing lots of good, specific, helpful, and persuasive information in her final document (Appendix A).

This project could have very easily reinforced Billie's insecurities about her writing if we had proceeded as originally planned. Instead, interviewing the instructor of the class and engaging in this dialogue gave her a chance to ask questions, and educate herself to her own satisfaction so that she determined the quality of her work. Once she gained access to the information she needed through this dialogue, she felt confident enough to write her testimonial, as well as to discuss the project in her reflective journals with greater authority.

Fluid project structure. For those students at the before and after school program at Grand Middle School, it was not clear at first with whom that dialogue needed to take place. All three of them—Callie, Mae, and Arnie—had started off bothered by the lack of

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structure in the tutoring program. We had all been expecting structure after our conversations with the site contacts. The research participants' frustration in this case had eventually led me to contact those site contacts myself, but there was little that could be done at that point. Callie, Mae, and Arnie had continued completing service at their site over the semester, working with the middle school students on homework, and eventually their frustration led them to action. The research participants, Richard, and I all had a discussion in Richard's office. I wanted to think of it as a group interview, so I brought my digital recorder. It turned out that there weren't many questions for me to ask, though. They had already come to a definite group decision.

"We want to write a proposal to start a *real* tutoring program at Grand Middle School," declared Mae. She often established herself as the leader of any group we put her in during class work. I had just made my decision that dialogue in the form of face-to-face personal interaction was necessary at the sites, so this sounded like a copout to me; I wanted them to talk to the administrators instead, and I said so.

"We've tried talking to them. You have, even. It hasn't worked," said Arnie. He was right. In fact, whether they realized it or not, their decision to present those people with a formal document showed some keen understanding of their rhetorical situation. The site contacts had indeed been unresponsive to casual conversation.

Richard looked excited. "This is very close to a kind of document you might write in a more traditional EN 101 class, maybe even a technical writing class. I can point you in the direction of lots of resources. Our education specialist in the English department may even be able to help you with the subject matter."

As the meeting broke, up, I was still thinking about the dialogue issue. I wasn't willing to let it go right away. Over the next few days, I began to realize that dialogue of a different sort had already occurred. It was different from Billie's dialogue with someone "in charge," but just as valuable in helping the research participants articulate ideas fundamental to their project writing. As Callie explained in one of her journals about the direction of their project, "We already have the information that we would have to research because we found it out firsthand by going to the school." They had been dialoguing with the middle school students all semester. They could use this information as primary research in their proposal. Because of this dialogue, they were going to be very in-tune with the students' wants and needs from such a program. They would also be able to effectively demonstrate the existing interest in a tutoring program in their proposal.

These research participants made me rethink my definition of valuable personal interaction and dialogue yet again. Perhaps it did not have to be with the site contact people or others in positions of authority. Maybe the dialogic activity just had to educate them on the issues that became most relevant to each of them individually.

This application of service learning was still true to the theory that had guided my design. I had been turned off by Deans' definition of writing with the community because it seemed to narrow down what "important issues" could be for each individual student. Likewise, I had gotten close to narrowing down what relevant dialogue could be to a fault. The research participants needed to be able to determine the direction in which they wanted to go, and the relevant issues they wanted to pursue, if I was truly interested in studying these projects as applications of ecocomposition. This was writing for and

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about the community as I had envisioned it. All three of these students decided to pursue the proposal of a structured tutoring program together. It was conceivable, though, that other relevant issues would have struck other students at the same site as most important—perhaps being a mentor of any sort, educational or not, would have been most important to a different student. Perhaps the importance of youth recreation would have interested another.

It was satisfying for me to see the research participants making connections, locating their areas of interest at each service learning site, and even locating the most relevant and helpful members of that environment to dialogue with themselves in some instances. I was impressed by the final projects I had seen so far.

After the Service Learning Project Work Was Completed

Research participant perspectives. It was time to take a retrospective look at the research participants' completed work. My impressions of their service learning experiences as they were working were important for me to record for this document, as were their impressions. Now I could consider what their thoughts about the completed projects.

Connection and interconnection. Most of what I was seeing toward the end of the semester was leaving me hopeful that this application of service learning, at least as it was evolving, had potential to provide useful practices to go along with ecocomposition theory.

My research questions also took into account my research participants' thoughts on its value. I started pillaging their end-of-the semester writing, journal entries and capstone essays that Richard had assigned, looking for their opinions. I also organized

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interviews to give me another layer of data. Some of the students were forthcoming in their written feedback, but others were not. There were also times where a research participant's writing left me with more questions about their experiences.

Lori: Connection to environment. Lori had been charged with having direct contact with both a "big," a "little," *and* her site contact to complete her project—turning an interview with two matched people into a narrative account to be used as advertising for Big Brothers Big Sisters. Her discussions with the site contact, in which she learned new things about the organization, provided her with helpful insight into the piece she wrote as well as information that made her think about how she might stay involved with the organization. Lori related in one of her journals, "I found out today that a college student could be a Big to a Little. I think I'm interested in that."

I thought this was a great example of service learning work fostering a connection to a research participant's environment that likely would not have existed otherwise. Lori had been given a chance to interact with part of her environment that she might not have been exposed to without the service learning component of her writing course, and the writing she completed was central to creating that interaction and the dialogue she had with the administration and members of that organization. I felt like this service learning work had aided in Lori finding a new place for herself in her environment. Her essay demonstrated to me that she had acquired understanding of how to share her newfound knowledge with the audience (Appendix B).

After reading Lori's piece, and seeing her personal interest in getting involved with BBBS reiterated, I arranged for a brief interview with her after class one day. Whereas I had prepared a series of questions in many other interviews throughout the

semester, I really only had one for Lori. As the other students made their way out the door, I asked her, "In both your journal entries, and in your writing for BBBS, you speak of the organization in a new way. What do you think contributed to these new ideas you have about the organization?"

She paused for a moment, and then said, "You mean that I want to be a 'Big?' Lots of things. I got to see the way Big Brothers Big Sisters works for myself, basically. I was in the organization in high school, but I didn't ask questions." She smiled. "I'm glad that I got assigned to do that." Lori's project had provided opportunities for dialogue with several different people that could provide insight and information about Big Brothers Big Sisters. Having access to all of this information, and from different viewpoints within the organization (not just the site contact's) seemed to help Lori make a connection that was of value to her. She understood the potential of her active participation in this element of her environment; she understood the interconnectedness of herself to this part of her environment more deeply. Most of the data I was gathering from Lori, though, centered around her feelings on the site work, or research she had done for her service learning writing, not the writing itself.

Noah: Connection as motivation to write. Research participants like Camille and Noah were eager to share their thoughts on the experience and their thoughts on writing, specifically, in their capstone essays. (I chose to include excerpts of those here, as their projects for their sites combined writing and visuals for museum exhibits.) Both commented on not only how they thought about these different subjects and parts of their environment after their service learning work, but also how the projects enabled them to

find new enthusiasm and motivation to work on making their writing strong and effective. In his capstone essay, Noah related:

My views on social action have changed a lot since I have begun my service learning experience with the Maritime Museum at the beginning of this English class. I have learned how much time and effort some people put into their visions of how they want something to come out and how important it is to them. For example my contact at the Museum was so informative and enthusiastic about the subject, she couldn't wait for the restoration lighthouse project that they had taken on to become a reality and finally be finished. Through all of the books that I have read about the lighthouses and the interviews with those at the museum I too have become a lot more excited about the subject of lighthouses and maritime history, especially in this town. I have learned a lot these last few weeks about service learning and gathering information, I now can conduct an interview over the phone and sound professional about it, and I even did an in person interview with one of the employees at the museum. These are valuable skills that most definitely will be put to use again.

He went on to say, later in the capstone essay, "It is easier to write better with all of this information to add. It was easier to sound like I know what I'm talking about."

Noah had also made a connection to the community of Rockville and its history through dialogue with his site contact. The site contact's enthusiasm about local maritime history had been contagious, so to speak, and once he felt enthusiasm for his subject, he found greater motivation to acquire "skills" like interviewing. He seemed more comfortable completing the writing tasks necessary for his project once he found enthusiasm for a writing subject, and could proceed with greater confidence and

authority. His dialogue with this part of his environment helped to create discourse when it shaped his assigned writing project.

Camille: Interconnection, environment, writer, and writing. Camille expressed a keen awareness of the ethical implications of writing something that would be shared with the public, as well as the importance of audience analysis in her capstone essay. This impressed me. I was not sure we would have been able to convey these ideas as efficiently through more traditional classroom instruction in a first-year composition class, even though they were certainly relevant to a writing classroom:

As a citizen writing for the community I feel a pressure of accuracy. I do not want to write something that is false. Then someone believes it's true because they read it on the walls and it was really wrong. Something that I learn at the Children's Museum is that children are very impressionable. When making an exhibit there are many factors to put into play. You have to be able to display the accurate information in a way the children and parents will both respond to. I learned that most people can't read past a 6th grade level. Knowing this, I had to learn to adjust my way of writing. I had to be able to convey useful information in language that my audience could understand. Also, I had to learn to grab attention through language and pictures. It is so hard to adjust to this type of writing it would take me 45 minutes to make a poster with two sentences; the language had to be clear and simple. The biggest struggle was being creative. I had to play with language to get an end result. One word would make the biggest difference good or bad. Writing for the community is a challenge but it is worth it. The end result is rewarding.

In the beginning of the semester, I had occasionally worried that students were parroting our rhetoric when they used words like "citizen" or "community" in contexts like these.

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Now, as the semester was coming to a close, I was seeing the students employ these terms in their own right. Camille was one of those students; her essay showed me that she was thinking about her environment's effect on her service learning project writing, and her project writing's potential effect on her environment. She sounded aware of her interconnection with the site; she also sounded aware of how her writing was affected by, and could affect the site. This struck me as an example of ecocomposition in action.

Researcher perspectives: Ecocomposition in action. With the final essays and final projects rolling in, I felt ready to make some preliminary conclusions. I trudged in through some fresh, wet, heavy snow on a December Sunday and sat in my office. I got down on the floor, sat cross-legged, and arranged hard-copy research data around me.

I would be looking for evidence that the research participants viewed writing or actually approached their writing differently as a result of the service learning work for this first-year composition course. In particular, I was looking for evidence that their environment affected their writing processes and they were aware of how their writing might affect their environment. I had designed the service learning projects with my own carefully thought-out combination of Deans' writing for the community and writing about the community that I thought held promise as a practice to put a definition of ecocomposition based on Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing" and Dobrin and Weisser's *Natural Discourse* into practice.

Dobrin and Weisser's definition hinged on "the total relations of an organism to its environment, both organic and inorganic." I had designed and begun to conduct this study because I wanted to help my future students find ways to work and write with the understanding that one's environment is indeed always multifaceted and complex, that

their identities were always acting and interacting within those complex parts of their environment, and that their connections to those parts were necessary to study as they wrote pieces that would be affected by as well as affect their environment. With all of this in mind, I had settled on the following three research questions for the study:

1. How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their writing? How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within a university setting, and outside of it?

2. How do I, in turn, think the service learning component is affecting the research participants' writing? How do I think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within the university setting and outside of it?

3. Ultimately, do I think adding a service learning component is a successful way to implement ecocomposition in a first-year composition classroom?

After collecting only the first half of my data, I did not yet feel prepared to answer my third question. At this point, I felt it would still be valuable to consider the first two questions in relation to what I had gathered so far.

I thought about Mae, Callie, and Arnie at Grand Middle School, of Lori and Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rockville County, of Billie at the Recreational Facilities yoga class, of Noah at the Maritime Museum, and of Camille at the Children's Museum. They all saw for themselves how their writing needed to function—not just as a classroom assignment, but as an active part of their total environment. In answer to my first research question, I felt as though some of them were indeed thinking about their writing differently. Now how I would define "differently?"

For some, the research participants' environment had imposed specific wants and needs on their writing, in effect changing the writing. Camille saw this when she wrote for parents and children that would only share understanding of certain words. Billie saw this when she had to describe a yoga class in a way that the general public would understand and find appealing. The writing I had seen in all of these cases also suggested to me that the writing itself had been changed. Billie and Camille altered their word choice in regards to specific audiences. Noah had been asked to take on writing tasks with which he initially felt uncomfortable, and went on to include his primary and secondary research in his work.

Mae, Callie, and Arnie got to see their writing change a significant part of their environment, the community of Rockville itself, when Grand Middle School accepted their proposal in part for the creation of a tutoring program. They gained an understanding of the change their writing could create within their environment. Lori's own concept of an organization in which she had participated before changed through the primary and secondary research she did; I would argue that without her project's specific needs, she might not have sought out this information, and might not have chosen to pursue further involvement. Her writing motivated her to be more active in that part of her environment. Likewise, Noah became much more interested in the topic of his writing, lighthouses and his community's history, and that had motivated him to tackle previously daunting tasks, like conducting interviews, with greater enthusiasm and confidence.

Of course, I had learned a lot over the semester about what kind of service learning exactly might foster productive engagement with environment. Direct, face-to-

face dialogue with people involved with the sites in some capacity worked to engage the research participants directly in a reciprocal relationship with a part of their environment. Who those people were, though, still had to be determined by the research participants; it was up to them to locate the most interesting element of their environment to pursue. For instance, Billie's dialogue had occurred with someone "in charge," the instructor of the yoga class. The most useful, informative, and transformative dialogue for Mae, Callie, and Arnie had occurred not with an authority figure, but with the middle school students at Grand Middle School. That dialogue not only inspired their course of action at their site, but it also provided primary research data for their proposal (Appendix C).

I had a second semester of research coming up soon. I knew I wanted to make sure the projects were set up to do two things, especially, from here—encourage more inquiry on the research participants' parts, so that they would all work to locate the areas of greatest interest to themselves at their sites, and then foster as much direct interaction and dialogue with the person or people most relevant to those areas of interest.

I felt I had data to suggest that when this happened, the research participants gained deeper understandings of how complex different audiences could be. Despite that complexity, they seemed more motivated to analyze themselves and their own existing capabilities, the needs of their particular audience, and what they would need to learn to do to fill those needs. So far, this had led them to seek out knowledge often covered in other first-year writing courses—grammar, usage, and mechanics conventions, different structures for written documents, and the inclusion of different kinds of research data in their own writing. Their final products adhered to the same conventions Richard was teaching them about the more traditional academic writing they were completing on non-

service learning days in their class. Callie, Mae, and Arnie's proposal to Grand Middle

School took what they were learning from Richard on non-service learning days and

appropriated it for their site project writing. I felt so far that the service learning

component was providing some students with everything a traditional first-year

composition class could and more.

I was tired. I was also excited for the winter semester. Inevitably, a different set of

research participants would provide varied data from this. But overall, would it

strengthen these tentative conclusions? Provide me with contradictory data? Completely

new ideas to consider?

CHAPTER 3: SECOND SEMESTER RESEARCH

Before the Service Learning Project Work

Researcher perspectives: Refining researcher place and site projects. I started my second semester of research by walking across a frozen sidewalk to the building that contained our new classroom—same building as last semester, same walk, but different scenery, and different classroom. I felt hard, sharp snowflakes hit the little bit of my face that was exposed to the wind as I trudged. Our classroom was once again cinderblock, but this time it was much bigger, and it was painted sky blue. Something about the wall color combined with the primary red chairs made me feel like I was in an elementary school. I sat down at a desk off to the side of the front of the room and started taking things out of my backpack.

Richard was already in the front of the room. He had his laptop connected to an overhead projector, and was busy pulling up several different files. He looked more prepared than last semester. He looked like he *felt* more prepared this semester, too—a little less antsy. I know I did.

I had thought about how to present an evenhanded, yet thorough, picture of the service learning component I was there to coordinate and observe. I also had thought about how to change our introductory materials to get students thinking about immersion in and dialogue with their sites as soon as possible. I had very different thoughts at this point in the semester, compared to the fall.

I felt as though I had more specific ideas about what I wanted to study—in particular, the exact model of service learning that I wanted to put into practice as a potential way to implement ecocomposition in the first-year composition classroom was

more specific. The students needed me and Richard to ensure that there was a potential for direct dialogue with people at their site. This would take close and constant collaboration on our parts; I needed to help those research participants determine with whom that dialogue should be, and in what area of their site (and part of their environment) they were most interested.

I already had the sites in place, many of the same ones as the semester before, so Richard and I had some experience with them. And this time, since the service learning was a mandatory assignment for his entire class (instead of elective, as it had been the semester before), Richard's explanation of the class structure would be less complex, and hopefully less confusing to all of his students.

Researcher place in the classroom. For my introductory remarks, I planned on being as straightforward as possible. I planned on doing my best to not sound like I was making a pitch for service learning. It had been difficult during the fall semester to be forthcoming with the students—to let them know that I thought the service learning projects were promising, even exciting, to reveal my biases as a researcher and a human being, without becoming "The Service Learning Cheerleader." I needed to make sure I was giving them the most clear-cut picture I could of me, my research, and these projects. I felt like I understood more about just how confusing my place in the class could be to them this time around.

I tackled those concerns head-on. "You're probably wondering who I am exactly, and why I'm studying your class," I began. I proceeded to tell them the whole story, my whole story, how I had decided to become an English major as an undergraduate, how my studies progressed from there, how I had done my doctoral coursework and exams at

IUP—all of it. I had not gone into this much detail in the semester before, for fear of boring them, confusing them further, or taking up too much time. But it was worth the extra few minutes. I saw a lot more head nodding and smiling, and a lot less squinting and eye rolling. I was pleased that I had followed my instincts; they led me to tell more of my story in order to provide valuable context.

At the end of the class session, they had to decide whether or not to participate in the study. "Here's the voluntary consent form. I'll be happy to answer any more questions you have, but make sure you get one of these back to me, indicating whether or not you want to be in the study." I sat back at my desk and chatted with a few students about details of the research. When the room emptied out, I had well over a dozen forms indicating consent.

Site projects. By the second week of class, I had a finalized list of sites for the students to choose from. I explained some of the new ones I was most excited about in one of my journal entries:

Things are really starting to come together. The site list is mostly finalized. I think I'm most excited about Advocates for Youth this time around. They're giving us lots of interesting options in which to participate, for instance, a Young Mothers' Group that meets on Sunday evenings. They want some of the students to come in and lead journal-writing sessions. I figure we could have them do some research on the benefits of journal writing, do a presentation, and then free write with the participants. They would turn in their presentation notes and their own journal writing from that session. There's also a GED tutoring group, a Saturday night recreation program where they could do some sort of "fun" writing activities with the participants, and also a Life Skills class. I think

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Dinah, the contact person, wants some sort of journal writing there as well. I see these all as chances for students to explore a new group of people in a new kind of environment, and to write with them. This is a different take on writing for the community than we've had yet at any other site; instead of just a passive audience, the research participants will have other live writers with whom to dialogue. There are also plenty of larger issues here for the research participants to explore in their reflective writings, or writing about the community.

I was working with many of the same sites, too, and I still felt after the fall semester's experiences that they held promise as places and projects where the students could engage with their environment, use words and language in those transactions, and then see for themselves how those words changed the environment in which they were writing. For example, sites like the Children's Museum, the Rockville Food Co-op, and Big Brothers Big Sisters were all asking the students to create writing that would be posted on-site. Service learning sites like these provided concrete examples to illustrate Dobrin and Weisser's definition of ecocomposition: "Discourse creates environment, and environment creates discourse" (32). They would start working with the idea that environment creates discourse when they were presented with a writing-intensive need of a specific service learning site. That part of their environment needed a specific kind of discourse to be produced. Then they would get the chance to see that their discourse could change that part of their environment when it was posted on site. It could potentially have an effect on their readers' concepts of the site, creating that part of their environment anew.

I knew more of what I wanted to research in each service learning project this time around, and had a stronger sense of how theory might translate to practice, or how service learning projects could potentially function as ecocomposition in action. Richard set aside most of a class day for me to present these and discuss them with the class. We took our time going through the list of sites, and they asked lots of questions about each. As I looked around our expansive, sky blue room, I saw fewer "deer in the headlights" stares than I had the semester before.

Second semester site list.

Final List of ASL Sites, January 24, 2004

1. **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rockville**

   Project—interviewing brothers or sisters and their "littles," and then writing a narrative of how and why they were matched to be posted on site.

2. **Rockville Diabetes Outreach Network**

   Projects—press releases, articles, etc.

3. **WRU T.V.**

   Project—writing news stories

4. **Rockville Children's Museum**

   Project—exhibit development

5. **RU Recreation Program**

   Project—attend a group fitness class and write a testimonial to be posted on site

6. **Evenshade Nursing Center**

   Project—interview a resident and assist in writing a memoir

7. **Green Mountain Watershed Preserve**

Project—writing for the newsletter, etc.

8. ***Alliance for Independent Living***

    Projects—press releases, informational articles, PSA's, etc.

9. ***Rockville Home for Veterans***

    Project—interview a resident and assist in writing a memoir

10. ***Rockville Food Co-op***

    Project—help with publicity material, materials to be posted on-site

11. ***Environmental Alliance***

    Project—writing for newsletter, etc.

12. ***Advocates for Youth***

    Projects—Life Skills Class, Young Mothers' Group, Saturday Night Fever, plus other potential writing/tutoring project.

Research Participant Perspectives: Disconnection between Site and Classroom

From the day these sites were presented in class discussion, we moved on to more involved discussions of service learning, and any comparable past experiences of theirs. There were more students with past experience in service work this time around, as well as a lot more interest, even enthusiasm, from the beginning. It seemed like more students were approaching me and Richard to ask questions, note concern, but also express interest and bounce ideas off of us for off-list sites and kinds of projects. There was a dynamic present here that was distinctly different from the first-semester class; these students seemed more worried about being able to write for these projects, but also more willing to tackle the unknown in the hopes of obtaining experience in writing that they

conceived as relevant to the professional work they would do in the future. In discussions and reflective writing happening at this time, I noted a few patterns.

"I'm not a good enough writer to do this." This came up repeatedly during class discussions, and like the semester before, I tried to assure the students of a few things: we would not ask for prior specialized knowledge about specialized kinds of writing from them, as we knew they were taking first-year composition and had designed the projects in accordance. Next, the service learning site contacts would be willing to work with them. Lastly, they were capable of learning about different kinds of writing. The day I presented the sites in class, one student, Amber, said, "All I have written before are book reports and stories. I need to know how to write papers." No one had phrased their doubt quite this way yet.

I responded, "Well, some of these sites offer you the chance to write something a whole lot like a book report, or a story, but also an academic paper. Let's look at what some of these sites are asking for in their projects." We reviewed a few sites that were asking for newsletter writing. Having prior experience with these sites also gave me a response here: that some of our students the semester before had felt more motivated than usual to learn this material *because* they were working with a service learning site that they had chosen, hopefully based on interest. Some of the research participants looked more relieved after I made these points during a class discussion—others, not so much. I heard a few talking quietly to each other as they left the room that day after class. "I'm going to suck at this," was the last thing I heard out the door.

Richard picked up on the worry those students were still expressing, too. A few days in, he brought in Anne Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts" for them to read, discuss, and

about which to write response journals. Lamott's essay argued for the necessity of rough, unfinished, messy, disorganized products in the early stages of writing. She gave her audience advice in the expressivist vein, claiming, "The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later" (22). This attitude of the students was well worth noting to me, and seeing whether or not the research participants were aided by some supplemental material like this might make me rethink what an effective model of service learning was in terms of following ecocomposition theory. It would at least make me rethink how I might present a service learning component to one of my own classes some day.

I had a chance to examine the research participants' response journals about Lamott's essay immediately after they wrote them. I was curious to see if they would find relief in Lamott's assertion that writing can start out messy and imperfect, since they seemed markedly worried about making their end products "perfect" for these "outside" audiences. One student, Ainsley, chronicled her own process, with its own pitfalls, here. She described similar insecurities to those Lamott addressed:

I have a hard time sharing my writing, it may show my weakness, and it may not make sense! But what does make sense? What is the right thing to write? What are thoughts? Still I keep writing them down as I let the words fill my head I feel a sense of accomplishment, maybe even smart, but those who read it may not! My insecurities sometimes hold me back from giving my all; I have yet to find the right words to assure me its o.k. but the words still flow, crazy to some, but reality to me. I also agree with Anne Lamott on how writers do not just sit down and pick up the pen and write, it's

almost like a whole cleansing process needs to be done first! Then the hard part starts, the process of letting the right words out, keeping the brain on track, what to write about? Open air, when actually it's right in front of you!

Lamott's essay seemed to resonate with Ainsley, but I was not sure that it allayed any of her fears about the service learning work, specifically. Nancy responded in a way that made me think the Lamott essay had not only relieved some of her anxiety about the service learning projects, but had also provided her with a helpful, Expressivist step for getting any kind of writing at all started:

Often when looking at professional writers, it is easy to assume that the words just flow like music onto the paper and stay that way with little or no adjustments. Hearing otherwise from an avid writer as Lamott is encouraging to say the least. It's comforting to know that first rough drafts are expected to be disorganized, unintelligible, and otherwise shitty. Their purpose is to get all of the ideas floating through your head out onto paper, and then being able to go back and add the structure needed. But it might also have to deal with the psychological aspect of starting small and shitty, and then improving it so much that the final draft looks like a masterpiece compared to the original.

The fall semester research participants had seemed less worried about writing for the sites, but also less excited about the projects at this stage. I drank cup after cup of chamomile tea while reading these journals, sitting in my office, watching the snow accumulate on the branches of the white pine outside. I wondered if some of the difference in attitude could be attributed to the fact that we were in the winter semester now. In my experience, winter semester freshmen often seemed a little less saucer-eyed

and a little more jaded than their fall semester peers. These students might be more willing to try something new because the rest of their environment, the college atmosphere in general, felt a little more familiar. This was purely conjecture on my part, of course. I was interested by the contrast, regardless. I was also interested to see some familiar themes emerge in their early thoughts about the service learning work.

"I'll learn about real world writing, not just academic writing." Like the fall semester research participants, these students also sounded excited about writing that happened out in the "real world." Their enthusiasm was centered on gaining workplace skills, sometimes to the complete exclusion of gaining academic skills. One student, Sabrina, said in a journal entry, "I see this project as a great idea, it has shown me an application of writing that might be used outside of school. It has also put a new perspective on writing for me other than writing papers. I'll get to learn about that other kind of writing." I responded to this idea in a mid-January journal entry:

The students I talked to individually seemed genuinely excited. Their reasons for being so vary greatly, from each other's and quite a lot overall from the fall semester research participants. One girl is a private duty aide for Rockville Home Health and seems enthusiastic about the nursing home sites. Another student cornered me after class and told me he thought this was great because he had done some sort of internship and "that was the only reason I got this job I wanted." There is a lot more zeal for professionally relevant skill building and resume building this time around.

This is a concept to which I wanted to pay continual attention. I wanted to see if the research participants would take this enthusiasm for learning about the "real world" kind of writing and make a connection between it and what they did for their college

courses. I felt there was much to be gained from service learning work, but if it did not

include a connection between site writing and academic writing, I would feel less

confident that the projects had successfully implemented ecocomposition. The service

learning work was being submitted to the sites, but it was being graded as a course

assignment, too.

Getting these projects started as soon as possible was of utmost importance to

Richard and me for two main reasons: the students during the fall had expressed real

frustration at being crunched for time, and he wanted to see what would happen if we

worked to combat that. Secondly, I wanted to see what would happen when the research

participants had a chance to develop a dialogic relationship with the people at their site

sooner, since I had seen evidence of it being so incredibly motivating to the students last

semester. That meant sites needed to be chosen, and contact efforts needed to be made as

soon as possible.

These students gravitated toward different sites than their fall semester

counterparts. Billie had been the only student to sign up with the RU Recreation Program

the semester before. This time, it was a popular choice. There were other notable shifts in

the chosen sites for winter semester, too, including an increased interest in the nursing

home projects, where research participants would collaborate on a partial memoir with a

resident. I had not gathered any data from this project during the fall semester.

I brought a big stack of research participant journal entries home a few days later.

The students had written about selecting their sites, and I wanted to see how this group of

research participants compared to those from the fall. I also wanted to see how they were

feeling about sentiments expressed before the site selection process—their marked doubts

about their own writing abilities, and their willingness to try anyway in order to gain a particular skill that they could apply in the workplace.

Right away, I found journals where students communicated the same strong doubt in their own abilities to handle writing for a service learning site, like Sabrina's:

I'm also scared to start my project at the museum. In the past all I've had to do is scoop out food and other acts that could be done by a 6 year old. Now I'm going to have to do something that involves me to my skills, or lack thereof, as a writer. I can't help but think, what if what I do isn't good enough? What can I do to make sure I don't screw this up? I guess whatever I do I'm just going to have to suck it up, and hope for the best.

While Sabrina sounded worried about being able to produce something of high enough quality for her site, the Children's Museum, she also expressed a belief that the service learning work would be useful to her in an academic sense, something I saw relatively little evidence of elsewhere in this batch of journals:

I do think that this experience will help to improve my writing. I won't be typing some meaningless paper that doesn't result into anything but a single grade in a sea of thousands. I will instead be applying my writing into a real life situation where what I write can make a difference. That in itself will inspire me to make sure what I write is that much better.

Others did not share her opinion. In fact, the opposite opinion was expressed by many of these research participants, as we moved through the semester.

"I don't understand how this will help me with college writing." In Nancy's journal entry, she sounded like she understood the importance of connecting with one's community right away, but she did not indicate to me that she understood how those

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experiences could positively affect her writing, as Sabrina had. Nancy chose to go to the Evenshade Nursing Center and collaborate on a memoir with a resident there.

I am excited to hear the stories of the past. I enjoy cultural history and different times and expectations of society. I also really do enjoy speaking with elderly people. They have lived so long, and most have a good perspective on life and the world around them. I am expecting some insight and wisdom to peek into our talk. I'm not sure if this will help my writing or not. It's not a new thing to me to be writing a story. Maybe if I had chosen a placement where I had to write a newsletter or something different, I'd be improving my writing skills.

It was interesting the way that Nancy voiced appreciation for the benefits of writing with the community here, but saw the writing she would do at her site as removed, as valuable only in terms of writing for the community, not to herself as a student and member of that community, (or part of that environment) too. To me, she was expressing a latent awareness of strengthening her connection to a part of her environment in this journal when she said, "I enjoy cultural history and different times and expectations of society" and then explained why, but she wasn't pairing it with awareness that this project could also be valuable to her as a composition student, too.

Justin, who would be working with the local YMCA, a site he chose off-list after a discussion with me, had even more cryptic remarks about "storytelling" to share in his journal entry. I got the impression that he, too, was not seeing the work he would do as connected to his academic studies. In fact, while I found what he had to say interesting, there wasn't any direct proof that he was talking about "telling" a story on paper. He sounded more like he was talking about speech here:

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I think that good story telling has to be something that you can relate to. It also has to be told well and with excitement. If someone is monotone the whole time they are talking then it's very hard to keep people interested in what they are saying. Also if someone isn't interested in what you are talking about in the first place then it will be really hard to keep their attention. I would say half of telling a good story is what the story is about, the other half being how it is told.

While I was a little perplexed by the lack of explanation as to how these ideas transferred to the written word, in particular the words Justin would need to produce for the specific audience his service learning project provided, I was encouraged by the outlook here. He sounded aware of the different approaches a writer (or speaker, or storyteller) could take toward a subject matter, and how that could affect audiences and environment in a positive or negative way. Justin seemed to easily understand something with which many writers in my past first-year composition classes struggled, but he was missing some of concepts that his peers had an easier time understanding, like the logistics of what would be asked of him in terms of "kinds" of writing.

This was the beginning of a trend I would see emerge with this second group of research participants—jumping over what I considered to be the surface level basics, but exhibiting or developing a keen understanding of the unique rhetorical situations at the service learning sites. I could see the answer to my first research question, "In what ways do the research participants feel the service learning component is affecting their writing, and the way they think about writing within a university setting, and outside of it?" evolving as I gathered data from this semester's research participants.

Alexander, despite plenty of explanation from Richard and I, did not make the

connection between service learning and academics at all, saying in his journal, "I'm not

really scared of anything about volunteering, I am just anxious to get it over with to make

sure that I can get it done with my schedule. But just as long as I am having fun while

volunteering, I don't think it'll be all that bad. But I don't think this will help my writing

skills at all."

This was not an uncommon response with this group of students. Even Justin,

who had such encouraging things to say in his earlier journal entry, soon after said, "I

think this project will improve my writing in that I will have to improve on what I already

know and I will half to use it more often. But I am also not learning any new writing

skills for all the extra work I'll be doing at the same time."

This was something I had not heard during early class discussions, this conclusion

that the service learning work would not be related to writing at all, or at least not be

related to the writing they would do for school. Many viewed the service learning

component as completely separate from their study of composition, and because of this,

sounded worried about the workload since it was a part of our class.

In a researcher's journal entry written a short time after I had read this batch of

journals, Richard responded to this pattern in the students' reflections:

Some of the students sound worried about the ASL projects, in particular, about

time expenditure and workload. Is it too much to ask students to volunteer at a nonprofit

agency? I believe the answer is no. Students often tell instructors that they were unable

to finish assignments for numerous reasons, but if we can require our students to go to

the library and pull books off a shelf when writing a research paper, can we not require

them to spend time at a site to complete an AS-L project? We had to be aware that

commuting to and from sites may be difficult for students. Some work part or full-time,

have children to pick up from school, or don't have a vehicle. Also, we had to let

students know where each site was located and organize car-pools, so they could make

informed decisions.

Assigning projects that require students to work outside of class or off campus is

nothing new to university curriculum. Nonetheless, requiring any task of students goes

back to the topic of motivation. Some teachers may feel that we cannot require our

students to participate in academic service-learning because it asks them to participate in

an activity or be a part of an organization which they may hold no personal interest. If

necessary, then think of academic service-learning as an experiential research project.

Students are in the field gathering data in the form of experience. With the element of

reflection, students are not simply taking information from the internet and pasting it into

their papers. Instead of simply finding someone else's thoughts and quoting those,

students are living that information and reflecting about their lives within a given context

and community.

Furthermore, many universities claim, for example, Rockville University, part of

the university's mission is to engage our students in active learning, prepare them for life

after college, and encourage civic participation. Not only can we require it, but we

should also be requiring academic service-learning. Students should be considering the

surrounding community as they study, in order to "become [the] outstanding citizens and

leaders" the university hopes they become. It may be possible for the goals of the

university's mission to be fulfilled in the classroom, but it seems logical that an

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immersive experience in the community will facilitate and magnify learning because it isn't text on a page or a lecture in a room. It's real.

I liked the way Richard equated the service learning work with other, more traditional coursework here, calling it "an experiential research project." I agreed with him that it was asking for something similar enough in terms of student time expenditure and effort for it to be reasonable, as long as we carefully designed the projects. He also reflected my own thoughts when he went on to tout the value of "this kind of research" over other kinds, in respect to its potential value to the students and the community. I would be interested to see how the feelings he expressed here affected his teaching of the course. I wanted to see what he would say to the students, what additional materials he might provide to help them understand that this could be valuable, relevant, and no more time consuming than a traditional first-year composition course.

As we began work on the service learning projects, these research participants—Ainsley, Nancy, Sabrina, Justin, and Alexander—were providing me with a great deal of data. As the semester unfolded, Amber would also discuss her service learning work at length. I decided on these five as the case studies on which I would focus, unless, of course, something changed markedly. Their perspectives, while just as rich, differed from those of the research participants from the fall semester: they expressed more doubt in their existing abilities as writers, a willingness to try the service learning projects anyway, excitement at the prospect of gaining professionally useful writing skills, and varying degrees of confidence that the service learning would help them become better writers overall. I wondered if contact with their sites and dialogue with the people most relevant to their areas of interest at those sites would change any of their feelings.

During the Service Learning Project Work

      Research participant perspectives: Concerns and disconnections. Soon

students started making contact with their sites. It was a relief to see this happen right

away in most cases since the delays in the semester before had caused so many problems.

There was still some confusion and frustration, but nothing that the students seemed

incapable of handling. Amber sounded enthusiastic about visiting the site, but did not

appear to be thinking about how her visit would inform her writing yet:

      After playing phone tag with Marissa at the Rockville Home for Veterans for a

couple days, we were finally able to connect with each other. When I explained to

Marissa about the service learning project and what my goal was, she became very

excited. Marissa informed me that she had the perfect person in mind. The man that

Marissa has chosen for me is named Phil. I don't know much about Phil, YET! Marissa

says he likes to drink coffee, smoke cigarettes, tell stories, and most of all he has led a

very interesting life. Although Phil and I have not met yet, I am looking forward to it.

Tomorrow (Friday) we will meet for the first time, I am quite anxious. I am ready to get

this project going, and I am looking forward to this experience.

      Sabrina voiced concerns over her ability to complete the writing project

satisfactorily in her journal. While Amber focused on the site visit, Sabrina obsessed over

the writing, even after reporting a positive experience visiting her site. She was

expressing the same doubt about her abilities that she had earlier. In the fall semester,

many of the research participants' anxieties had lessened once they made personal

contact with the people at their site, and dialogued about the project. Sabrina had taken

this step, but many project details still needed to be decided. I hoped that her fears, too, would be alleviated once her project was fully determined:

> *Going into the meeting I was really nervous. I have never done anything like this before, so it all seemed very intimidating. I had no idea what I would be doing, whether or not the people I'd be working with were nice, along with a million other things.*

> *Well James gave me a tour of the place. It was really cool. I had never been to the children's museum and had no idea what it was about. Over the course of the tour he pointed out various things I could work on and threw me some ideas. He emailed me asking me what my thoughts were on what I'd like to do. I emailed him back and threw a couple ideas his way and asked him what he thought. He still hasn't gotten back to me, and that was over a week ago. I can tell he's a busy person though.*

> *I still am very intimidated by this whole project. Partly because I don't know what I'll be doing yet. It seems like a lot of work too. So I'm actually kind of not looking forward to this project. I'm just really afraid of screwing it up.*

Nancy sounded as though she was carefully considering how her service learning work would affect her writing. In particular, she was choosing a resident to visit at Evenshade Nursing Center that seemed pleasant and interested in her project:

> *Of the three residents that I was introduced to as possibilities for interviewing, I think Mary would be the most responsive. She is a retired RU professor and is still alert and has an upbeat personality. She seemed interested about my project and helpful. The other two didn't seem as interested in the project. Jasmine told me one was depressed, and the other seemed like a miscast from Grumpy Old Men.*

I was interested to interview Nancy, after reading this. I wanted to see if her continuing experiences at her site would change her opinion about the writing at all. Earlier, she had said she saw no connection between it and the writing she was studying on non-service learning days with Richard. Would the concrete details of her work, the process of gathering interview data and planning its integration into a memoir change that?

Ainsley had not talked to her site contact at Advocates for Youth extensively about what her writing there would entail, but I was impressed that, at this early stage, she was looking critically at the bigger issues surrounding the work that the organization was involved in:

I finally met with my site person on Friday at The Advocates For Youth, her name is Dinah she seems to be a 100% into her job. She gave me a lot of information about the advocates for youth. The Advocates for youth is all about helping the 17-21 year olds try to get back on their feet. She also brought to my attention that the homeless in Rockville is a lot more than we see or know! And a lot of them are young kids. I was very disturbed to hear such a thing being a mom I just could not see throwing my child to the street. I guess a lot of the reasons for throwing these kids out are kids can't get along with maybe the boyfriend or the new husband or new wife or girlfriend. To hear that people in Rockville would throw away a child to keep a relationship is greedy. As a parent I feel that there is nothing a child and parent can't work out the answer is not to put the child to the street. I learned a lot from dinah and I know that I'm going to enjoy helping out there, My first adventure will be this Sunday at the young mothers group, I am looking forward to it.

I was excited to hear from Richard that Alexander was interested in choosing a site off of the list, Gray Ridge Heights, which was an assisted living facility in town. Maybe he was more enthused by the service learning work than I had thought? I was pleased by the thought of having another project like the ones at the Rockville Home for Veterans and Evenshade Nursing Center from which to collect data. Upon reading the following in his journal, though, I realized that ease of contact was his primary reason for choosing Gray Ridge Heights. His mother worked there:

Gray Ridge Heights, it is an assisted living residence. I think it will be a lot easier to find information there and it'll be a lot easier to do work there because I can just read to the elderly people, or talk with them, or even just listen. And I can get their own stories and write them in my paper. It'll also be a lot easier for me to write my paper about them, because my mother works there and she will be able to set me up with the right people to talk to and to get information from. Richard said it would be ok for me to use this as a site, even though it wasn't on the list we looked at earlier.

I had to admit that Alexander's general apathy combined with the fact that he had chosen his mother's place of work left me worried, at this stage. I saw potential here for him to have a casual conversation with a resident of Gray Ridge Heights that he already knew, about information with which he was already familiar, call it an interview, and write it up. I needed to make sure that project details were in place that would enable productive dialogic activity. I wanted to keep a close eye on Alexander's work.

I started scheduling some interviews in my office with the research participants. Alexander was my first choice of interviewee, but we were having difficulty with our clashing schedules. I was continually surprised with how lukewarm, even uncomfortable

many research participants sounded when I proposed interviews to them. Sometimes I wondered if they claimed lack of availability as an excuse to duck out of speaking to me. I was thankful, at times like these, that I was also collecting written data in the forms of journal entries and other assignments.

  Disconnection between project writing and classroom writing. Nancy was soon available for an interview, so I took the occasion to talk to her about how her project at the Evenshade Nursing Center was progressing. I was eager to ask her if she was starting to make any connections between the writing she was doing there and the rest of her environment, academic and otherwise, since that had been an issue in her journal entries. I was again in my office, this time on a Friday, and a cold snap of weather had just broken. I was thinking about how crazy it was that 25 degrees Fahrenheit felt "warm" when Nancy arrived.

  As she situated herself, she muttered about the weather. We chatted a little bit about school in general, and then, before I could formally start the interview process, she asked me a bevy of questions about her project. She gave me the impression of being one of those people that seeks out things to worry about. Most of her concerns were incidental, and I tried my best to allay them. When there was a lull in the conversation, I asked if I could turn on the recorder. "Yeaaaahhh," she said, hesitantly. Once the recorder was on, I tried to pick up our conversation where it had left off. We had been talking about how our class compared to other composition courses.

  "What about the value of the assignments? Do you feel like you're getting what you need from the ASL project?" I asked her, to which she replied,

"In my case I'm not really sure. It's not like it applies to the real world." I was surprised to hear this. She had just said something a moment ago to the effect of "writing is writing." I tried to get her to be more specific:

"Because there are less technical and format issues?"

"Yeah. If I were going to be an author it would be helpful," she said. I wondered if she would see that there were actually connections here.

"Do you think you still have some considerations as far as audience and word usage and structure?"

The most detailed answer I could get out of her was, "Yeah, I'm still figuring out how I am going to set it up and everything."

I thought Nancy might still make those connections, but as of yet, it had not happened. I wondered if she would see how crafting a biographical piece of writing was not all that different from writing that informs its audience about other things once she had more contact with the woman that she would be interviewing at Evenshade and had to use that interview data as research. I would have to wait to see.

Connection, confidence, and motivation. Next, I had a chance to interview Amber and Ainsley in my office together. I wanted to ask both of them about their site writing. The journal entries of theirs I had read so far discussed the sites—the people there, the larger relevant issues—but not the writing they would do as part of their work there. It was their idea to come in and be interviewed at the same time. They were both nontraditional students, and I think they felt more comfortable than they would have alone. I could hear them coming up the hall, giggling and telling stories to each other— about their service learning sites, I hoped. Once they were situated in the office, Amber in

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the cornflower blue chair, and Ainsley on the futon, I started the recorder, and started

asking questions.

I had thought about whether or not I wanted to start with questions they could

both answer, or individual questions for each of them. Ainsley, especially, was easily

made uncomfortable, and I worried that Amber's answers might influence hers if I asked

them the same questions. I decided, then, to go with the individual approach. I started

with an issue that Amber had recently brought up during class discussion. "So Amber,

you've been relating to me that you're getting almost too much information from the man

you're visiting at your site, the Rockville Home for Veterans, which I guess is better than

not enough, but do you think you're going to have an okay time focusing your memoir?"

She went from smiling to looking very serious. "Yep. I've made a list of questions

to ask him. He hasn't even begun to talk about his family yet, or the military either, just

his career, which I'm assuming happened after the military? I'm prepared, though."

These details jogged my memory. Amber had an enthusiastic and friendly

resident. "I remember you talking about him now. Didn't you say all of his friends want

to be interviewed, too?"

She went back to being smiley. "Uh huh. I get called 'Sunshine' and 'Rose' every

time I'm there. I love it there."

"Is it something you'll consider being involved in after the class? I know it can be

hard to leave places like that sometimes, but that people often also have time constraints."

I was trying to sound evenhanded, but of course, I wanted to hear that she was interested

in continuing on at the site, since it seemed that her experiences had been so positive thus

far.

"Oh no. Absolutely I want to keep going."

I could have kept talking to Amber—because I was interested in the interaction she was having with her resident, and I still wanted to hear more of her thoughts on the project writing. But I also didn't want to ignore Ainsley. She was still sitting on the futon, hands politely clasped in her lap, but staring at the floor, like she was getting bored. "What about you, Ainsley? You're working with Advocates for Youth. Which particular programs are you participating in?"

Her face lit up, but she also looked anxious. "I went to the Young Mothers' Group, and sat in with them while they talked and shared their information about their babies. They had their babies there. There's not a lot to do there but sit and listen right now."

I interpreted that "right now" to mean that she was feeling sure about how her time at the site would be spent throughout the semester, that she would take those observations she was currently making and work with them. "Okay. So, when all's said and done, how do you see this comparing to the other assignments you're doing for class? This is not the traditional kind of assignment many people do in first-year composition. Do you think the workload is comparable?" I had been posing the question to Ainsley, but Amber jumped in, saying, "For mine I think less. I just get to sit with a cute old guy and smoke cigarettes."

"But for the writing," I reminded her, "Does it need to be thoughtfully done?" I wanted to wince. That question would definitely lead her toward a certain kind of answer. I was so obviously still new at this.

She replied, "Yep, when I did a rough draft, I realized I have to be careful about changing any words, because then I change his whole meaning." I was encouraged to hear an awareness of this, even if I had sort of asked for it. I wanted to get Ainsley talking more. I decided to ask them both a question. "How do you guys feel about this writing versus the other writing?"

Ainsley responded. "I've learned things I never would have known," and then Amber chimed in. "It's definitely interesting."

I wanted to hear more. "Does it motivate you more to do the writing?"

Amber responded first, exclaiming, "Oh yes!" and when Ainsley heard her, she agreed, nodding her head. I had to wonder whether or not she was agreeing just to go with the herd, though. As soon as I shut the digital recorder off, she looked immediately more comfortable, and both women started talking about non-class related issues as they walked out the door together.

Ainsley had not been very forthcoming; like quite a few of my research participants, she tended to open up much more in her journal entries than during interviews or class discussion. Amber had spoken quite a bit, and had indicated to me that she was thinking about how her word choices would affect the meaning her interviewee was trying to convey to her. Not too long after our interview, she turned in the following journal entry. She discussed how her service learning work had changed her concept of the part of her environment in which her service learning project immersed her, an assisted living facility:

This week Phil and I meet on Friday morning. I was able to ask him some questions about his childhood and growing up in Two Rivers. We talked about his children and his ex-wife.

I was glad to talk with Phil about his family. I have always felt sorry for people in nursing and/or veteran's homes. I guess I have always felt that institutions such as these are for older people whose families didn't have time for them or simply don't care. I have learned, that is not the case at all. Phil had three sons, all of whom reside in the area. They spend a lot of time with Phil, taking him to community events, their homes, or just simply visiting with Phil in his "home". Now I know I can write something positive/happy about Phil.

The time I have spent at the Rockville Home has been a very different experience than what I expected. Most of the members (Phil informed me that they refer to each other in the home as members), are very capable of doing things on their own. They enjoy playing cards, board games, puzzles, and of course bingo! The members are never alone, unless they want to be.

This experience has really changed my point of view on facilities such as this. I have realized that these homes are not people who have been discarded because they are old, these places offer many opportunities that the members may not otherwise have. The staff makes sure that the members are eating properly, exercising, taking meds, and well taken care of physically. They also have the opportunity to socialize with others, their own age, with similar interests. The memoir I will do with Phil will be different than I had imagined when we started this.

Amber sounded conscious here that her experiences with her service learning work would change her writing—that environment could create discourse. I still wanted to find out whether or not it changed her ideas about all of the writing she would do, academic writing included.

As Sabrina began work on specific exhibits for the Children's Museum, her anxiety seemed to dissipate as she dialogued more with James about the museum's needs and projects she could complete. Like Amber, she too sounded motivated by the process of choosing the right words for her audience. She reported on her progress in a March journal entry:

I met with James again and we discussed some ideas and decided on a couple small projects. The mission was to liven up and have the inside of a tree more interactive. Right now it is pretty dull. So, one of my projects is to find a tree unique to each of the continents and an animal that lives in each one of the trees. Then we are going to make a display and ask the children to match the animal to the correct tree that it lives in.

Secondly James and I are going to work together in creating a game to have the children and parents work together looking at the rings of a tree and relating it to their own lives. It's challenging to think about what words to use, but James has given me some ideas. We still have a lot of brainstorming to do with that one to make it work.

Finally, I am working with another volunteer on a bug game for inside the tree. She's zoology major and is going to create a bug. My job is to take word fragments and have them somehow arranged. I will also have a sign or something asking the children to name the bug, using the word fragments and adjectives.

I am now really excited to get to work on this project. Now that I know what I am doing, I have a bunch of ideas of what I can do within the project, and I know I am going to have tons of fun writing, now that I know more what kind of writing they need at the museum. I also have some other ideas of stuff to do there so I might volunteer some extra time and do those things.

Sabrina was reporting a similar service learning experience to that of many of her first-semester counterparts: anxiety about engaging with an unfamiliar part of her environment, followed by enthusiasm and increased motivation to write once she located her areas of interest at the site and engaged in dialogue relevant to those areas of interest. It had taken her a little longer than some of the research participants with similar experiences from the semester before, but she nonetheless seemed to experience the same process.

Alexander, likewise, sounded more motivated to write after face to face interaction with his interviewee at Gray Ridge Heights. His general attitude about the service learning work changed dramatically after his initial interview with Irene. He sounded grateful to be engaged in the project work, and sounded much more enthusiastic about the writing tasks necessary than he had before in this journal entry:

I was finally able to interview someone this week. I interviewed a woman named Irene from Gray Ridge. She is 94 years old. It was a lot of fun talking to her, she has a great sense of humor, which was very uplifting, considering her age. I didn't even have to ask any questions, she just talked. Probably the most interesting thing I learned about her was that she went to college when she was 65 years old. She enrolled in Rockville U and attended at the age of 65. After she graduated from high school she wasn't able to go to

college, since back then not many women went to college. And as she got older, she

wished she had been able to go, so she did. Seven and a half years later, she graduated.

The sad part of it is that her husband died the year before she graduated. She made a

joke of it though. She said that he had been nagging her the whole time, "You're going to

kill yourself with all this reading and work, and then you won't live to graduate" he said.

"And then look what happened, he up and died on me!" was her response to it. It made

me happy to know that she had a sense of humor about it. She has four children, two boys

and two girls, a handful of grandchildren and even a handful of great grandchildren. I'm

glad I had to do this, I had a great time talking to her, and I got to ask her about how she

wanted me to talk about her on paper. I hope she had fun, too.

Research participants like Amber, Sabrina, and Alexander had become much

more enthusiastic about their service learning projects once they were more closely

dialoguing and interacting with the people connected to their sites. This data corroborated

my preliminary conclusions from the semester before, and strengthened my belief that

face-to-face interaction and dialogue, once the student had located his or her area of

interest within the service learning site, was necessary.

Interaction and dialogue do not always cultivate connection. Not everyone

easily located that area of interest and established a motivating dialogic relationship so

easily. Nancy was at the Evenshade Nursing Home, and I had been thinking of this site as

one where dialogic interaction was inevitable. Even though that happened for Nancy,

both with Jasmine, her site contact, and the two residents of the home with which she had

been assigned to visit, she still sounded as though she felt frustrated when she wrote this

journal entry. She struck me as being very passive here, even when she was working with

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the kind of site that had inspired other research participants to become motivated and be proactive in their efforts:

The reason this is late is because I didn't want to write my journal entry until after I was able to visit again with one of the ladies I go see. This is because I've been encountering some problems in the process of my project. I went twice since the last visit; first they were busy with a group activity, and the second time they were at dinner. I wasn't ever told the specific times for special events there. So I went back today and visited with Lucy. Margaret wasn't there, as she was out with her family for dinner. This will also set me back on my project, since she was the one who I had the most information on. Right now I am planning to just write up her story. Hopefully, I will get to visit her again soon to finish up the story. I'm worried about this also because she will soon be leaving the nursing home, in probably two weeks. She was only in there for a broken arm, because she couldn't move around on her own. Soon she will be back in her own house.

Lucy won't really tell me much of her life story, and I don't think she's very keen on the idea of someone knowing all this information and then writing about it. Also, she seems kind of depressed about being in the nursing home. I don't think she wants to talk about her life because it makes her miss it. Next time I hope to see Margaret again, and finish up the information on her story.

Justin's case illustrated to me that even when there was an opportunity for direct interaction, and it happened, it did not always result in dialogue that would motivate students to think critically about their writing. He and his contact at the YMCA, Tim, had decided that he would create some advertising text for their teen dances. To get a

deeper understanding of the Y's mission and the audience to which he would be writing, he first chaperoned a few of the dances. I interviewed him once he was in the process of writing to see how things were going.

As I waited for him in the student lounge of the building that contained our classroom, I thought of questions I could ask him about his service learning work. I knew he had been involved in a lot of face to face interaction at the site, and so I wanted to know as much as possible about how his site work was making him think about his classroom work. Justin showed up in the doorway right on time, and quickly made himself comfortable in the chair across from me. I started by asking him, "How do you think this ASL assignment compares to your traditional writing assignments in this class?"

He looked thoughtful for a moment, and then said, "More work but better work. We're not just going to be writing essays out there."

He was thinking about writing not only "out there," but also "in here." I pressed on: "Is this work more interesting to you?"

"Yeah. I'm finding out a lot about the organization in general," he said. My goal, in studying the implementation of service learning in composition, of course, was not simply to educate students about community organizations. I tried to steer him back toward the idea of writing.

"What about the value of this to you in terms of academics and college, and then beyond that?"

Justin answered, "I think it's pretty good. I'm getting to learn about the YMCA

and what they do for the community. They do a lot to help people." He still wasn't seeing this in terms of a useful academic, in particular *writing* experience.

I tried one more time. No more beating around the bush. "Have you learned anything about writing?"

"I've learned how to write advertisements for the YMCA, what they're all about."

No matter what kind of questions I asked, and what kind of answers he provided, I didn't feel as though Justin was making the connections between writing academically and writing in the community based on the answers he provided. He seemed supportive of us encouraging people to volunteer, but he didn't think about how it was actually relevant to his first-year composition coursework. He did not indicate that he saw the service learning work as a chance to learn about writing, the same writing he would be asked to do in his college classes, at this point.

I needed to keep cases like Nancy's and Justin's in mind when coming to my preliminary conclusions based on this semester's research. I had data that suggested these kinds of service learning projects really did have potential to implement ecocomposition in a first-year composition classroom, but I would also have to search for ways to design the projects that anticipated problems like this in the future, if my ultimate goal was to use service learning in my own courses.

Connections to site vs. site writing. As March wound down, many people on campus fell victim to the erratic weather patterns and contracted all kinds of colds, flu, etc. Richard was no exception, and I found myself stepping in to sub on a Thursday, which was a day of the week I did not usually attend class. Class time was usually devoted to other aspects of Richard's syllabus. He had left me no plans, though, so I

decided to take advantage of the time we had together and have the students write about their service learning projects in class. This was a hybrid approach at collecting data for me. It was a free-form journal entry with multiple prompts; the questions were pointed, like our interviews, but they didn't have to answer me verbally, to my face. They could write their answers down privately. This encouraged some of them to be more forthcoming.

I stood up at the board, tapping the chalk. I decided to start simple. "Describe one thing you've learned about your site and/or community." When I read the responses later, I would see that Ainsley answered this one in a way that demonstrated to me her site was changing the way she thought about the environment outside of the university, saying, "I never realized how many homeless youths and adults Rockville has." She, along with some of her fellow research participants, had not yet provided me much data on the writing they were completing for their sites.

My next prompt was, "Describe one thing you've learned about writing." Ainsley responded to this prompt with "I've learned I've got a lot to learn about writing!! It's a lot more involved than just writing down the words." The fact that she had not separated her site writing from academic writing here made me wonder if she was acknowledging them as connected or having commonalities. I couldn't be sure at this point. When I read her response here, I found myself wishing she had written more.

Nancy provided an involved answer to this prompt, explaining:

I've found it's hard to tell another person's story in a non-offensive way. I want all her words to be right and not to write anything too sensitive. I was surprised at the eagerness of Margaret to tell her story, and the resistance of Lucy. I was surprised at

how uncomfortable I felt at first. I still don't like going there very much, but once I'm in

their room at the home, it's fine.

After reading this, I felt that I may have "given up" on Nancy too soon. She had

taken longer than many of her classmates, but here I could see that her interaction with

Margaret was making her consider her word choices carefully, with respect to her unique

audience. She was acknowledging that the environment of her site shaped her writing

here.

Amber discussed not only how much thought and effort she was putting into

writing Phil's memoir, but also how that writing was necessitating that she learn about

certain elements of writing, namely, how to utilize secondary research to her advantage

alongside her data from Phil, which was her primary research:

I have spent a lot of time studying my notes and trying to figure out how I want to

go about writing Phil's memoir. I'm nervous about writing a memoir, especially now

that I promised Phil; he would get a copy of his own. I hope that I am able to retell his

experiences in a way that will be as interesting as he has told them to me.

I was able to go online and get a little more information about certain projects

that Phil worked on in the past, which will also help me out. It will fill in some of the

gaps, and make the memoir sound more like Phil's way he told me his story.

Like Nancy, Amber was thinking about how a part of her audience would affect

her writing. She was considering how her environment would shape her writing. She was

also thinking about how she could strengthen her piece with multiple sources of data.

When I read this, I thought that she must have been making the connections for herself

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between this and academic research papers, but since she did not explicitly say so, I could not be certain.

Justin had still not shown me that he had made the connections between his service learning work and writing in an academic environment. He answered this prompt with the following response:

The writing that my ASL project requires is some Power Point writing. The Power Point is more like decorative advertising. The flyer will hopefully attract more kids to the dance. There is reward in the idea that I will be helping to advertise these dances. The frustrating part is finding time to volunteer.

Justin's case presented an example that was representative of this semester's research participants; if they did not make a connection between their service learning site writing and the writing they would complete for purely academic purposes, the site projects just felt like an unnecessary extra workload placed on them. I could see where engaging in this work could be frustrating if they did not understand why it was included in their coursework. This would be the gist of the data I would receive from Justin. He did not elaborate on his viewpoint further; in fact, I heard very little from him after this point.

Researcher Perspectives: Connections and Disconnections

At this point in the semester, I had data that gave me more solid answers to my second research question: "How do I, in turn, think the service learning component is affecting the research participants' writing? How do I think the service learning component is affecting how they think about writing within a university setting and outside of it?"Like the first semester, many of these research participants had found their

motivation to write through locating their area of greatest interest at their site, and dialoguing closely with people that could help them write about that area of interest. Unlike the first semester, there was a prevalent doubt the service learning project writing was useful to them as students, or relevant to their study of academic writing.

Currently, Richard's syllabus schedule was divided up into service learning and non-service learning days. We had done this so that he could continue to teach as he had in the past. Now I could see where this division might be working against us. The service learning was not a clear part of their study of writing, for some. They were inclined to think of the work as separate because, in a way, we were presenting it as separate. It was too early to come to conclusions, but I began to think that a service learning component designed this way needed to be more integrated into the class activities. For instance, instead of there being "service learning days" and "non-service learning days," the service learning projects needed to be a constant presence, directly and obviously informing each and every part of the class.

Richard's perspective: Service and first-year composition. I had occasion to read some of Richard's researcher's journal soon after reading the research participants' in-class writings, and was shocked to see how differently we were thinking about the service learning component at this time:

This approach does ask for a great time and energy commitment on the part of the teacher. A well-established university service-learning program would take the extra work-load from the professor; however, we are currently without such a program at Rockville University. In my opinion, the most easily manageable model of academic service-learning would include Deans' writing-about-the-community and require

students to find organizations with which they may volunteer (a list of opportunities could

be provided) and gain experiences. The students would be fulfilling needs of the

community and agency, although the service would not be in the form of performing

writing tasks.

I wanted to interview Richard and explore this further, as it was a very different

conclusion than mine but based on shared experiences in the classroom. He had come to

value an entirely different model of service learning through our experiences.

I had the chance to interview him within the week. We sat down in my office. I

really wanted to talk to him about the conclusions he had come to in his journal entry—

that writing about the community was a preferable model of service learning to pursue

than the one with which we were currently working.

I began by asking him about that. "Tell me a little bit about why you're leaning

toward an adoption of a solely writing about the community approach to service learning

in your future classes. It seems as though earlier on, you were more excited about

students completing projects that were, in and of themselves, writing intensive. Can you

describe how your point of view changed and why it changed?"

He leaned forward in his chair. "Originally, I felt like when using the *writing*

about model, students may not be fulfilling the objectives of a writing class. We had

agreed that the students should see the connection between academic and workplace

discourses, and then become motivated when they realize that writing abilities gained in

college will be useful afterward. But now I think there are other ways to demonstrate this

to students that will make up for the lack of 'for' or 'with' writing experiences."

I didn't feel like he had satisfactorily explained to me what was wrong with "for" and "with" experiences, but he was practically begging me to ask him about these "other ways." I continued with, "Such as?"

"I think that students can be led to see the relevancy of their writing just by having a more interesting subject matter to write about. I like the idea of giving them choices for their sites, to make sure everyone cares about their sites, and then letting that develop into an intrinsic motivation to perfect their writing skills."

I felt like he was answering questions evasively. "It seems like you're jumping over some important ground with that, though. How do you get from interesting site to intrinsic motivation to write? What about intrinsic motivation to learn about new discourses?" I asked.

He sat back and looked at the floor for a moment, and then went on, in an almost confessional manner. I could tell he thought he was saying something I didn't want to hear. "After this study, I feel that taking on new discourses, and writing for a public agency, might be too much for first-year comp students. And also, gaining mastery and keeping clear communication with a large list of sites is a huge workload in itself for the instructor."

My perspective: Pedagogy, practice, and model. Richard was looking at logistics, and I could not begrudge him that. I could not examine this issue usefully from an idealist, abstract, theory-only viewpoint. But I was not willing to give up on the application of service learning I had designed for this study, an amalgamation of writing about and for the community that stressed dialogue and critical thought about total environment, just because it wasn't immediately easy to execute. Despite gathering data

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from some research participants, including my co-researcher, that expressed disappointment and frustration with the service learning component, I still had a strong conviction that my ideas were worth pursuing. I had also collected data already suggesting that this model of service learning could apply ecocomposition theory in a first-year composition classroom.

I was having nearly the same classroom experience as my co-researcher, and we were thinking very different things. If I ultimately came to the conclusion that this service learning design had aided us in implementing ecocomposition in this classroom, I needed to acknowledge that I solely was of the opinion that it did. I would have to explain why I gave some of my data more consideration than other data. Whatever conclusion I came to, I would have data that contradicted it. My conclusions would not be simple, one way or the other.

After the Service Learning Project Work

Research participant perspectives: Connection, interconnection, and disconnection. We were nearing the end. There was a feeling of spring in the air on campus, of wrapping up the semester, moving on, and relaxing over the summer break. Often as an instructor on a college campus, I felt my students get impatient around this time and start to lose touch with their work ethics. They started to lose their ability to focus and instead to get, as I was fond of saying, "squirrelly." My research participants acted to the contrary. Some sounded eager to buckle down and finish their final work on their service learning projects. Others were completing their projects and beginning to reflect on their finished work.

Sabrina: Connection fostering confidence. Sabrina had given time and energy to her service learning work, but could also see that she benefited herself. The benefits she discussed were not specifically about writing; nonetheless, she seemed to be open to engaging with her environment in ways that were exciting to her. She also sounded as though she had gained insight into children's lives and ways of thinking. She expressed a newfound appreciation for museums, a part of her physical environment, and her writing showed me she was newly aware of her ability to engage actively with her environment:

I have learned from this experience that community service, or in this case, service learning, can be a fun experience. Before, when I volunteered my time, I didn't really have fun with the project. I would do it just to help other people and I never really got anything out of it. Volunteering at the Rockville Children's museum has taught me that I can provide a service for the community, have fun, and learn from the experience. I learned a lot about how the child mentality and got to see how they interacted to different things, like the snake tanks. I also got to see how simple things are for kids. I got to watch them be carefree and happy. I really enjoyed that. I also really enjoyed knowing that my work was going to improve the museum, and families' time there. It gives them more things to do.

I also really enjoyed working with James. He is such a nice guy, and very intelligent. He gave me insight into the workings of the museum. He also helped me with my project in making it appealing to the kids and parents that visit the museum. Overall, I really enjoyed volunteering at the children's museum. I think that I am going to continue to volunteer there. James has also offered me a job there for the summer. I already have 2 summer jobs lined up back home so I couldn't take up the offer. But, he also said that if

there were any openings left next fall he'd like me to work there next year. If there is an

opening left, I am definitely going to take him up on his offer. I really liked working there.

While Sabrina made no declarations here about her writing, I felt as though these eye-opening experiences she had chronicled, these environment-changing experiences, had indeed affected her writing when I thought back to how insecure she had sounded about working on this project. Her new perceptions and piqued interest enabled her to complete the writing more easily. She did not communicate a change in her thinking about writing directly that would answer my first research question, but this data helped me answer my second research question; *I* felt as though she were more confident in approaching unfamiliar rhetorical situations. In Sabrina, I saw more eagerness to take on new, unfamiliar writing tasks when comparing her earlier journal writing in the semester to what I saw here.

Alexander: Differing perspectives on writing. Alexander had stated earlier, "I didn't learn anything about writing on this project." The research participants also wrote reflective capstone essays on their projects; here, Alexander's answers indicated a different opinion: "I'm glad that I had to do community service for a college course. I had a lot of fun interviewing Irene, and that surprised me because I had never interview someone before and I was afraid that I'd run out of things to say and that I wouldn't have enough to fill the paper. But it didn't end up that way." Alexander didn't believe he had learned anything about writing, but I saw evidence that he had. He indicated he felt more positive about researching after his service learning work.

While I couldn't say he made the connection between enjoying his interviewing process and enriching his site writing with the data he had gathered, I could say that I saw

evidence of his opinions on this part of the assignment change substantially. His opinions on the interview process and the service learning work in general were negative earlier in the semester; my conclusion at this stage was that this change meant his confidence in his primary research skills and motivation to do such research in the future was higher.

In answer to my first research question, which asked for research participant perspectives, Alexander did not feel his understanding of writing had changed. Our perspectives differed, however. Based on his data, I felt it was possible that his feelings about the elderly, researching, and writing were more positive than they had been before.

Nancy: Disconnection between project writing and classroom writing. Nancy had started out expressing frustration with her project when she was having trouble scheduling time with Margaret, the resident about which she would end up writing. Like Sabrina and Alexander, Nancy was more motivated to write a strong document and also had a higher level of comfort with her site, a nursing home, as more face-to-face dialogue occurred. Nancy placed herself in her final document, a collaborative partial memoir, often (Appendix D). She intermittently expressed her own reactions and opinions to what Margaret said, as evidenced in these sentences about the death of Margaret's spouse: "She then went on to say he died at the age of 82, quite an amazing feat for a man with tuberculosis at that time. I could tell the love for him was still as strong and the wound was still fresh."

While this demonstrated to me that she had not applied her coursework on point of view in different writing styles to her site writing, it also indicated her dialogic relationship with Margaret, and Margaret's environment, the nursing home. She saw herself as an active and interactive part of the environment in which her "research

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subject" lived. In answer to my research questions, then, she was not demonstrating gained knowledge about the mechanical conventions of academic writing in her site writing, but she was demonstrating a connection to environment. I could speculate at this point that Nancy thinking about how her environment impacted her writing.

Amber and Ainsley: Disconnection between classroom and project writing.

Before finishing up her project, a collaborative partial memoir with a resident of an assisted living facility, Amber explained how diligently she was working in a journal entry from this time:

I have spent a lot of time studying my notes and trying to figure out how I want to go about writing Phil's memoir. I'm nervous about writing a memoir, especially now that I promised Phil; he would get a copy of his own. I hope that I am able to retell his experiences in a way that will be as interesting as he has told them to me. I was able to go online and get a little more information about certain projects that Phil worked on in the past, which will also help me out.

I was interested to see her combining primary and secondary research together here, and she was expressing awareness of how this particular part of her environment was shaping her writing. The site work was motivating Amber to take on writing tasks not specifically assigned to her in the classroom. She was taking on a proactive role in her writing.

I felt eager to read Amber's collaborative memoir after reading this journal entry. Amber had included a good bit of her own assessment of Phil's character; like Nancy, she had not followed traditional memoir format (Appendix F). She had not included as much secondary research as I had been led to believe she would, either, but she had a start. She

began her document by including a definition from Webster's dictionary, but she had not cited it according to any academic style conventions.

Again, like Nancy, while she did not demonstrate that she understood how to implement some of the more mechanical and stylistic elements of writing, she showed an awareness of some of sophisticated rhetorical elements in her writing. She analyzed not only the information with which Phil provided her, but also the way he provided it, in particular the words he used to describe parts of his story. After including quotes directly from Phil, Amber often jumped in to say things like, "As Phil told his story, I could tell that he was a man that had respect, yet he was caring and wanted to help people," or "I can tell that Phil has a way with people." Amber was demonstrating an awareness of rhetorical purpose and the importance of representing her subject in a way he and the rest of her audience would all find accurate. She was choosing her approach to the material, details to include, and words with her audience—Phil himself and his fellow residents at the Rockville Home for Veterans—in mind. She wanted her audience to receive her document positively.

Ainsley made more use of secondary research in her proposal to change sex education and birth control distribution at Advocates for Youth. I had expected Ainsley to focus the majority of her time on researching the benefits of journal writing so she could lead the Young Mothers Group with which she had spent so much time in journal writing sessions. After spending time there, she had determined this proposal to be a more important and urgent project on which to spend time.

Ainsley began her final project with a very clear sense of purpose and audience, and had plenty of motivation after dialoguing with Dinah and the young mothers at

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Advocates for Youth, but her document was problematic in terms of function and form. Her research often contradicted her assertions, and her work contained many surface errors (Appendix G). While she had become increasingly motivated to write through her interaction with the service learning site, the structural components of her document needed help. She was not showing me that she saw the connection between the service learning work and her other composition coursework.

In answer to my first and second research questions, Ainsley indicated she was putting time and effort into making this proposal persuasive for her audience, but in my opinion, her experiences had not led her to make connections between service learning writing and "other" writing, and therefore to an investigation into these "nuts and bolts" of academic and public writing that would have helped make her proposal more functional and persuasive.

Researcher perspectives: Refinements to service learning model. This semester had given me a lot to think about. It had begun amidst student doubt about their writing abilities and had ended with my doubt about their writing abilities. Several research participants had created documents with prominent errors, despite Richard covering material on his class days that could have helped them. I had data that demonstrated either a struggle with writing in general, or a lack of understanding of connection between site environment and classroom environment.

I still thought dialogue was crucial between the research participants and the people at their sites who could help them explore what was more interesting and motivating to them there. Now I also felt strongly that the service learning work needed to be better integrated with the rest of the subject matter they were expecting in a first-

year composition course. I had seen evidence that our particular course design, while enabling the existence of an instructor and a teacher researcher in one classroom, had not aided the students in helping them connect their service learning work back to their academic work. It was not giving them the sense that they were one and the same. Even Richard, the instructor of the course felt as though those two parts were not working together after two semesters; he had expressed that the service learning component was too much of an additional load to a first-year composition course.

My first-semester data had led me to believe that this model of service learning could viably foster ecocomposition in the first-year composition classroom as long as the students had opportunities to locate the areas of greatest interest to them. The projects also needed to ensure direct dialogue occurred with the people at the site most relevant to that area of interest. I now had data that both complicated and contradicted those preliminary conclusions. Despite all of those factors being in place, some of my research participants had not learned about writing and its function within their environment, by their estimation or mine.

I had designed my research without the intention of coming to simple conclusions, but rather answers that had many layers, coming from multiple perspectives. I had succeeded. I had plenty of mixed tentative conclusions. I had plans to write, write, write over the summer. I had data; now what did I want to do with it?

CHAPTER 4: DATA, THEORY, PRACTICE, AND CONCLUSIONS

Time Travel: 2004-2006

I finished my dissertation research during the winter semester of 2004 at Rockville University. I was offered the directorship of their writing proficiency exit exam in the fall of 2005, and I took the opportunity to gain some valuable professional experience, as well as stay in an area I loved, and catch my breath. My head was swimming with data, tentative conclusions, and ideas for subsequent studies and for implementing service learning in a class of my own. I needed time to digest everything before trying to make sense of it on paper. As a colleague of mine said, "You'll sleep for two weeks, and then you'll write."

She was right. I slept for the good part of two weeks. Then I stumbled around in a daze for a few more, organizing some data and drafting some pieces of this document. Before I knew it, I was training for my exam directorship, and then in a few more weeks, taking over duties as writing exam director, which turned out to be far more intensive than the fact I would be compensated for four adjunct credits per semester for them let on—one of my first valuable professional lessons.

I turned into one of those people I never thought I'd be—one of those people that is always "working" on her dissertation, every time you ask. I had gone through all of my prior schooling with expedience; it was surprising and disconcerting to see myself slow down to such a crawl. But life dictated it. And during that time, I began to appreciate the positives of finishing my dissertation slowly. I had been under the impression that I was best off flash-frying this work. Our field changes so quickly that I thought I wanted to cook up a deep-fried ice cream dissertation. But my dissertation was a stew, like it or not,

and I came to appreciate the way my understanding of the data got richer as I let it simmer. Coming to my conclusions over a few semesters of directing RU's writing exam, teaching composition and technical writing, attending more conferences, networking with more colleagues, and always, always, always reading all strengthened my understanding of my conclusions and their contexts. Much like my reasons for pursuing service learning work, which started with critical pedagogy and evolved into ecocomposition, my understanding of my study had not changed—rather, it had deepened, and I had found more meaningful, apt ways of articulating my thoughts and conclusions over this time.

I found my professional obligation, the directorship of the writing proficiency exit exam, to be more than just time-consuming; over the first year on the job, I came to believe that the exam was not serving RU's students well. An exit exam that asked students to produce a polished essay in two hours on a surprise prompt flew in the face of all of the composition theory that made sense to me, all I knew to be true about how students learn to write and keep writing.

In my second year of directing the exam, I initiated an effort in the English Department to eliminate it. I was actively petitioning to eliminate my own position. With it would go the little prestige an adjunct administrative position offered, along with a guaranteed spot on the department's composition subcommittee. The latter was not easy for me to give up, but I did. Through this experience, I learned just how important it was to me to engage in work in which I believed, work that aligned practices to the theories which I believed.

The effort to eliminate the exam was eventually successful, and as an adjunct instructor at RU without additional administrative responsibilities, I had newfound time

and energy to invest in writing this dissertation. The fact that the writing exam was not in line with my own beliefs as a writing instructor had bothered me over the previous two years a great deal. Only slightly less did the feeling of being "stalled" on my dissertation progress bother me. I was eager to begin again. I had much to say, many ideas, but also many remaining questions. I sat down, once again in my office at RU. It was a quiet afternoon in the late spring of 2006. I began to organize my concluding thoughts. "If these walls could speak, they could defend my entire dissertation for me," I thought to myself. I started by looking back at the second and third chapters I had drafted, in particular the conclusions I had made about research data immediately after each semester.

It was helpful to review all of my case studies and earlier conclusions from both semesters for this final chapter; I found myself reiterating some of my earlier conclusions, coming to some new ones, identifying patterns, and finding places in which my own hopes for the study, prior experiences, interests, and inclinations had moved me to see data in biased ways. Examining my own biases this way deepened my understanding of exactly what it was I had wanted from this study. I felt as though I were developing a stronger sense of the potential connections between ecocomposition and service learning. With this review of data and consideration of newly published scholarship in the areas of service learning, I was able to further articulate my own theories, pedagogy, and even ideas for future research.

Review of Data: Multiple Perspectives on Connection and Interconnection

I returned to my research questions. I printed them off on a separate sheet of paper and kept them next to my laptop:

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1. How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their writing? How do the research participants think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within a university setting, and outside of it?

2. How do I, in turn, think the service learning component is affecting the research participants' writing? How do I think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within the university setting and outside of it?

3. Ultimately, do I think adding a service learning component is a successful way to implement ecocomposition in a first-year composition classroom?

All of these questions were designed to help me examine the service learning component I had designed as a possible implementation of Dobrin and Weisser's ecocomposition. Dobrin and Weisser's concept of environment differed from that of earlier scholars writing about ecocomposition. Taking their cue from Marilyn Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing," they argued that writers and their writing exist in a metaphorical ecosystem; the many parts of writers' identities, the content and design of the writing, and the many concerns of the total environment in which writers exist—not just physical, but civic, social, psychological, etc.—all affect each other. Like parts of an ecosystem, they all exist in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship. Studying these individual dynamic connections was near impossible and ultimately counterproductive. Instead, I had set out to study whether or not service learning could help students learn to assess their own complex, ever-changing places in their metaphorical ecosystems and how their writing could function there. I thought that spending time in a service learning site

environment could immerse students productively, in a way that gave them a strong sense of the complex total environment in which they and their writing would function and the reciprocal nature of their relationship to it. I wanted to see whether they voiced awareness of the fact that their environment could affect their writing, and their writing could affect their environment. I also wanted to see if their work demonstrated such awareness to me. I had two semesters of data that could shed light onto whether or not they were assessing themselves, their writing, and their environment in these ways.

Research participant perspectives: Varied connections. I began with the first question. Looking back at my earlier conclusions, I noted that patterns had emerged. Noah, Sabrina, Alexander, Callie, Mae, and Arnie voiced increased enthusiasm and confidence in themselves as writers after engaging with their site, expressing awareness that their environment had affected them. I saw awareness in other research participants of the potential impact of their writing on their audience, or how their writing could affect their environment, like Camille and Amber. Lastly, I had data in which the research participants related that they had not learned anything that would help them in their writing outside of the service learning projects. This perceived lack of connection between parts of some of the research participants' environment was significant to me because the connections between their service learning writing and the writing studied and produced in their composition course affected the quality of both kinds of writing. It would remain a source of concern throughout my final conclusions, and inform my understanding of scholarship published after my study and calls for future research.

Environment affecting writing. Several students demonstrated awareness that their environment had affected their service learning writing projects.

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Noah. Noah worked on an exhibit for the Rockville Maritime Museum in the first semester. He indicated in his capstone essay that he became more interested in maritime history once he had begun visiting and meeting with his site contact at the museum. Being in close contact with the people at the site made him more interested and also made him feel more connected to the site and the history of his current environment: "I too have become a lot more excited about the subject of lighthouses and maritime history, especially in this town." This closer connection to the site and subject of his exhibit made him more confident and comfortable in considering how his writing would function at that site: "It is easier to write better with all of this information to add. It was easier to sound like I know what I'm talking about."

As a result, he was confident in approaching and completing unfamiliar writing tasks, such as conducting primary research to inform his final document. He reflected on his new feelings about the process of researching: "I now can conduct an interview over the phone and sound professional about it, and I even did an in person interview with one of the employees at the museum." His personal interaction with his site was key to this final outcome—he explained in the same writing that seeing how "excited" his site contact was about maritime history in the area motivated him to educate himself on the topic, and then embark on his project, an exhibit about lighthouses, with more confidence and enthusiasm.

Sabrina. In the second semester, Sabrina developed an exhibit for the Rockville Children's Museum. Before spending time at her site, she expressed anxiety about her site writing project, saying, "In the past all I've had to do is scoop out food and other acts that could be done by a 6 year old. Now I'm going to have to do something that involves

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me and my skills, or lack thereof, as a writer. I can't help but think what if what I do isn't good enough? What can I do to make sure I don't screw this up*?*"

Once she had visited the museum personally and dialogued with others working there like her site contact James, she became much more confident and enthusiastic, as evidenced by later journal entry writing: "I know I am going to have tons of fun writing, now that I know more what kind of writing they need at the museum." The service learning sites immersed the research participants in complex rhetorical situations; nonetheless, her feelings about the site and the nature of her role there became more positive once she engaged with her site environment.

Alexander. Alexander likewise approached his work with more enthusiasm after interviewing Irene, a resident at Gray Ridge Heights, an assisted living facility. He visited with her over the second semester, eventually conducted formal interviews, and collaborated on a partial memoir with her. He said in a journal entry after his first interview with her: "I had never interviewed someone before and I was afraid that I'd run out of things to say and that I wouldn't have enough to fill the paper. But it didn't end up that way."

Callie, Mae, and Arnie. During the first semester, Callie, Mae, and Arnie had all engaged in service learning at Grand Middle School, where they were supposed to tutor middle school students in an after-school program. Their project had originally been designed around writing with the middle school students themselves. All three research participants realized after visiting the site several times that there was a problematic lack of structure in the program. They were frustrated by this; that frustration moved them to ask Richard and me if they could collaborate on a proposal for a new, more structured

after-school program at Grand Middle School, to be submitted to the school's administration. Their after-school tutoring program would provide trained tutors and educational activities.

During their time on-site, Callie, Mae, and Arnie had developed a strong sense of the students' needs. This had guided their decision to change their project. They interviewed the students participating in the after-school program, and used that interview data as primary research for a proposal on which they collaborated. They successfully persuaded their audience, the administration at Grand Middle School, by including information about and perspectives from the middle school students (Appendix C). Callie voiced clear understanding that their environment had directly affected the content of their proposal when she wrote in a journal entry, "We already have the information that we would have to research because we found it out firsthand by going to the school."

Writing affecting environment. Other research participants demonstrated awareness that of ways the writing they produced for the service learning sites would affect the site and the people there.

Camille. Camille worked on an exhibit about kitchen cleanliness and safety for parents and children to read together at the Rockville Children's Museum. In her first-semester capstone essay, she had discussed at length how the specific and "real" audience provided by her project motivated her to make her writing accurate, saying, "I do not want to write something that is false. Then someone believes it's true because they read it on the walls and it was really wrong."

She then explained how the reading level of her audience made her reconsider her own writing process: "I learned that most people can't read past a 6th grade level.

Knowing this, I had to learn to adjust my way of writing. I had to be able to convey useful information in language that my audience could understand." She concluded that word choice was crucial in making her exhibit not only accurate, but also effective and interesting, saying things like, "I had to be able to convey useful information in language that my audience could understand. Also, I had to learn to grab attention through language and pictures."

All of these thoughts indicated to me that Camille was motivated to portray her topic accurately and in a way that was both interesting and accessible to her audience. She became increasingly familiar with this audience through her time at the site. She also engaged in continual dialogue with the museum's director as she researched, wrote, and designed her exhibit. In her capstone essay, she voiced awareness of the potential impact all her choices in the writing process could have on the audience with which she had been interacting. Every step of her writing process was informed by her immersion in her site environment.

Amber. Amber's relationship to environment likewise motivated her to be accurate and choose the right words for her audience. She had worked at the Rockville Home for Veterans during the semester, continually visiting and interviewing a resident named Phil. Her writing project involved collaborating with Phil on his partial memoir (Appendix F). Amber had said she was "nervous" about the task of writing down her resident's life story, even after being in direct contact with him and the site. She had made strong connections with Phil, and it was a keen awareness of how her writing would affect him as an audience member that shaped her feelings and approach to writing: "I hope that I am able to retell his experiences in a way that will be as interesting

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as he has told them to me." This had spurred her on not only to choose her words carefully, but also to conduct some supplemental secondary research on events and places about which he spoke in order to ensure her document was accurate. She pursued this secondary research completely on her own, without prompting by Richard or me. Instead of being guided by an instructor in such matters, her own let her to create a partial memoir of Phil that functioned the way she wanted it to in her site environment.

Disconnection: Service learning work and classroom. Some of the research participants in the study demonstrated a lack of understanding of how the service learning work and the composition course content were connected.

Alexander. As the second semester continued, Alexander had made increasingly positive comments about the service learning work, his collaborative memoir with Irene, a resident at an assisted living facility. I was surprised to read his statement later in the semester: "I didn't learn anything about writing on this project." He had spent time at his site, interviewed Irene, and eventually wrote a document containing that interview data (Appendix E), but in his opinion, what he learned through his service learning work was not connected to writing.

Nancy. Nancy also collaborated on a partial memoir with a resident of an assisted living facility. Margaret (Appendix D). She too reported increasingly positive experiences at her site. In both her reflective writing and her interview data throughout the semester, however, Nancy expressed that she did not see the service learning writing as relevant to the kind of writing she would do in other college courses, or elsewhere. In one journal entry, she said, "Maybe if I had chosen a placement where I had to write a newsletter or something different, I'd be improving my writing skills." Later, during an

interview with me, she described the service learning writing she was completing this way: "It's not like it applies to the real world."

Researcher perspectives: Affecting and disconnecting. I would have to take their conclusions and consider them along with my thoughts on the work they had done in order to arrive at final answers to my second research question, "How do I, in turn, think the service learning component is affecting the research participants' writing? How do I think the service learning component is affecting their understanding of writing within the university setting and outside of it?"

Considering the impressions of the research participants and mine together, I again saw similar patterns emerge. The work of Ainsley, Camille, Billie, and Alexander demonstrated that their environment had affected them. The work of other research participants—Callie, Mae, and Arnie—demonstrated that they knew they could affect their environment. Alexander and Nancy had told me they did not learn anything about writing, indicating they did not see connections between their service learning work and their composition course content. Looking at the work of Nancy, Amber, and Ainsley, I also saw this lack of understanding of connection in action. Some research participants did not apply their composition course content, covered by Richard on "non-service learning days," to their service learning writing.

I knew that this could mean they were seeing the connection between service learning project writing and the rest of their course content, but struggling with the course material in general. Considering that Alexander and Nancy had also told me that they felt they were not learning about writing during their service learning work, however, I had to

note this as possible evidence, again, of a lack of perceived connection between two parts of environment: service learning site and classroom.

Environment affecting writing. Several of the case studies demonstrated the idea of environment affecting writing.

Ainsley. Ainsley had made a proactive decision to write a proposal after beginning with a different project at her service learning site. Originally, she had begun working at Advocates for Youth with the understanding she would lead journal writing sessions for a group of young mothers there. Her environment affected her decisions as a writer significantly in that she completely changed her project to attend to serious issues she noted during her time there; she felt that the way sex education and birth control were being handled by the organization was not serving the youth aided by the organization effectively. As a result of visiting the site repeatedly, dialoguing with her site contact, Dinah, and speaking to some of the young people there, she proposed an increase in sex education and possible changes to the distribution of birth control (Appendix G). Her site environment had affected her document's purpose, topic, design, and content.

Camille. Camille's site, the Rockville Children's Museum, affected her final document, an exhibit about kitchen cleanliness. She dialogued with her site contact, James, a great deal about the reading level of her audience, which consisted of both children and their parents. She also thought hard about the relationship between her content and the implications of accurate or inaccurate information. Her exhibit used simple wording, and worked to make kitchen cleanliness sound both important and fun to children. Her site contact, the site's needs (there was a frequently used kitchen area with

no information about cleanliness), and the audience that would view her exhibit all guided her choices.

Billie. During the first semester, Billie wrote a testimonial about her experience in a Recreational Facilities yoga class to be posted in the recreational facility at RU for educational purposes (Appendix A). The words Billie chose were also clearly influenced by her site. She balanced the language appropriated from the instructor during interviews (like "poses" and "different options to stretch certain muscles") with her own prior knowledge level and experiences as a new class participant to choose words that were specific to the discipline of yoga, but paired with explanation adequate for a less knowledgeable audience.

Writing affecting environment. In these cases, the research participants' service learning project writing had direct and obvious effects on its surrounding environment.

Callie, Mae, and Arnie. Callie, Mae, and Arnie had initiated the effort to collaborate on a proposal to the administrators at Grand Middle School which outlined a more structured after-school tutoring program (Appendix C). Their proposal utilized primary research they had collected from the middle school students about their needs, and secondary research about useful educational activities that could be a part of such a program, such as quiz and test-related games. Callie, Mae, and Arnie created a persuasive document that was eventually successful in creating the after-school tutoring program they proposed. Their writing affected their site environment; their proposal persuaded their audience of administrators, the setup of the tutoring program changed, and as a result, the students at Grand Middle School had new educational resources available to them.

Disconnection: Service learning work and classroom. Some of the service learning project writing itself demonstrated a lack of perceived connection on the research participants' parts between the service learning work and the composition classroom work.

Nancy. Nancy's final project, a partial memoir she wrote after interviewing a resident of an assisted living facility, Margaret, deviated from the format for such documents that Richard had covered in class. It was well written, but included a lot of her own opinions and reactions. For example, in the second paragraph of Margaret's memoir, she wrote, "Margaret, now 85 years old, but still sharp in the mind and quite lively, loved to tell her life story. And I loved to listen. It's not everyday that you get a live history lesson" (Appendix D). Her choice to include her own point of view indicated to me that she did not understand the connection between the class work on point of view in writing and the service learning project she was completing.

Amber and Ainsley. Amber's memoir with Phil also included her own point of view. She interjected statements like, "As Phil told his story, I could tell that he was a man that had respect, yet he was caring and wanted to help people" (Appendix F). Further, she neglected to cite any of the secondary research she had collected. While she had put a great deal of work into her document for Phil, the fact that she did not implement the concepts Richard was covering showed me that she did not see the different kinds of writing she was studying or producing as connected.

Ainsley's proposal to Advocates For Youth to change the way that sex education and birth control were handled included secondary research, but like Amber, she did not cite it in the way Richard had taught her to, and the proposal also contained several jumps

in logic (Appendix G). The content did not appear to implement suggestions about research or persuasive writing that Richard had covered in class.

Service learning: Ecocomposition in action? My third research question asked for an "ultimate" conclusion that took into account the research participants' opinions, including Richard's and my own opinions: "Ultimately, do I think adding a service learning component is a successful way to implement ecocomposition theory into a first-year composition classroom?"

Comparing my impressions to that of the research participants had enriched my understanding of the service learning component I had designed and its relationship to ecocomposition. The research participants had come to conclusions of their own. These conclusions indicated they saw a varying level of value in the service learning component of their class. Dobrin and Weisser had coined the term "discursive ecology" to describe ecocomposition in action. Discursive ecology asked writers to consider their "discursive acts as being inherently ecological" (117).

This meant acknowledging that one's relationship to environment is complex and reciprocal. So far, I was seeing bits and pieces of this; some research participants discussed the impact their environment had on them and their writing. Others expressed awareness of the potential impact their writing could have on their environment. They were describing important connections, or one-way relationships, but not interconnections, or reciprocal relationships. The practice had also failed to demonstrate any connection between two significant pieces of some research participants' total environment: service learning site and composition classroom. I had a lot of data from

multiple sources providing multiple perspectives. I had complex, varied, and even contradictory ideas and viewpoints to consider.

I sat in my office that afternoon in 2006, long after the conclusion of my study, and looked back on all of the data I had collected. I pondered this last question in relation to the data I had collected, my initial conclusions about it, and my updated conclusions, too. I looked back further through the planning of this dissertation, the coursework and reading that had influenced its planning, even to the experiences I had prior that shaped me into the scholar I was at that moment, and I realized that my ability to answer this question would be limited. Part of the value of the dissertation process for anyone, I think, is to learn about the process of researching in one's respective discipline. All things considered, I could very simply and "ultimately" state one thing: I had learned a lot about what I did not know.

This study had not been designed to provide me with the kind of answer this third research question demanded. With my study's focus on multiple perspectives and capacity for contradictory data, I could not say simply or conclusively, "Yes, this service learning component was successful in implementing ecocomposition into a first-year composition classroom," or "No, this service learning component was not successful." I had intended to gather this kind of data from the study's inception, yet still worded my third research question in a way that asked for quite a simplistic answer. What I could say was whether or not I saw cases in which service learning put ecocomposition into action, and whether or not those cases indicated that service learning held promise as pedagogy that could implement ecocomposition.

I had wanted to help students assess their interconnections with their environment. I believed their relationship with environment was dynamic and reciprocal; their writing would be affected by it, and their writing would affect their environment, in turn. While I had noted research participants who were affected by their environment, and research participants who affected their environment, I would need to decide whether any of my research participants showed awareness of or demonstrated both of these things at once in order to say their cases illustrated ecocomposition in action. After careful consideration, I felt I could logically conclude that Camille, and Callie, Mae, and Arnie, and Amber all did so. I also felt that other cases like Noah and Ainsley had been writing with some understanding of their reciprocal relationship of their environment.

Camille's case demonstrated an ecological relationship between writer and environment to me. Her immersion in her environment at the Rockville Children's Museum had affected her in that she learned a great deal about her audience and their relationship to the material about which she was writing. Her experiences in her site environment strengthened her motivation to portray the information in her writing in ways that her audience would understand. Her environment affected her. In turn, she was keenly aware of her potential impact on environment; she worked hard to portray the information in her exhibit in ways that ensured it was both accurate and accessible.

Callie, Mae, and Arnie's case also demonstrated a reciprocal relationship between writers and environment. Their environment inspired them to design a new writing project, the proposal to Grand Middle School administrators. Immersion in that environment had given them a strong sense of an existing problem there. Their environment shaped the kind of document they would write, and what it would contain.

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They also shaped their environment through the writing of that proposal, which resulted in the beginning of the more structured after-school tutoring program they proposed.

Amber wrote in a journal entry about the process of writing her partial memoir of Phil, a resident at the Rockville Home for Veterans, "I hope I am able to retell his experiences in a way that is as interesting as he told them to me," and indicated she was nervous about presenting him with her final document. I felt she was aware of not only Phil's effect on her and her writing, but also of the potential effect her writing would have on Phil and the other residents at the home.

Other cases pointed to possibilities. Noah talked extensively about his environment's effect on them on his document, and I had the sense that his exhibit's potential impact on its environment shaped decisions he made in his writing, but I had no specific data collected in which he voiced this or demonstrated it explicitly. Ainsley's site environment moved her to write her proposal, and in writing that proposal, she clearly intended to affect her site environment, but again, I had no data from her explicitly discussing her document's possible effects on the audience at Advocates for Youth.

My data left me with as many new questions as it did answers to the old ones. This would help me point out limitations in my research, but also possibilities for further research. But first, in order to do so, I would need to gain a thorough understanding of the directions in which service learning and ecocomposition scholarship had gone since the conclusion of my study. I needed to see how my own dissertation research contributed to the bodies of scholarship in these two areas.

The process of doing this has continued through the present in 2010. Compositionists carried on earnest and energetic study of both service learning and

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ecocomposition in the years following the collection of my data. At present, there is a

rich and increasingly large collection of scholarship on both. What follows is a review of

the scholarship I have found to be most relevant to my study.

Theory and Pedagogy: The Evolution of Service Learning and Ecocomposition

2004-2010

      Service learning. Since the conclusion of my study in 2004, service learning has

become increasingly popular in higher education, including within composition studies.

Ecocomposition and related "ecological" theories of composition have also been explored

in greater depth since Dobrin and Weisser's *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*.

The terminology surrounding both service learning and ecocomposition has expanded

and changed. Also, these two areas of study have often become intertwined.

      Ideas of environment, spaces, and places have led scholars—like Nicholas

Holton, author of "Rural Service-Learning: Turning Special Challenges into Great

Opportunities"; Randy Stoeker and Charity Schmidt, presenters of "Geographic

Disparaties in Access to Service-Learning"; Elizabeth Soslau and Deborah Yost, authors

of "Urban Service-Learning: An Authentic Teaching Strategy to Deliver a Standards-

Driven Curriculum"; and Nicole Webster and Tracy Hoover, authors of "Impact of an

Urban Service Learning Experience on Agricultural Students"—to label the space in

which service learning happens and study the effects of those different spaces on the

practice. This was a distinction that became common after I had designed my study.

      Others like Christian Weisser and Paula Mathieu began to write about service

learning as part of a larger movement, "public writing," in *Moving Beyond Academic

Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere* and *Tactics of Hope: The Public*

Turn in English Composition respectively. Similar terms like "community-based work" emerged during the same time to discuss larger movements of which service learning could be a part (Cushman and Grabill). Either way, thoughtfully approaching "where" writing is taking place, could take place, and should take place has remained an area of much discussion in the field of composition studies, and service learning as a part of the public writing phenomenon has often been central to those discussions.

  Rural vs. urban service learning. In the years preceding my study, service learning programs had been implemented in more urban environments, in part because of the large availability of sites in which students could work; subsequently, a great deal of the scholarship I read was written about service learning happening in the urban environment. Rural service learning initiatives, with their unique advantages and challenges, have also begun to warrant discussion of their own. By the time I began drafting this chapter, rural service learning was becoming increasingly institutionalized.

  Organizations like The Rural School and Community Trust are helping rural schools implement service learning, and Rockville University's Service Learning Advisory Board, an interdisciplinary board formed just after my study concluded, designed to work with the Center for Student Engagement and organize service learning efforts on RU's campus, even discussed the prospect of RU becoming a "rural service learning center" in early 2008 after being approached by members of Michigan Campus Compact. A meeting between interested parties from Midwest universities and community colleges occurred later that year. Kirtland Community College mathematics instructor and rural service learning scholar Nicholas Holton was one of the attendees. In

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an interview I conducted with him, he identified three specific challenges to service learning occurring in rural areas.

According to Holton, the first challenge is geography itself, and the accompanying challenges it creates for travel between sites. Whereas urban areas may provide many feasible service learning sites within a small geographical area, service learning in rural areas often grapples with larger distances between sites. This can easily create travel difficulties. I thought about my own study and realized distance had sometimes been a factor. There were a few suggested sites on the list initially provided to me by the Center for Student Engagement at RU that were simply too far away for my carless first-year research participants to reach. Some research participants had also expressed frustration during our class discussions over getting to and from their chosen sites. This had been especially prevalent in the early days of contacting their sites and scheduling initial visits. Once contact had been established and work had begun, the frustration was expressed less; nonetheless, distance had been a factor.

Second, Holton identified school size as a challenge often unique to rural service learning initiatives. Schools often grow to larger sizes in urban areas where they are supported by larger populations; schools in rural areas are often smaller. This can result in less available funding for the service learning programs themselves. As the teacher researcher who coordinated the service learning component of the course, I had felt as though I had ample support at RU during my research. Richard's conclusions at the end of the second-semester research, though, pointed to something important. He had mentioned during the study that the task of locating and managing all the sites as an

instructor would have been overwhelming to him if he were teaching a writing class with a service learning component alone.

Last, Holton described the challenge of creating productive and supportive faculty networks at smaller schools in rural areas. With fewer faculty, an institution might only have a few instructors, one instructor, or no one at all in a particular department or discipline implementing service learning in their courses. If instructors have little to no peer support for their efforts, those efforts can be more difficult, even less rewarding. I had peer support built into my study as a teacher researcher with a co-instructor. Acting as sole instructor and service learning coordinator would undoubtedly be more challenging, and I would need to think about this if I hoped to implement service learning in my own future courses.

Public writing. Service learning has not only been discussed in more particular terms that designate the type of environment in which it takes place since the conclusion of my study, but in different, and sometimes more generalized terms as well. Finding problems with the term "service learning," some scholars have begun referring to work on an interdisciplinary level as "place based learning," or "place based education." Service learning within composition studies is now often discussed within more general terms as well. "Public writing" is a term used by both Christian R. Weisser and Paula Mathieu, two scholars whose work influenced my understanding of my own research.

Christian Weisser's *Moving Beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies in the Public Sphere* discussed at length the place of public writing within composition studies. Weisser argued here for a focus on transformation in the way academic writing is situated in the greater whole; he argued that "we might begin to view social change on

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the micro level of interaction and allow it to fit into our immediate situations and communities. We might begin to conceive of ourselves as activist intellectuals" (123). My dissertation linked an interest in service learning to ecocomposition; Weisser linked the greater whole of public writing with the general study of the spaces and places in which that writing was taking place, or the greater whole of ecological composition theories.

This relationship between ecological composition theories and public writing pedagogy would continue to be explored in the years following Weisser's book. Scholars like Paula Mathieu, Nedra Reynolds, and Jonathan Mauk would come to conclusions that changed the way I viewed my own service learning research.

Paula Mathieu is one scholar who identified service learning as a specific practice within a larger sphere of public writing in *Tactics of Hope: the Public Turn in English Composition,* published in 2005. She reviewed some of what had since been theorized and problematized within service learning in composition studies since the inception of my dissertation. Much of the service learning in composition scholarship had been positive and hopeful when I began planning my study; Mathieu's critique, then, has been very helpful for me in thinking about my study and my data in a more critical light. It provided new ways of considering decisions I had made in my research design and possible answers to remaining questions I had about my data.

Mathieu rejected other terms used to describe "public" writing like "service" and "community" in favor of "street" as the projects she wrote about were set in urban parts of the environment. She then argued that relations between campuses and the street are often problematically "strategic." In other words, the university controls the

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circumstances under which the work is done and measures the success of it with their own tools, like student grading, which makes the work not truly reciprocal or valuable to all involved. As Mathieu argued, "the dynamic spaces where we work should not be considered strategic extensions of academic institutions" (17).

When I designed my service learning component, I had taken it for granted that the site would ask me and my research participants for projects that fulfilled true needs. I left it up to them to make sure the service learning work was valuable to their site. Mathieu's argument has helped me see that designing a service learning component to a writing course is not that simple; careful and continual attention to the site's needs must be paid in order for a service learning project to be facilitated ethically and for it to be mutually beneficial. The people at the sites need to maintain an active role in the design and evolution of the service learning projects and the students' roles at the sites.

Mathieu went on to argue for a more context-based approach instead, "a tactic of hope," in which tactics, or rhetorical, context-based units of measureable success as defined by Michel de Certeau are combined with Ernst Bloch's definition of "hope." Far from blind wishing, Bloch's hope analyzes circumstances critically, and after acknowledging difficulty, pushes forward optimistically with thoughtful action. Mathieu explained how these definitions work together in her vision of ethical, productive public writing: "We must realize what our world—or community partnerships—is missing and acknowledge what our work cannot achieve in order to hope and work for a better future" (19).

Mathieu's proposal here brought me to the realization that once again, and for new reasons, my third research question did not allow for a simple conclusion. I had

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asked, "Ultimately, do I think adding a service learning component is a successful way to implement ecocomposition theory into a first-year composition classroom?" A fundamental part of that answer would be whether or not I considered the service learning projects I had designed to be successful. I was beginning to understand that whether or not a service learning component in a first-year composition course is "successful" is incredibly complicated.

This is not just because students and their work vary, and not just because student and instructor opinions on the work can vary, as I would have said prior to reading Mathieu's work. It is also, as Mathieu enabled me to see, because service learning sites will have complex views of what "successful" projects are from their viewpoints, and because "success" for a community site very rarely comes in neatly-packed, semester-long units. "Successful" could mean much more than whether a mutually agreed upon problem was temporarily or even permanently solved, or whether students demonstrated learning equivalent to what they could be expected to learn in a traditional composition classroom. It would be nearly impossible to say whether or not service learning was a viable ecocomposition pedagogy if my answer depended on an overly simplified definition of successful service learning in the first place.

Mathieu did more than complicate my third research question. She also proposed a model of what service learning projects underpinned by her "tactics of hope" may look like. Comparing it with the model around which I had designed my study, and considering how that model had evolved as I learned from the data, I saw that she proposed approaches to site choice, project choice, and project negotiation among site,

student, and instructor/service learning coordinator that solved problems with which I had struggled; her ideas about all three of these things were useful to me.

She provided an example of a student/site match in a tactical project that began with site choice based on student interest, not teacher decision or assignment (111). This resonated with a decision I had made early on. Choosing a service learning site had to begin with individual student interest, and that included work that did not fall under the social activism paradigm set up by many Freire-fueled service learning practitioners of the early 2000s.

She differentiated her proposed approach from what I had envisioned pre-study, though, by saying that "tactical projects begin or are grounded early on in locations outside the university or result from relationships that exist for other reasons than the research or service connection" (111). This made me see some of the reactions I had to data in both semesters in a new light. I had wanted to begin with a list of sites of my choosing, and take students out of personal comfort zones with their work, to jar them into critical reflection. I tended to be suspicious of my research participants that chose off-list sites with which they were already familiar, such as Alexander's selection of Gray Ridge Heights, which was his mother's workplace. I could now see where even a familiar site could give students plenty of connections to study; in fact, "plunking" them down in new territory might be asking for problems—for them, and as Mathieu points out, for the site. A student already familiar with the site might come into the writing project with a much more sophisticated understanding of site needs, and therefore ability to produce truly useful writing for the site. The writing, in turn, would provide a richer opportunity for the students to study their interconnection with their environment.

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Mathieu went so far as to say that setting up a list of potentially new places for students to engage in service learning is too strategic, too based in university-controlled practices (99). I thought about the struggles my research participants had encountered in making contact with the service sites, setting up appointments, and determining what writing, exactly, needed to be done. I had begun my study thinking these negotiations were necessary, even useful for the students in learning about how those sites, those parts of their environment worked.

Mathieu has helped me see how this part of my service learning model could have negative repercussions. My insistence that students work outside of their "comfort zones" could interfere with site needs, student learning, and connection to environment. There were times when needs were not met and writing did not occur until quite late in the semester, or even at all because the research participants had become frustrated or overwhelmed with this earlier part of the process. Ellen was one example of this from the first semester; she ultimately dropped out of the service learning work because she had difficulty making contact with her site, the Diabetes Outreach Network.

In the design of this service learning model, I had wanted to create an opportunity for students to explore and understand their interconnectedness with their environment, and how their writing could function there. Research participants like Billie at Recreational Facilities had needed to adjust the service learning site work to make it more valuable to them. Others like Callie, Mae, Arnie, and Ainsley had needed to determine their own writing projects entirely, different ones than I had imagined initially. In my review of their data in earlier chapters, I had begun to see value in "backing off" and letting students determine their own paths of inquiry and action. Now I began to envision

an even more organic service learning model in which students, in conjunction with the site contacts of their own choosing, determined their site, nature of their work there, and writing project.

I could see now that I had been steering the research participants toward parts of their site environment in which they might not have been as interested, and then limiting them to "problems" I thought they could write their way out of in fifteen weeks. Many ended up with projects different from what I had originally envisioned. If I was looking forward to creating an approach for truly ecological writing and learning, I needed to think about ways to step back, even if it meant rethinking my ideas of what constituted useful immersion in environment and "successful" service learning projects. A writing instructor implementing the model of service learning I had designed would need to stay thoughtful yet flexible throughout the process.

As Mathieu said, "In a tactical orientation, the radical insufficiency of the acts we perform is fore-grounded, not as a critique of a project but as a necessary component of remaining accountable as teachers and students (112). Operating with her definition of "hope" in mind, a definition which utilized Bloch's theory to combine acknowledgement of difficult circumstances with realistic optimism, I needed to realize that "successful" work, for the students and the sites, could be done, even if it did not result in writing that was perfect by academic standards, or completely and permanently solved a problem for the site.

This idea was echoed and built upon to some degree later in Shari Stenberg and Darby Arant Whealey's 2009 *CCC*'s journal article, "Chaos is the Poetry: From Outcomes to Inquiry in Service Learning Pedagogy," in which they explored the

measures of success in service learning. They argued for a discontinuation of focus on end result success, asking their audience to instead consider outcomes for service learning "not as fixed, but as ends-in-view." Lastly, they redefined each outcome goal as "a point at which to stop and reflect, not to cease activity" (684). In both Stenberg and Arant Whealy as well as Mathieu's works, I saw an argument for service learning and public writing researchers to adopt the same model of praxis, inspired by critical pedagogy that many composition instructors value for our students. Instead of focusing on static concepts of end products and success (or as Mathieu had pointed out specifically, university-determined success), we should approach our service learning initiatives and research looking for opportunities to act, reflect, and act again.

Stenberg and Arant Whealy's article and Mathieu's book were both useful to me in updating many of the discussions of issues I had included in the first chapter of this study. It was interesting to see where the conclusions I had made based on my own research fit into this new scholarly conversation taking place in our field. I could see where my research questions could be rephrased, if I were beginning this study in 2010 with all of these new ideas in mind. Perhaps instead of asking my research participants, co-researcher, and myself to reflect simply on whether or not the service learning component was successful, helpful, or valuable as a learning tool or implementation of ecocomposition, I could have asked all of us to identify opportunities to stop and reflect on our work. I could have asked all of us to re-evaluate our classroom and site goals periodically, and to share those evolving goals along the way. I could have asked all of us to define our evolving places in those parts of our environment, and how our actions

(writing, in particular) changed as those places changed. I also would have asked these questions of the site contacts.

Ecocomposition and related ecological theories. I had learned so far that discussions of service learning became increasingly critical and complex in the years following my study. Ecological theories of composition had also evolved significantly, becoming more complex and far-reaching. Two specific patterns emerged that affected my understanding of ecocomposition's place in composition studies and my dissertation: an expansion of the terminology being used to articulate ecological theories of composition (Reynolds; Mauk), and a movement toward understanding not just student writing, but all writing as situated ecologically, including our own scholarly writing (Keller; Weisser; Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Clark Pepper; Dobrin).

Geographical metaphors. In 2004, Nedra Reynolds published *Geographies of Writing: Inhabiting Places and Encountering Difference.* In Reynolds' work, Dobrin and Weisser's assertion (in 2002's *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition)* that "discourse creates environment, and environment creates discourse" (32) evolved into a call for studying "how people learn about boundaries and borders, when they may cross them without penalty; or how they can slip in without being detected; or what the safe times of day are" (3). Her work examined the cultural factors influencing students as they move through and write in different parts of their environment: how those parts of environment affect their writing, and how their writing affects those parts of environment.

Reynolds differentiated her approach from ecocomposition by claiming that ecocomposition is mostly based in traditional, nature-based understandings of the terms

"environment" and "ecological," explaining, "While the work of ecocomposition looks mostly to the natural world, cultural geography focuses on the interaction of the social and the built environment, but the idea of *inhabitance* is crucial to both geographical and ecological theories of writing" (4). Dobrin and Weisser's work on ecocomposition was based on Ernst Haekel's definition of ecology, "the total relations of the animal both to its organic and to its inorganic environment" (*Natural Discourse* 9), and considered "total environment," not just the organic, natural environment. Though Reynolds was using different language to discuss some of the same theoretical concepts, her work led to specific pedagogical conclusions that Dobrin and Weisser's had not.

In the design of the service learning course I had studied in this dissertation, I had found value in sending the research participants to unfamiliar service learning sites. I had seen the negotiation of that new place as "useful immersion in environment," before beginning my study in the fall of 2003, as a way to expand student notions of the total environment in which their writing existed. Mathieu had helped me to see that this approach could interfere with the effectiveness of the work being done for the site. Reynolds drew my attention to the fact that when students are immersed in new parts of their environment, moving into unfamiliar territory demands acknowledgment of "geographies of exclusion," which she defined as, "the ways in which people feel excluded from certain places because of landscape, the built environment, the inhabitants, or the force of their own preconceptions or expectations" (9). While Mathieu had expressed ethical concerns about what service learning projects asking students to engage with unfamiliar sites were able to offer the community, Reynolds expressed ethical concerns about what such projects asked of our students.

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Reynolds went on to describe service learning projects like the ones I had designed for this study as "an assigned encounter with difference" (9), and eventually argued that public writing projects need not ask students to "travel" so much or so far: "Along with sending students to communities that surround and support the university, we also need to encourage their understanding of the politics of space in the immediate university environment" (136). In saying this, she posited that there was important, valuable work to be done within a university setting, too.

Jonathan Mauk's 2006 essay "Location, Location, Location: The 'Real' (E)states of Being, Writing, and Thinking in Composition" from the collection *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers* used real estate as a metaphor for higher education, saying "Like real estate, higher education is promoting, attempting to get students to buy (into) ideas about place. The ideas have value, and like land, their value is based on an intersection of the material and the conceptual, of the real and imagined (198). Drawing on concepts from critical geography and pointing to decreasingly "traditional," geographically centralized college student populations, he came to different conclusions than Reynolds, asserting that "students need to conceive the space outside of the campus, outside of the classroom, as academic" (213).

While Mauk did not make a specific argument for the practice of service learning in the composition classroom, he did continually call for a widened perspective of the environment in which our students write: "Academic space must extend itself, not merely outward, but in all the directions of being which constitute the lives of students" (214). Whereas Reynolds cautioned her audience against asking students to cross borders, Mauk, also using geographical metaphors, asked that we rethink where those borders are.

His argument began with a different space/place-related theory than mine, but his call here for expanding what we consider academic space was similar to my argument for studying service learning as a possible implementation of ecocomposition. I had wanted to study a pedagogy that helped expand notions of the environment in which the writing being studied in a first-year composition course could occur.

Theoretical location of ecocomposition. The editors of *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers* responded to the increasingly complex discussions of ecological theories of composition by working to situate ideas of space and place within a larger historical and ideological scope of composition studies. In their introduction, editors Peter Vandenberg, Sue Hum, and Jennifer Clary-Lemon provided a historical synopsis of the process movement and post-process beginnings, and then arrived at the three convictions that shaped their book: "1. Writing occurs through conversations and negotiations with others (relations), 2. Writing is shaped by material places and intellectual spaces (locations), and 3. Writing reflects the contingency of our beliefs and values, and in doing so composes identity (positions)" (8, 9).

Ecocomposition was eventually identified within Vandenberg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon's framework as a post-process theory of location, and then discussed as such in greater detail by many authors already familiar to me—Dobrin and Weisser and Reynolds being among the ones in this document. The editors presented an interpretation of the concepts and terminology in Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing" that was new to me in their placement of the essay in this same grouping, a theory of location. Theories of location, according to them, operated under the assertion, "Writing is shaped by material places and intellectual spaces" (9). Upon my initial reading, what had spoken to me and

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made Cooper's essay a foundational work in ecocomposition was its attention to an element of what these editors refer to as "relation," a theory operating under the assertion that "writing occurs through conversations and negotiations with others" (8).

In my mind, the ecological metaphor is unique not only for its focus on an environment's effects on writing, on metaphors of spaces and places, but also its study of interconnectedness. There is a dynamic relationship between discourse, creators of discourse, and our complex, multi-faceted environment. Ecocomposition allows us to study more than just location. An ecological model of writing allows us to study the dynamic relationships between those locations and the "conversations and negotiations" that occur as part of those relationships. Environment affects writers and writing, but writers and writing affect environment, too. I had read the same scholarly work as the editors of this collection during the planning of this study. It was interesting for me to see the possibilities for multiple interpretations of the same work.

Vandenburg, Sum, and Clary-Lemon's collection illustrated two things to me. First, the editors were demonstrating awareness that increasingly varied interdisciplinary influences were affecting ecological composition theories, and this variety of interdisciplinary influences was resulting in increasingly varied language being employed to describe such theories. Second, many compositionists, myself included, were coming to varied understandings of the same ecological theories of composition as a result of this variety of influences and language. This included the specific theory I had studied for this dissertation, ecocomposition, and foundational works in ecocomposition like Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing."

Reading essays that described ecological theories of composition in varied ways helped me understand that my personal definition and understanding of ecocomposition was somewhat singular; I could not assume that there was a common understanding of ecocomposition in our field from which I could argue in this document. I would have to articulate mine further. I knew after reading Reynolds that I understood ecocomposition to include studies of built, inorganic parts of our environment, as well as organic parts. In fact, the "total environment" I had conceived included abstract and virtual elements like cultural, social, spiritual, and civic elements, among others. I knew after reading both Reynolds and Mauk that scholars were coming to conclusions that were both similar to and different from mine about pedagogy using different space/place-related metaphors.

After reading *Relations, Locations, Positions: Composition Theory for Writing Teachers*, I knew that my specific understanding of ecocomposition had caused me to see it situated differently within our field from other scholars, such as editors Vandenberg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon. I had understood it as more of a theory of "relation," than "location," to use their terms. As I continued my review of scholarship that addressed ecological composition theories, I saw that this variation in language and understanding within such theories was drawing more and more attention.

The ecology of Composition Studies. *Writing Environments,* edited by Sidney I. Dobrin and Christopher J. Keller and published in 2005, demonstrated an awareness of the increasingly varied language being used to discuss ecological theories of composition. This collection took a unique approach to making sense of the phenomenon. It contained interviews with scholars outside of the field of composition: scientists, historians, environmental activists, philosophers, creative writers, nature writers, literary critics, and

ecocritics. It also contained response essays from those within the field of composition studies and some responses to those from the original scholars. Many of the interviews and response essays in the collection examined how concepts and language from these disciplines and areas of study had been borrowed by compositionists. The intent was to update older conceptions of environment and their relationships to writing and composition.

This collection helped to illustrate the evolution of much of the varied terminology within ecological theories of composition at the time. In their introduction, Dobrin and Keller explained the reasoning for their collection by pointing to the difficulty in designating one definition of ecological theories of composition: "No one umbrella term exists that adequately characterizes the diversity of such studies, though one often comes across phrases such as spatial criticism, critical or cultural geography, postmodern geography, ecocomposition, or cognitive mapping" (1, 2).

The editors attempted to make sense of the varied language and interpretations of it within ecological theories of composition; instead of creating categories like those in Vandenberg, Hum, and Clary-Lemon, Dobrin and Keller traced the history of the variation in terminology to create context. After identifying the difficulty in articulating a succinct definition of ecological theories of composition, they provided a detailed description of such theories, saying that regardless of the disciplinary influence or terminology, they all study "not only how place-related metaphors and concepts function, but also how various kinds of texts are able to shape places (and vice versa), and, additionally, how different models of place and space limit or expand our understanding of diverse texts, disciplines, peoples, cultures, and the world in general"

(2). Clearly, even though the editors attempt to provide some structure for making sense of these related theories, it could not easily be done.

Dobrin and Keller's collection deepened my understanding of the expansion of these ecological theories of composition—the variety of disciplinary influences, and the variety of terminology employed. They had taken a historical approach in an attempt to map out the context for some of the concepts and language being appropriated by ecological composition theorists.

The ecology of scholarly writing. Throughout the later 2000s, the second pattern I had noted began to emerge. Compositionists were arguing that ecological metaphors could help us better understand not just student writing, but all writing, including our own scholarly work. Keller went on to edit *The Locations of Composition* in 2007 with Christian R. Weisser. Keller and Weisser began their introduction to the collection by acknowledging the continued prominence of ecological theories of composition in the field based on space/place-related metaphors and concepts: "Nearly all the conversations in composition study place, space, and location in one way or another" (1). They, too, pointed to the variety of ways of defining these common terms and uses for many of them: "There is no way to easily characterize or codify these various scholarly conversations and activities, in part because of the multitude of differing ways these terms are defined and employed in the scholarship of composition studies" (1).

Instead of problematizing the "differing ways these terms are defined and employed," or trying to make sense of that variation in language and interpretation, Keller and Weisser argued for that variation's worth to scholars in the field, saying:

Our vision for the collection as a whole may certainly—and productively differ from the ideas presented in individual chapters. Such tension should be viewed as an asset to these conversations instead of a liability. Terms such as 'place,' 'space,' and 'location' are open-ended terms whose meanings are contextual and specific to individual arguments (6).

Here, they contended that this variety of language used to discuss similar ideas is necessary for those interested in an ecological understanding of writing. They closed their introduction to the collection with the following: "But readers, we hope, will continue to redivide, reconnect, and relocate these chapters and do so from their own ever-changing locations" (12). In saying this, Keller and Weisser encouraged us to operate with an ecological understanding of language and writing that includes not just student writing, but also the scholarship we create, publish, and read.

If we are operating under the assumption that our students' connections with environment are dynamic, that their writing is not only affected by the total environment in which it exists, but also affects that environment, it makes sense to me that we honor our own theoretical language's interconnectedness with environment, too. While I had felt compelled to take an ecological approach to this document, I could see now that such an approach had been based on a limited understanding of the greater scholarly environment in which it existed. I was thinking of a system that included the elements of my life experience, my research participants and their life experiences, Rockville University and the surrounding community. Until now, I had not thought of my document as a part of a system that included other scholarship in the field of composition studies.

After reading Keller and Weisser's collection, I began to think of my dissertation's "place" within the scholarship of composition studies. Reading diversely worded definitions and understandings of ecological composition theories had deepened my understanding of the context in which my study existed, and had helped me further articulate my own thoughts. I saw now that this document could have the capacity to affect other compositionists' understandings of the same theories. As an emergent scholar with an ecological understanding of the work in our field, I did not need to look for vindication or confirmation by aligning myself and my work with the work of other, more established scholars in the field; instead, I needed to consider why there were similarities and differences between our "locations": our word choices, definitions, interpretations, and applications of the theories that guide our studies and our work. Also, I needed to think of my document as an opportunity for my audience to do the same.

The ecology of scholarly research. My decision to take an ecological approach to my scholarly research specifically gained support from the field through the 2000s. Other scholars also began to make cases for specific, ecologically-based approaches to research writing. While Keller and Weisser had enabled me to see my study as situated ecologically among other related scholarship, Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Clay Spinuzzi, Rebecca J. Rickly, and Carole Clark Pepper argued for an ecological understanding of individual research document approach and design in their 2008 article "The Importance of Harmony: An Ecological Metaphor for Writing Research."

I had defended my decision to apply ecocomposition theory to my design of this document in its first chapter by discussing how my background and biases have affected my thinking about my research and writing. I had also cited Karen Norum's "Black

(W)holes: A Researcher's Place in Her Writing," the general influence of the reading I was doing in ecocomposition, as well as a Thich Nhat Hanh quote: "The wave lives the life of a wave and at the same time, the life of the water. When you breathe, you breathe for all of us" (132). Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Clark Pepper succinctly stated a rationale which I had earlier piecemealed together: "This ecological orientation enables us to research rhetorically: to devise and argue for a systematic account of reality in ways that others find persuasive, useful, and widely applicable while remaining sensitive to the incompleteness and the distortion of a single account" (389). This reinforced the decisions I had made about reporting my study data in this narrative document.

Ecocomposition as post-composition. The expansion of an ecological understanding of writing was also reflected elsewhere. In March of 2009, Dobrin and Weisser were featured speakers at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in San Francisco, CA, presenting a talk titled "Becoming Ecocomposition." The session was chaired by Marilyn Cooper. During the presentation, Weisser provided a review of ecocomposition's evolution and of the variety of terminology used by compositionists to discuss similar ideas. He covered general definitions of space and place, and then went on to discuss some additional interdisciplinary influences on the horizon of ecocomposition that were new to me: not only spatial theory, but complexity theory and post-humanist theories. Ecological theories were continuing to appropriate language and concepts from other disciplines and studies.

As Weisser concluded, he urged the audience to stop thinking about writing solely in terms of students and student subjects. He proposed instead that we truly embrace the potential of ecocomposition and think of writing as a system, explaining that thinking

about our writing and our students' writing solely in classroom terms was not truly ecological. This was in line with Mathieu, Stenberg, and Arant Whealy's arguments that we quit conceiving of service learning sites as extensions of classrooms and judging writing project success in purely classroom terms, and Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Clark Pepper's argument that we approach not just student writing, but all writing, including our own scholarly writing, as situated ecologically.

In his presentation, Dobrin elaborated on Weisser's conclusion, proposing a study of "post-composition" that "moves toward developing theories of writing grounded in spatial, networked, and complex ecological thinking." He argued that ecocomposition, when conceived as a post-process composition theory, could never be more than a theory of the teaching of writing, which does not acknowledge writing as a whole system. He pointed to the limitations created by the higher education system, and how these affected our understanding of the places in which writing exists.

While Keller and Weisser's framing for *Locations of Composition* and Fleckenstein, Spinuzzi, Rickly, and Clark Pepper's article had argued for compositionists to expand our understanding of whose writing could be approached and situated ecologically, here, Dobrin was arguing for an expansion of our notions of what that environment entailed. Mauk had made a call for expanding our concepts of academic space; in this presentation, Dobrin was arguing that writing existed in much more than just academic space, or parts of the total environment guided by academic concerns. Dobrin's ideas provided me with new, even more open-ended ways of conceiving the term "system."

After listening to Dobrin and Weisser's presentation, I felt I could say that the definition of ecocomposition I had been interested in putting into practice with this study had attempted to expand notions of environment past campus boundaries and into the community, but had still been primarily guided by academic concerns. I had been hopeful that my service learning writing projects would help demonstrate to students how complex their connections were to their total environment, how their writing could work to interconnect them with many parts of their environment, not just their classroom, and how an awareness of those dynamic relationships with parts of their environment could help them make choices as writers. My original research design had been guided by ideas similar to Mauk's—that we look for ways to extend academic space. I had asked students to write for public audiences, but based a great deal of my estimation on whether their projects were "successful" or not in classroom terms.

After considering the arguments of Mathieu, Stenberg and Arant Whealy, which argued for definitions of success in service learning that are based on not just classroom, but also community concerns, and now Weisser and Dobrin, who were arguing that writing is situated in an environment much more vast and complex than just the university, I was beginning to conceive of a model of service learning that might work with a less limited definition of "success:" one that might be more closely aligned with Dobrin's "post-composition" in that it would acknowledge the classroom and its accompanying academic concerns as part of the total environment, but one that also acknowledged the non-academic concerns of parts of the environment not attached to the classroom.

Their presentation contained many ideas and conclusions similar to my own as well as new ideas that appealed to me, so I felt compelled to ask Dobrin and Weisser about their feelings on service learning during the Q&A session. I asked them to comment on whether they thought some applications of service learning might be agreeable implementations of their definitions of ecocomposition. Weisser responded with some general comments, but seemed hesitant to agree to any specific pedagogy to accompany their proposed theories.

As their work was primarily theoretical, I did not find this surprising. I also felt as though it provided me with somewhat new ground to cover here, in this document, the focus of which has always been to study the worth and potential of the connection between ecocomposition and service learning. While it might have been satisfying to hear an audible "seal of approval" from those who had inspired me to conduct this study, such an utterance might have also, in many ways, taken away my opportunity for any remotely original scholarly assertions of my own, assertions based on my synthesis of theory, published data, and my own collected data. Operating with an ecological understanding of my own theory and pedagogy, I also felt less compelled to seek that "seal of approval." After all, I was thinking, studying, researching, and writing from quite a different location than Weisser or Dobrin.

Considering the research I had conducted in this new context altered my perspective on it. I had a stronger sense of where my work fit into the larger environment of composition studies. I had arrived at some similar conclusions to the work being published soon after my study, but I had also used different terminology than some of my fellow scholars, and interpreted some of the same language differently than others. This

had contributed to a more finely honed definition of ecocomposition, for me—one that encouraged not just our students, but us as well to view our writing as part of a complex system that included more than a classroom, a university, a single field of study, or academe.

The scholarship published after the conclusion of my study also drew my attention to problems and weaknesses in my research design, like my system for placing research participants at unfamiliar sites and my classroom-centric criteria for judging the success of the service learning projects. This made me eager to propose a new path forward for my own inquiry and that of others in the future.

Relevance of Study: Informing Service Learning, Public Writing, and Ecological Theories of Writing

I had begun this study with a specific understanding of the theoretical terms from my earlier readings of Cooper's "The Ecology of Writing" and Dobrin and Weisser's *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition.* I had defined "ecocomposition" for myself using Dobrin and Weisser's ideas: as a study of "the total relations of an organism to its environment, organic and inorganic" (9), as a theory that asked us to study "interaction, economy, and interconnectedness" (116) of writers, their writing, and their audiences as elements of an ecosystem. I had then sought to study pedagogy that might put such a theory into practice, and decided on service learning.

I know now that this data contributes to a growing body of service learning data collected in a rural environment. The data I present here and the conclusions I base on it have been influenced by the fact that they were collected in a rural environment. This means my research participants did not deal with the same issues as some students in

urban service learning projects. My research participants did encounter obstacles particular to rural environments, such as the travel difficulties created by longer distances and a smaller number of sites with which to work. These issues are particular to the specific environment in which the study took place.

My service learning projects were designed to cultivate not just connection to environment, but also interconnection—chances for the research participants to see their writing both affect and be affected by their environment. Research participants like Callie, Mae, and Arnie had experiences with such interconnection with their proposal that created a tutoring program at a local middle school. So did Amber, when she presented the resident at the local retirement home she had been visiting with the partial memoir on which they had collaborated. Noah and Camille were affected by their sites, the local maritime and children's museums respectively, and created exhibits that then affected those environments. They were able to see value in their work that transcended the academic part of their environment; their work had a greater value than a grade. While I can see in retrospect that I judged the success of the projects in mainly academic, classroom terms, I think there is data in this study that helps to prove the value of expanding our pedagogy to address the total environment, or system, in which our students study writing—both academic and non-academic.

My experiences lead me to argue for a continued place for ecocomposition in our field among all of the other current scholarship on ecological theories of composition: a study of how our students' interconnectedness to the "ecosystem" in which they exist affects their writing and is affected by their writing, as well as a study of that system itself. An ecological approach of this sort can allow all of us, students and teachers, to

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study interconnections among writer, writing, and environment in all of its complexity. Those interconnections are always changing, as the spaces and places in which we and our students exist, write, and the spaces and places their writing creates are ever-changing and shifting.

For this reason, the nature of that system and those interconnections deserves our attention, and we need to find ways to help our students negotiate the many elements of their environment and understand those interconnections—not just once, but again and again. I believe this is particularly important for composition scholars to study because I believe those interconnections can teach us and our students to find ways to evaluate and negotiate our ever-changing places. As those places keep changing, we must continually find them and redefine them, and think critically about how they affect our writing.

My conclusions, which strive to take into account my own biases, interpretation of my data, and interpretation of surrounding scholarship, suggest to me that Dobrin's proposal to move our field into a study of "post-composition," a study that considers the factors present in our classrooms, colleges, and universities as well as the factors present in our greater environment, has merit. I believe I began this study with a more classroom-based concept of what constituted success in student writing, and an inclination much like Jonathan Mauk's to extend the spaces we and our students conceive of as academic. I would go so far as to propose that the version of ecocomposition for which I advocate now is a theory of post-composition: a theory that allows for a study of all the connections we have with our total environment, one that asks us to study our interactions with our field, higher education, but also the other parts of our environment, and to consider how our writing functions in all of those parts.

While I have reviewed varied uses of the terms "eco," "ecological," and "ecocomposition" in my review of composition studies scholarship in this document, my use of the term "ecocomposition" will now refer to the definition I think is most current and useful: an ecological theory of writing that studies the connections and interconnections among parts of environment—including academic elements for many of us, but also much more, and including not only our students, but also ourselves.

Limitations of Study: What My Study Was Unable to Contribute

This study was designed to provide multiple perspectives, including disparate viewpoints on the research participants' experiences, and it did, but some of the data pointed to problems with the study itself. First, there is data like Nancy and Alexander's that repeatedly points to a lack of student understanding of connection between service learning site work and classroom work. Also, Richard left the study with reservations about including a service learning component in a composition class, especially as a single instructor without assistance. I believe the students' lack of understanding of connection between site and classroom and Richard's feelings about implementing service learning were both due to the specific course setup.

I had sound reasons for placing myself in the classroom as a teacher researcher alongside the main instructor of the course; however, a slightly altered implementation might have resulted in more positive experiences for some of the students and for the instructor of the course. A syllabus making room for both instructor and teacher researcher would have to take into account how service learning was discussed and put into operation. I believe service learning models with variations from the one I studied for this dissertation could have the ability to unify the site and classroom work for

students such as Alexander. Service learning is being institutionalized and supported in new ways within universities. Interdisciplinary service learning coordinators and service learning centers are sometimes part of colleges and universities. Setups such as these could make service learning work more approachable and manageable for instructors like Richard, who might be thinking about taking on service learning in their composition courses.

Second, students like Sabrina expressed a great deal of anxiety about the writing projects early on. After reading the work of Mathieu and Reynolds, I can see that my inclinations to place students in unfamiliar places and require them to negotiate that new place and potentially unfamiliar writing project mostly on their own were ill conceived. Such a setup could adversely affect the student writer, the writing, and the site. I can see now that writing projects at sites already familiar to the students could provide venues for valuable and important action, reflection, and study of interconnection.

Third, I believe my inexperience as a researcher affected my data. When my research participants misunderstood interview or journal prompt questions, or interpreted them in ways I had not anticipated, I did not always know how to steer them toward addressing the issues most important to me and this study. I did not always gather the most informative data because of this. A few times, I also led the research participants toward answers I wanted to hear without realizing it, as described in Amber and Ainsley's interview. Choosing a narrative approach in which to report my data allowed me to include my awareness of such missteps and realizations. In chronicling events like Amber and Ainsley's interview, I was able to include event details, what I thought at the time, and then also what I thought in retrospect.

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As later scholarship drove home the importance of measuring success in service learning in more than purely academic terms, I also regret not collecting more data that could have helped me understand the service learning projects' success as viewed by everyone involved. I regret not collecting data from my site contacts regarding how they determined the needs at the sites that could be filled with the service learning projects, their roles in the design of the projects, and their long-term use of the materials produced.

I chose to use all of these problems indicated in my data as a lens for my review of scholarship published after my study was concluded. In doing so, I am able to propose hopeful paths forward for future teaching and research in ecocomposition and service learning. I feel as though this data, which could dissuade me and others from engaging in service learning in composition, instead helps to productively focus the refinement of my service learning model and the possibilities for future research.

Call for Future Research: New Methods, New Concepts of Place, New Definitions of Success

Based on my data, conclusions, and the scholarship that has followed, I feel as though there are new inquiries related to mine that could elicit valuable information about service learning's relationship to ecocomposition. I believe a study similar to my own conducted on an altered service learning model could provide further data on this relationship. I also believe that scholars have expanded our field's ways of conceiving "success" and "goals" in the practices surrounding this theory and pedagogy to include more attention to the needs and expectations of our audiences outside academe. I think there is a great deal of potential for exciting new research, new data, and new conclusions as a result of all of this.

Changes to service learning model. In regards to a viable service learning model that works to put ecocomposition into practice, I still feel that a thoughtful combination of Deans' writing with and writing about the community, but one that takes into account the research on service learning, public writing, and ecocomposition reviewed here which followed chronologically could provide a pedagogical model capable of putting ecocomposition theory into useful practice. I now imagine such a service learning model as having the following elements in place:

1. Sites of the students' choosing, including ones on campus and/or to which they are already attached

2. Close interaction, dialogue, and reflection

3. Organic, fluid project structure

4. Seamless combination of academic and non-academic exploration

Students choosing sites. First, the new service learning model would need to allow for students to continue choosing their own sites. Instead of choosing sites from a list compiled by the instructor or a service learning coordinator, students should be encouraged to seek out their own places of interest, or even better, to work with sites to which they are already attached. I would be willing to let students work with groups on campus; Mathieu pointed to valid concerns about asking students to work with a completely new, unfamiliar part of their environment (19); this was echoed in Reynolds' argument that we need to "encourage their understanding of the politics of space in the immediate university environment" (136). Classroom writing prompts might be used to engage students in inquiry that could help them locate possible sites.

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Before my study, I had valued "shaking students up" by placing them in an unfamiliar site and letting them negotiate their way through it; I believed it would cultivate closer familiarity with the complex rhetorical situation of their site project. After reading the work of Mathieu and Reynolds, I saw that this could negatively impact both the quality and the quantity of work occurring at the site, as well ask for unfair travel through "geographies of exclusion" (Reynolds 9). I had been disappointed when Alexander proposed working at his mother's place of work because I thought he would miss out on valuable negotiations with new parts of his environment. By not considering the possibilities at sites with which the research participants were already familiar, where students could build on their existing familiarity with a site to communicate with site contacts and help determine real needs, I had been cutting down on the time students had to work on the writing itself. I had been in danger of imposing projects on the students and the sites that might not have been as beneficial to either as I thought.

Keeping the writing projects on campus would mean this practice did not constitute service learning, by some definitions, which stress "civic responsibility," and "community" as a way to separate the work from campus internships, student organization work, work study, etc. The definition I cited in the first chapter of this dissertation reads, "Service learning is a method by which students learn through active participation in thoughtfully organized service; is conducted in, and meets the needs of the community; is integrated into and enhances the academic curriculum; includes structured time for reflection and helps foster civic responsibility" (Huckin 50). Rockville University's current definition of service learning likewise refers specifically to civic responsibility:

Academic service learning is a course-based, credit-bearing educational

experience in which students: participate in an organized service activity

that meets identified community needs; and reflect on the service activity

in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader

appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of both personal

values and civic responsibility (Academic Service Learning).

Definitions like these stress "community needs" to differentiate the work from

campus activities. I feel the elements of the writing projects outlined here that are crucial

to aligning it with ecocomposition theory are still present in a model that allows for

exploration of sites within the university. For this reason, I allowed some of the research

participants in my study to engage with sites on Rockville University's campus. I am

more concerned that the writing projects contain opportunities for students to not only

connect, but also interconnect with their environment outside of a classroom and purely

academic concerns than I am with the projects following definitions of service learning

strictly; therefore, while I still conceive of the projects described here as service learning

for the many commonalities they share with similarly defined writing projects, I

understand that they do not meet everyone's definition of the term.

Interaction, dialogue, and reflection. Second, a new model would need to

provide those students with more opportunities for inquiry than the model I studied for

this dissertation, once they determined their sites. The students would need to think

critically about their every-changing connection to the sites, what site needs could be

addressed through writing, and exactly how they could go about addressing those needs.

Close interaction and continual dialogue with people attached to the site (not just a

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previously determined site contact, but other people as well) and numerous opportunities for reflective writing could be used to aid in this decision-making process.

Another kind of reflection would more closely align a new service learning model with more recent work in ecocomposition: reflection on place. When I began designing my service learning model, I focused on implementing ecocomposition by finding ways to enable students to study connections and interconnections; I designed my model with the intent of illustrating the idea of a metaphorical ecosystem for students. Now, in consideration of some of the newer scholarship on ecological writing theories, like Dobrin and Weisser's 2009 presentation at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, I would create continual opportunities for written reflection and inquiry into the specifics of place: of what does each student's total environment or system exist? Academic elements? Public elements? How do those elements intersect and interconnect? In turn, how and where does the course writing function?

Organic project structure. Third, a new model would need to create room for the process to remain fluid, to allow for exploration of whatever connections the student and the site felt were important, in order to be ecological. I had perceived the service learning projects to be much simpler when I first designed them; I did not anticipate some of the end results, and I initially resisted deviations from the projects I had imagined, such as Callie, Mae, and Arnie's decision to write a proposal to the administrators at Grand Middle School. An instructor teaching with the model I propose here would need to stay open to many possibilities for project work.

Site and classroom work unified. Last, a new model would need to intertwine the project work and the rest of the first-year composition coursework more closely. I believe

doing so could help students feel less divided between separate worlds. It could enable them to explore their site work and their academic work more as part of a unified system, a total environment. This did not always happen in the course Richard and I designed together. That adversely affected some of the research participants' feelings about the worth of their projects, as well as the quality of the very projects themselves. Ainsley's proposal to Advocates for Youth is one example of this. It was difficult to understand and it was less persuasive by any standards, academic or not, because she had not worked to implement what she was learning about writing in her composition course. She did not apply the ideas being taught by Richard in the organization of her writing or her use of research.

For these reasons, I want to see if changes to the model we had used would work to eliminate some of these adverse effects. An altered service learning model for subsequent study might work to negate the separation between site work and classroom that ours may have created with the presence of an instructor and teacher researcher and elicit interesting results, while still allowing for a more comprehensive definition of "system" that does not focus solely on classroom concerns and standards. In fact, I believe a model containing the elements I have outlined above might enable students to think about the academic part of their environment in more holistic terms—one that eliminates separation in their minds between campus and surrounding community.

I would like to think that if the course were taught by a single instructor who worked to interweave the writing projects closely with the course material, the problematic disconnection in the research participants' understanding of their site writing and classroom writing would be diminished. While I have to take into account Richard's

feelings about the experience, I also know my own syllabus for a first-year composition course with such a component would look different from the one we had designed together; it would not contain "service learning days" and "academic writing days," for instance.

Because my own interest in teaching composition had been what inspired me to begin this research project, I feel it necessary to look at the study in this light. A study based on a less compartmentalized syllabus might elicit different results, and I feel this research would be necessary before I could come to a final conclusion on whether or not the service learning component was too much of a burden on students and instructor, as Richard's experiences had led him to believe.

While my study identified issues that need attention, I think those issues are specifically and productively addressed by the more recent scholarship I have referenced here. Like any composition classroom practice, service learning is unpredictable; there is great room for variation in approach and perception from instructor to instructor and from student to student. I feel strongly, however, that service learning can create positive and valuable learning experiences for composition students. I feel it has great potential to enable ecological awareness of rhetorical situations.

Outside of a refined service learning model designed to implement ecocomposition, I feel there are a few other possibilities for research closely related to mine based on the more recent scholarship in public writing and ecological theories of writing.

The specifics of service learning location. New understandings of specific place in service learning have come about. I feel as though a study of service learning which

works to take into account the specifics of geographical location for each service learning site and its correlating college or university would provide useful information for higher education service learning practitioners. I think future service learning research needs to consider whether the study occurs in an urban or rural environment, for instance, in order to study the specifics of how the differences in those locations affect the students' and the sites' experiences. More specific demographic information than this might inform a study in even more specific ways.

New measures of success. I see great potential for the expansion of the paradigm under which service learning research had been conducted prior to my study. Mathieu's book and Stenberg and Arant Whealey's article made convincing arguments against focusing on academically-initiated, predetermined end products and goals. Jonathan Mauk's essay used metaphors from critical geography to argue for a rethinking of academic space. Dobrin and Weisser's 2009 Conference on College Composition and Communication presentation asked their audience to think of ecocomposition as a theory for studying a system that includes classrooms, academe, and also nonacademic places. Arguments such as Mathieu's, Stenberg and Arant-Whealy's, Mauk's, and Dobrin and Weisser's create new possibilities for service learning research. A study of student and teacher perceptions of writing function and "success" in relation to the understandings of the place in which writing happens could be informative for service learning scholars and practitioners.

Final Conclusions and Parting Thoughts

Overall, I feel the model of service learning I studied in this dissertation and to which I am now proposing the refinements outlined above holds promise to implement

ecocomposition in a first-year composition classroom. Many of my research participants had approached writing tasks like anticipating audience needs, gathering primary and secondary research, and implementing both in their writing with awareness of the complexity of their environment. They wrote a lot about how their experiences changed their perceptions of certain parts of their environment—children, the elderly, assisted living facilities, or specific places or organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters or Advocates for Youth. The writing tasks sometimes gave the research participants an opportunity to see that they could actively connect with their environment. In turn, connecting with their environment often motivated them to write, and enabled them to proceed confidently with unfamiliar writing tasks.

Research participants like Camille, Callie, Mae, Arnie, Amber, and possibly Noah and Ainsley could also see how they were interconnected through their site project writing. They understood that the writing itself would be shaped by the concerns of their environment, that writing often entailed finding their places. They also understood how that writing could eventually affect their environment; they understood that they had the ability to define their places.

My research participants who reported less positive or valuable experiences were crucial in helping me identify problems; these problems prompted analysis that enabled me to propose new paths forward for service learning as ecocomposition, paths about which I am hopeful and excited.

I would like to continue my work with service learning and public writing as a composition instructor. I would like to teach composition courses that give my students opportunities to explore their environment in all of its complexity and how their writing

functions there. I hope to give them an opportunity for finding their places in their

environment, for cultivating an understanding of how places change, and lastly, for

learning how their writing can be a part of defining those places.

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<div align="center">**APPENDIXES**</div>

Appendix A: Billie's Testimonial for Recreational Facilities, Rockville University

Power Yoga is a group fitness class that allows you to get a full body workout in a very relaxing way. You do all types of non-stressful stretches and poses that cover your entire body. I do not think there were any muscles that were not stretched. Not only does it work your muscles, but also you become very focused with your breathing. Your mind becomes very focused with your body and what it is doing. It is an excellent way to have self-control over your body. There are a number of techniques used during the class. Each person is shown different options to stretch certain muscles. Once given all the options, you are allowed to choose what type of stretches and poses you want to use. It is a class that is for everyone of all ages.

Appendix B: Lori's Narrative for Big Brothers Big Sisters of Rockville County

BBBS is mostly volunteer, with minimal paid staff. This program is funded by weekly bingo games, United Way, and individual donations. There are no fees for this service.

Adult females and girls are matched, along with adult male and boys. They prefer this type of match, but boys can be matched with adult females. Couples can also be matched with one child. The couple may spend times as a threesome or as pairs if one adult can't be there. Families can also be matched with a child. A family consists of a mother, father, and there kids. This presents the child with a home atmosphere.

For my service learning project I was matched with a Big Sister, Liz, and her Little, Bethany. Liz has been apart of the program for about a year now. She is a paid employee that helps with the matching of the Bigs and Littles. In order to become a Big you must have a year of residence in the state. Liz heard about this organization through her local church. She then applied to the program. After a year she got a job with BBBS as a program coordinator, and got paired with Bethany. The matches made between Bigs and Littles are based on similar interests, personality, overall compatibility, geographic proximity, age preferences and personal experiences. Liz got matched with Bethany because of there personalities, they both like to be active and Liz chose to drive to another town to pick up Bethany. The role of Big Sister or brother should be as follows: unconditional friendship, positive role model, friend and listener, teacher of the right way to do things, limit setter, sets limits on behavior, and a guide to the future.

How the littles get involved in the program is if they are from a single parent family or if the family is having problems and if the child needs to make more friends. Bethany became part of the program because she is from a single parent family. She lives

with her mother, her sister and two younger brothers. Bethany is ten years old. Bethany at first was very shy, but the more they hung out the more open she became. Bethany and Liz meet every other weekend.

Bethany's favorite things to do with Liz include going to the speed skating events, climbing the rock climbing wall, painting, and bowling. Bethany also enjoys playing baseball with other friends. Her most favorite thing that she has done so far with Liz is going to the children's museum.

Bethany and Liz both feel that there relationship is going very well and they enjoy hanging out. Once Bethany turns 18, they will no longer be matched together. But, relationships can last a lifetime.

In conclusion, Bethany and Liz are very happy that they have been matched together. I hope that someday I will have the opportunity to be involved with BBBS and make a difference in a child's life.

Appendix C: Callie, Mae, and Arnie's Proposal to administration, Grand Middle School

Proposal for Grand Middle School

To whom it may concern:

Having spent a number of hours of the local Before and After School Program located at Grand Middle School, many of us feel as if we can enhance this service by starting another beneficial program for the children.

As of right now, the service provides an open period of play time. We would like to add a program that gives the children an opportunity for focused positive learning as well as a chance for fun and entertainment. Our plan is to set up an after school tutoring program to help the students become active learners and motivated to do homework or study. Students who want a place to play will also be given several options. For example, jump rope, times tables, verb tag, and solar system frozen people are a few examples of how we want to portray active, fun, learning. Also, we want a separate area for students who need individual attention to enhance their concentration.

Another idea we had was for the teachers to let us know of any upcoming tests. That was we will think of a game where the students can come and have fun studying. The teachers could also use our program for students who need help, but refuse to get help. This could possibly be a form of punishment and bring new learning experiences to the children.

Going to Grand Middle School and talking to some of the students, we got their perspectives on the issue. Questioning them as to how they would feel if college students came a few times a week to study with them and play games to help you learn, Mike,

Grade 5, responded, "Yeah, that would be fun." Clearly, the students are interested in learning. Another girl, Kayla, Grade 4, responded, "It's fun when you help me with my homework now. That would be cool if more teenagers would come too."

If this proposal does follow through, this is what the week will consist of: Three days a week: Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. Beginning at 3:30 until roughly 5:00-5:30. We will have an equal number of boy and girl tutors the students can pick who they would be most comfortable with. As of right now, two volunteers a day would be there. We would also like the teachers to know we are there. Perhaps sending out an e-mail and putting up posters in the hallways so kids can read it themselves. Encouraging the teachers to have their students come, we will do our best to help the kids.

Realizing that we need the approval before anything major can get started, we aren't positive to an actual starting date. Furthermore, discussion and planning is necessary to make things happen. You can contact us by e-mail to finalize plans if this proposal is of interest or by phone. Thanks for your time.

Appendix D: Nancy's collaborative memoir with Margaret, Evenshade Nursing Center

The Trials and Tribulations of Love

"That's him…that's my college sweetheart," she said, pointing at an aged picture of a young man dressed in a war uniform. She beamed while she told me that they had met at Rockville University and fell instantly in love. "We were both pursuing degrees in education. Isn't he handsome?" They were engaged by the time she graduated with her degree in elementary education in 1942, and married within the next year.

Margaret, now 85 years old, but still sharp in the mind and quite lively, loved to tell her life story. And I loved to listen. It's not everyday that you get a live history lesson. When I went to speak with her at the nursing home, I learned about the culture and social processes of her growing up time period; but more importantly, I discovered a love story of great faith, dedication, and strength.

Being family oriented, Margaret passed up a full scholarship to Bowling Green University giving her the opportunity to obtain her doctorate degree. She decided she would rather stay at home locally, teach for awhile, and then raise her children. Things didn't go exactly to plan though, as things rarely do, and she later came to regret passing up her free ride in Ohio, as she found she would have had time to do both.

Margaret and James were married and decided to live in Southtown, where she was born and raised, and most of her family resided. They were very much in love and looking forward to starting a life together, but as Margaret put it, they would soon experience the many "trials and tribulations in love." She was offered a job teaching, which she accepted. James also got an English teaching job, but it was short lived.

World War II was already in full swing; Pearl Harbor was already attacked, and several troops were sent overseas fighting. James was drafted and sent overseas for 19 months, while Margaret was left heartbroken and worried sick. As if it wasn't hard enough to be separated, James became severely sick while overseas with the lung disease, tuberculosis. His diagnosis was so bad that the doctors in the army didn't expect him to live long and he was immediately sent back home.

Margaret looked at me and rolled her eyes, "What did they expect? You can't very well send a tall Norwegian to the middle of a hot and humid jungle."

There was no cure for tuberculosis in those days; the only treatment was to live in the sanitarium. Because it is a highly contagious disease (through kissing, coughing, and sneezing), the sanitarium was a hospital for patients with tuberculosis only. It was a well ventilated building that helped the patients breathe good quality air.

The only sanitarium in the area was located in Rockville. James was placed there and Margaret moved back to Rockville. She was anxious about leaving her hometown, having to live alone, and especially about the health of her husband. For being such a newlywed couple, they barely had any time together before he was sent to the war and then the sanitarium.

Music became the only comfort for all of her stress. "Whenever anything was wrong, it felt so good to go to the piano and just pound all of your worries away on the keys." While growing up, she had attended a music conservatory, and spent 15 years playing the piano. Her life was entirely built around music; she played the pipe organ at two churches, directed a church choir, and accompanied several people and groups.

Knowing the effort and time it takes to become a good musician, I asked why she didn't continue with a career in music.

"My friends and family always asked me the same thing. They said I could have easily majored in music education, but I wanted to try something different. I had spent 15 years of my life completely absorbed in music, and I wanted it to become more of a hobby than a career."

It was the middle of September, when they moved back to Rockville, and she assumed that all teaching positions would be filled for the year. Luckily, she knew several people at Rockville University. There was a fresh position open at the college, and one of her professors heard she was back in town. She was offered the job immediately on the terms that she would work towards her master's degree and receive master's level pay while working. Her position involved teaching aspiring young students how to educate.

It's interesting the way the education program was set up. Instead of students going out into the public schools to student teach, there was a "lab school" inside the university that included grades K-12. The education majors would then teach the classes while under Margaret's supervision.

"I loved that job more than anything. I was able to work with all ages, from young elementary students all the way up to college students," she said smiling, and then with a wink, she added, "It was a better system than how they do it now."

"I ended up working much longer than I had originally planned. I had wanted to have children and raise them at a younger age, but that's kind of hard to do when your husband is in the sanitarium."

It turns out that James had an amazing purpose for living at the sanitarium. He started growing stronger every day. He required bed rest for 20 hours of the day, but Margaret could still visit him daily and she did.

There were several kids of all ages that had been in the sanitarium nearly all of their lives. (Since there was no cure for tuberculosis, patients rarely left the facility.) Because of this, many of them had never gone to school. During his free hours, James would sit on the children's beds, visiting and teaching them how to read and write.

"I was so happy he was able to do something that made him happy," Margaret told me.

The doctor admired what James was doing, and proposed an idea: If they receive a grant from the state, they could turn part of the hospital into a school, and he wanted James to teach it. It worked and soon he was teaching school 2 hours a day, which continued on for the next 14 years.

It became obvious that James' health was vastly improving. The doctor was amazed how strong he became, especially since in his first x-rays, his lungs were filled with fluid. It was 14 years later that antibiotics came out; these "miracle drugs" stopped tuberculosis from progressing any further.

Margaret and James were then free to live happily and worry free. It was the lifestyle they had been dreaming of since they first met. They had two healthy children, one boy and one girl, that have grown up and had very successful jobs.

When James was discharged from the sanitarium, the doctor was amazed at his progress, and pulled Margaret aside, saying, "I think it saved his life." Without hesitating she knew exactly to what he was referring and readily agreed.

"Teaching at the sanitarium gave him a purpose to be alive. He had a reason to why he had become sick; he was helping others and improving their lives. It absolutely fired his recovery and he beat all the odds." This was said with a somber, yet proud remembrance. She then went on to say he died at the age of 82, quite an amazing feat for a man with tuberculosis at that time. I could tell the love for him was still as strong and the wound was still fresh.

As she wrapped up her storytelling, I remembered her saying there are many "trials and tribulations" in love. Upon looking up the definition in the Webster dictionary, I found that tribulation means "an experience that tests one's endurance, patience, or faith." Now I think to myself, there couldn't be a better word to describe what the two went through. They were tested more than once and they passed with flying colors. It's reassuring to find a story every now and then that confirms the statement that *love conquers all*.

Appendix E: Alexander's collaborative memoir with Irene, Gray Ridge Heights

The other day I met a woman unlike any other woman that I had ever met. I was with her for probably a total of a half an hour, at the most, but she taught me a lot and she made me realize that there is nothing to be scared of in growing old. That it will happen to the best of us. But that we'll always have our memories. Good memories, bad memories, funny memories and sad memories. We'll always have them. And even if we do have to move into a nursing home, or in her case, an Assisted Living Facility, no one can take those away from us. She also taught me that you're allowed to have a sense of humor about sad things, that you shouldn't dwell on things that aren't your fault, and things you cannot change. She also taught me one really important thing, that you can teach old dog new tricks.

Irene is 94 years old. She was born in 1909, in Eastburg, where she also grew up. At the age of nine she started taking piano lessons and she has kept playing most of her life. She also taught piano lessons. During church services she used to play the organ but since the stroke she had five years ago she hasn't been able to play. It left her with 70% use of her right leg and only 20% use of her left hand and arm, which keeps her from playing the piano, and also keeps her from walking on her own. She now has to use either a walker or a wheelchair.

I asked her if she married her childhood sweetheart and she told me that her life "isn't that easy." She was dating a man, when he went away to Chicago to study art. He then got a girl pregnant. The girl's family was in Al Capone's mob, so he had to end up marry her instead of Irene. She then married her husband, Ed, in August of 1933, whom also was from Eastburg. He worked for the phone company, and during the Depression

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he only made $80 a month. They traveled a lot in the United States, and didn't stay in Eastburg their whole married life. In 1940 they moved to Southtown for four years. Then they moved for two years in Rockville. After Rockville, they lived three years in Maroonville. Then they moved back to Rockville and that is where she lives right now. She loves being able to look outside her room and see the mounds of snow. Although she never got to go, she's always been interested in the Orient and would love to someday be able to travel to China or India, but now days, "You never know if you'll get out alive," so she knows she'll never be able to go.

She and Ed had four children together; two boys and two girls. Don, the oldest, has a masters in Biology from RU and went to Illinois to get his Ph.D. He had polio at the age of one, but luckily, it didn't result in any permanent damage. The second oldest child, Joan, went toRU also. She was lacking eight credit hours and so she never got her degree. She was an engineer at South Bell until she retired. Jim, her other son, got a business degree from RU and worked for Ford, but is now retired. The youngest of her children, Pat, has a degree in Elementary Education, from RU. She taught for 13 years at Sawyer Elementary. She then got married and divorced and then married her childhood sweetheart who she now lives with in Green Hills. He is a policeman. Irene also has eight grandchildren and seven great grandchildren, with the eighth on its way.

Probably the most important thing that happened in Irene's life was on May 8, 1981; the year that she graduated college. It wasn't very common for a female to go to college back when she was in her early 20's, so instead, she waited until she was 65, and went. She enrolled in RU at the age of 65, and started taking twelve credit hours. Eventually, she realized that was too much for her, so she dropped back to eight. It took

her seven and a half years to get her bachelors degree. She graduated with a degree in Liberal Arts and Earth Science. She said that, "like most girls," she hated math. She graduated with a 3.6 grade point average, Magna Cum Laude, number nine in her class. She was 72 by the time she got her degree. All throughout her studies her husband would sit by her and tell her, "You're studying too much, pushing yourself too hard, you're not going to live to graduate!" And then, ironically, "He died on me a year before I graduated!" He died of a heart attack in 1980.

That is one thing I noticed about her, even though she is 94 years old, she is still sharp as a nail. She even said herself, that her body is giving out, but her mind is still all there. She described it as her, "framework is wearing out." She has horrible osteoporosis, but she still has perfect eyesight, her own teeth and no hearing aids. But she does have high blood pressure, which can be treated with medication. She has had three hips operations and two shoulder operations though, and now she can't raise her arms above her head anymore because her shoulders are going bad again. Because of that, Gray Ridge has raised her to a level two, adding $500 to her rent a month.

Besides playing the piano, she also loved to read when she was younger, and to this day she still does. She has about 600 books. Two of her favorite authors are Creighton and Ludlum. In her room, she's got a book holder on her door and it is stuffed with books. She also enjoys watching movies. Her children buy her a lot of movies for Christmas or her birthday. She has over 196 movies that she has copied herself, plus the ones that her family has given her. I noticed some titles such as "Titanic," "Mrs. Doubtfire," and "Cats."

Irene has had many jobs in her lifetime. The first job she ever had was a clerk. That was in 1927, and she only had that job for one day, and then she quit. She only made six dollars a week and when she asked for a raise, they told her no; hence the reason she quit. She has also been a telephone operator, long distance information person, piano teacher, student, bookkeeper and a stenographer.

When asked a memorable moment in her life, besides her graduating college at 72, she talked about a car accident she was in 50 years ago. She said it was one of the worst days of her life. Her 18 year old daughter was driving, Irene was sitting in the middle, a friend of her daughter was in the passenger seat, and then her two youngest children aged seven and eight were in the backseat. They were in a head on collision. Her daughter's head hit the steering wheel, resulting in a broken jaw and most of the bones in her face were broken. Irene suffered a bent neck, spine and a concussion. Her two children, in the backseat, just fell to the floor and weren't hurt, but her daughter's friend wasn't so lucky. She died in that car accident, at the age of 18. Irene mentioned that she will "always remember that day."

Irene is a really funny woman, and made me laugh many times during that interview. It was very refreshing knowing that even after all the things she has been through in her life, that she still has a sense of humor. That she can talk about her late husband, and laugh. It makes me wonder whether when I am 94 if I will look back on my life and be satisfied with my accomplishments, or if I will regret not doing something. It sounds to me that she is very happy with what she has accomplished, and if I were her I would be too. You don't meet many people that go back to college at 64 and then

graduate with a bachelor's degree. She's lived a very full life and I hope she has many years left to live.

Appendix F: Amber's collaborative memoir with Phil, Rockville Home for Veterans

Phil: An Interesting Man

The Webster's Dictionary defines the word "interesting" as "stimulating interest, attention, or curiosity"; it is a word that describes a man I recently met named Phillip.

Phillip "Phil" Numan was born on September 23, 1933 in Two Rivers. Phil grew up with his brother and his "super parents" as Phil describes them. Phil played basketball in school; his school consisted of fifty-two students, eight in his graduating class. Phil's family owned a business in Two Rivers . The store, "Buckman's Friendly Service" offered gas, groceries, a phone (Phil still remembers the phone number) and 5 cabins. Many travelers and tourists came to stay at "Buckman's"; some just passing through, others vacationed there every summer. One of their regular visitors was an author, who wrote a story using Phil and his brother in it. These experiences with a variety of people from around the world, prepared Phil for a lifetime of different people.

After graduation Phil attended Rockville University, but was unsure of what path he wanted to follow. He started out as pre-law, but wasn't very good in English; he then thought about being a Math teacher but then there was the calculus, and he also thought of being a coach. In September of 1953 Phil joined the Army and was stationed over seas. In June of 1955, Phil received an early honorable discharge, in order to attend college.

Phil returned to RU and graduated with a B.S. in Social Work. Phil went on to earn a Master's Degree from another university. When I asked Phil why he decided to go into social work he replied, "they didn't have a major in basketball". In his senior year, Phil took a sociology class; that is where he met his future wife, Vera. Vera also majored in

social work. Phil and Vera married and raised a family of three sons. They later divorced but have always remained friends.

   With his degree in hand, Phil set out on his adventure. His career began in Detroit, Michigan where he worked in communicable disease control. This job led Phil into a whole different world. A world so very different from the berry picking trips and boating in his home town. Yet he was using a skill he learned there so many years before, people. I can tell that Phil has a way with people.

   While in Detroit, Phil learned the ropes of his new job. He worked with prostitutes, homosexuals, drug addicts and sexually transmitted diseases. Once a disease was reported, it was Phil's job to go in and quarantine the house, treat for the disease, and try to educate people on prevention. Many of the places Phil worked in were steam rooms, whorehouses, and the lounges that the prostitutes worked. The homes Phil went to when tracking clients were dirty and run down, often having feces and urine on the floor.

   Phil was assigned to track down a prostitute who was infected with Gonorrhea. Phil took me back to that day in Detroit when he set out to find her

   "I was assigned to track down a prostitute who went by the name of One Eyed Betty. She was a well known, and was also infected with Gonorrhea. Not too many of the people on the streets wanted to give out information on one's where a bouts. One Eyed Betty worked out of the Sweetheart Bar, a honkey tonk dancing bar. After having no luck finding her; I noticed a homeless man sitting on a log, drinking his Muscatel Wine. I approached him and asked him if he knew how I could find this One Eyed Betty. The man was hesitant to tell where to find her but offered to bring her a message. At that time a City Police Officer came by and asked if I needed any help. I explained that I worked

with Public Health and was trying to locate a woman. The police officer grabbed the man's bottle and held it in the air with his club ready to strike. I told the officer not to worry about it but it was too late, he had smashed it. After the officer left I bought the man another bottle and he told me where to find Betty.

She lived in Mercury Manor out back of the bar; I had never heard of that place before. I walked through the alley and out back and there was an old junk car, a Mercury. That's where I found One Eyed Betty. You had to get to know the people on the streets and get them to trust you, if you wanted their help. You have to know how to work them and persuade them into testing and treatment".

As Phil told his story, I could tell that he was a man that had respect, yet he was caring and wanted to help people. However, Phil's clients weren't always homeless, drug addicts etc.

Phil also worked with his share of the rich and famous as well. Phil had worked with professional football players; he worked closely with Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio's dentist, Dr. Gavin (after Dr. Gavin found a lesion in one of their mouths) and members of the Kennedy family. Needless to say, these cases were often reassigned and not heard of again. Phil's adventures also led him to the Peppermint Lounge which was owned by his friend, Ralph. It was a hang out for a lot of military personnel and frequently visited by Chubby Checkers. The song "Peppermint Twist" was written about the lounge.

Appendix G: Ainsley's Proposal to Advocates for Youth

Advocates for Youth

110 4th Street

Rockville

To Whom It May Concern:

I had the pleasure of visiting and sitting in on a few of your young mother meetings. I really thought that there was a lot of valuable information brought up, and I learned a few things myself. However I was surprised at the variety of issues brought up, childbirth, getting back into shape after childbirth, smoking, breastfeeding, there were so many helpful topics brought up to help the young mothers, but there was issue of birth control also that I found to be a little disturbing.

My personal thought was that there was a little to much emphasis put on this issue. I, as a parent, would not present birth control this way; I feel that to have the condoms and other sources of birth control sitting in a basket right by the door is very enticing. I felt as though they jumped out at me to say, "Hey! Don't forget these." I wonder if this has any influence on the young adult's as they leave out the door? If sex is not on their mind, is it as then?

I brought this to Dinah's attention and we discussed a few reasons why the protection should be there; I listened to her reasoning and thought there could be some other arrangement. Dinah's theory is that if the protection is kept in her office, the kids would be too embarrassed to come to her to ask. They would in return probably have unprotected sex. I wonder if having some meetings on abstinence, marriage, and sexually transmitted diseases would help educate the youths on the risks and dangers of having

sexual relations before their ready. Maybe they could put pamphlets and statistics on

hepatitis (Which is now considered to kill more people than HIV-AIDS), in a basket right

next to the protection so it is also accessible.

I did have a chance to talk to one of the young fathers. That young man said that

where the protection is at now, makes it very easy for him to grab them when needed. He

did add that if the protection was accessible to him sooner that he might not have a son

now. He was very adamant that the condom basket was in the right place. He said that

they are very accessible to any one who needs them and that saves the embarrassment of

having to go ask for them.

My overall thought on that is if you plan on having sex and you are responsible you

should be prepared your self. Its like a catch 22, Advocates for Youth is there to help but

yet they also provide the protection needed to have the sexual relations their having. But

on the other hand they do not allow male and female to house together in the apartments

they provide. So it's like their saying we'll provide protection for your activities but it is

not acceptable in our program. If that's what the Advocates for Youth wanted to come

across, they would do housing for monogamous relationships. Although it might be a

healthier way of presenting the situation. That is if they are going to be sexually active

and responsible about it. Then a monogamous relationship would be safer.

My overall thought on this issue would be maybe to move the basket of condoms to

an area where the youths have to be responsible and come and ask. This may also make

them think twice about how important it really is to have sex? With that thought in mind

maybe a few of the youths will be deterred from the idea of having sex. I feel that maybe

a basket full of abstinence pamphlets or some pamphlets on HIV, Sexually transmitted

Diseases would be more appropriate maybe if that was the first thing they saw and the last thing they seen before leaving out the door they would be a little wiser to what life is about.

I hope you have found my ideas to be of some help. I have a suggestion; maybe if the abstinence pamphlets and STD pamphlets were set next to the protection they would also be aware of the consequences. I know there is no right or wrong on this issue as everyone has their own opinion on it. I would hope that any new ideas would be looked at and really talked about, sometimes trying some new can be rewarding.

Sincerely,

Ainsley Jones