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Poetic Signs of Third Place: A Case Study of Student-driven Imitation in a Shelter for Young Homeless People in Copenhagen

Christina Matthiesen

During a series of writing workshops at a shelter for young homeless people in Copenhagen, I examined to what extent the literary practice of student-driven imitation with its emphasis on self-governance and a dialogical approach can engage marginalized learners in reading and writing. I found that student-driven imitation had the potential to engage different kinds of writers and that they adopted the practice with ease and confidence. In addition, I experienced that the residents' preferred genre was poetry and that they generally sought a neutral space with low attention to social status, characterized by dialogue and a homely feel. This space is comparable to Oldenburg's third place, and I suggest that poetry is a textual marker of this space.

Reading, however, is free.

—Quintilian (X.I.19)

Clearly, it began with an idea. Not an explicated need. Not an invitation or request. Actually, I ended up insisting, mostly out of curiosity, but some stubbornness might have been at play. My idea was cultivated from two interests especially: my exploration of imitation as delineated by Quintilian; and my attraction to the public turn of composition as scrutinized by Elenore Long and developed by Linda Flower and Paula Mathieu, amongst others, as well as the ethnographic work of Ralph Cintron. My exploration of imitation as delineated by Quintilian had led to the development of a concept I call student-driven imitation (Matthiesen 5). Student-driven imitation foregrounds the choice and reflection of the individual student: "Which texts fascinate me, and what do I need or want to learn?"

Here, I will tell a story of what happened at a shelter for young homeless people in Copenhagen, where I held a writing workshop series of thirteen sessions based on student-driven imitation. My aim was to examine if, and to what extent, student-driven imitation has the potential to engage marginalized learners in reading and writing. These learners may be with or without learning disabilities, but typically have negative, or poor, educational experiences due to difficult life situations, and therefore may struggle with reluctance towards learning and low confidence levels.

Imitation exercises from the classical rhetorical tradition are seldom seen in community literacy projects, maybe due to their often restricted pedagogical scope, which focuses primarily on pattern practice (see D'Angelo; Glenn, Goldthwaite, and Connors; Terrill; and Fish). However, student-driven imitation foregrounds a practice based upon the students' own choices of text and an unrestricted interaction, in which mirroring is not the goal but process is. This practice, I claim, has the potential to engage marginalized learners in reading and writing, since it is highly inclusive of the experiences and reflective practice of the individual learner, and emphasizes the decision-making of the individual learner as a reader and writer, her preferences, goals, and manner of interaction.

Where imitation exercises generally build upon the reciprocally reinforcing relation between reading and writing (Nelson 437; Salvatori 659), as well as train dual attention to both the learner and the text (Terrill 297), student-driven imitation also strongly asserts the premise of *dialogism*, as developed by Bakhtin, naturally dependent and receptive to what has already been said and written (Bakhtin 276). This is reflected in the five dimensions of student-driven imitation: "1) Paying attention to FASCINATION", "2) Identifying QUALITIES WORTH IMITATING", "3) Carrying out CRITICAL REFLECTION", "4) Considering ACCEPTANCE", and "5) Exploring ways of INTERACTION" (Matthiesen 79-83). The dimension of interaction animates unrestricted interaction across genres, and situations: a blog post may stir up a poem, and the other way around. Maybe a perspective was found useful, maybe a metaphor, maybe just a word, maybe only if twisted or mocked. In this manner, student-driven imitation, as a literate practice, seeks to strengthen rhetorical agency: that is, both rhetorical skills (as restricted imitation exercises) and the ability to find or create rhetorical opportunities (Hoff-Clausen, Isager, and Villadsen 57), by becoming attuned to and grant agency of others (Geisler 15; Flower, "Public Engagement" 202). In Michael Warner's sense of what constitutes a public, self-organized attention to and reflexive circulation of discourse (Warner 419), the literate practice of student-driven imitation can be viewed as "a mode of public engagement" (Asen 191). Thus, student-driven imitation as a literate practice not only underscores the experience and goal-setting of the individual learner, but is based upon participation in public life through reading and writing. Hereby, the practice resembles key principles in Dewey's thinking on education: impulses, experiences, and goals of the learner are central and must be linked to concrete action, inquiry, interaction, and participation in public life (Dewey, "Democracy" 101, "Experience" 33). But student-driven imitation also contains an aspect of Freirean pedagogy, which seeks a dialogue not dominated by authoritarianism, alienating intellectualism, but instead animates a dialogue in which students hold power as subjects (Freire 67). This contrasts to "banking education," in which the teacher preserves knowledge (61). In the subject of rhetoric, language itself is the core content of the education, but in contrast to other educational content, language is free and renewable for everyone. Yet, as Deborah Brandt, inspired by Bourdieu, reminds us, language is often made scarce and hard to get (769). Student-driven imitation seeks to acknowledge and foster receptiveness to both the language and invention of the

individual and of the other, “elite and street, canonical and vernacular” (Matthiesen 90). One cannot do anything wrong when working with student-driven imitation, and one can work with student-driven imitation on one’s own, attuned to the individual talent in everyday life – all one needs is pen and paper. Thus the literate practice seeks to promote independence, confidence, and a sense of agency, important properties for all types of writers, especially those on the margins (Alberti 391). In addition, working with the concept does not depend, at least in the long run, on teachers, technical support, or funding. Once explained and tested, the student can work with student-driven imitation on her own.

As we shall see, student-driven imitation as a literate practice has the potential to include and engage writers on different levels, and is easily adopted. What I did not foresee, though, was the residents’ preferred genre, poetry. Nor that they would generally seek a dialogue with me, and the other residents, characterized by a low attention to social status, playful moods and a homely feel, in which conversations about reading, writing, education, and politics could unfold, and conflicts and anger surface. This dialogic space is comparable to the sociologist Ray Oldenburg’s third place. The concept of third place is bound to urban informal public spaces, such as the barbershop, the pub, the gym, or the street, places we seek between our first and second place, home and work. It is characterized by open, neutral ground, voluntary recurrent participation in, primarily, dialogue, low attention to status, playful moods and a homely feel (Oldenburg 22–38). In line with Dewey’s view on communication in local communities (Dewey, “The Public” 153), Oldenburg sees great democratic potential in third places: here a community can take shape, connect, and built up, “give substance and articulation to group sentiment” (75), but he also underscores the personal benefits of the third place: it promotes “novelty,” “perspective,” and “spiritual tonic” (Oldenburg 44–55). I find Oldenburg’s concept relevant here, because it emphasizes, besides dialogue, open, neutral ground, recurrent voluntary participation, and low attention to status.

The emergence of a space comparable to the third place was marked, I propose, not only by the nature of our physical recurring meetings in the shelter, but by the residents’ preference for poetry, a genre of neutral ground and with low attention to status, as opposed to telling one’s own story or writing job applications.

I begin with an account of the setting and set-up of the workshop. Then, I exemplify how student-driven imitation can work in relation to poetry and specify the residents’ strategies for interaction. This leads to an illumination of the value of poetry in relation to student-driven imitation. Next, I point to other signs of engagement, from anger to conscientiousness and curiosity, which may have been triggered by the dialogic approach of the concept and workshop. Finally, I discuss how strengths of this open-ended version of the literate practice may also be a weakness and conceivably induce a feeling of lack of progress and purpose. This leads to an outline of strategies of possible value to future projects.

The Setting and Set-up

An often-used, informal term for young homeless people in Denmark is “sofa-surfers”. This term points to the fact that young homeless tend to hide their homelessness and avoid the most obvious and often rough places sought by adult homeless, such as the most well-known shelters and street corners where they sell the homeless’ newspaper. Thus, these young marginalized people often live a hidden life away from institutions, treatments, and social and educational activities. According to the social workers that I have been in contact with, this group of young people typically see themselves as simply lacking a place to stay, not as homeless people with all their accompanying connotations. Nor do they look like homeless persons in the sense of the stereotypical image: a homeless man with a dog and three plastic bags, sleeping on a bench in a park. This ought not, however, lead us to conclude that the lack of a place to stay is their only problem. Many suffer from the same problems as the majority of non-immigrant homeless in Denmark. Besides economic poverty, these problems include social, personal, and interpersonal problems, such as a general distrust of others; problems with attention and concentration; alcohol and drug abuse; intense angst, and, sometimes, psychiatric issues such as psychosis and schizophrenia. A fairly new initiative to meet these vulnerable, marginalized young people is RG60, a shelter and dwelling place for young homeless between 18 and 30 years of age, established in 2010, and located in the area of outer Nørrebro in Copenhagen.

To enter RG60, you must ring the bell and wait for one of the social workers to open the massive black door. A camera is placed above the door in a small gate. From the gate, behind a fence, you get a glimpse of the yard. RG60 is both a shelter and a social service offering accommodation for up to six months, sometimes longer. All residents can use the large living room, and unlike most shelters for homeless people in Copenhagen, the living room may be used 24 hours a day. When entering RG60, you immediately step into the front part of the living room. Here, you find table tennis, table football, two or three locked-in computers, and a small room for video games. The other part of the living room contains sofas, a TV, and a long table used for meals and house meetings. The walls are covered with paintings made by the residents, from dreamy blue flowers to graffiti-like patterns. Usually, the living room is not used until around 1 p.m. or later, when the residents either return to the house after having done errands or get out of bed. The vast majority of residents have no jobs or education.

RG60 was a relevant and compatible partner for many reasons: their focus on the growing number of young homeless people in Denmark; their guidelines, which give residents the possibility of staying, not only at night, but during the day, for periods of up to six months and sometimes longer; their allocation of funds to offer young homeless a place to stay and an action plan with contact to caseworkers but no regular in-house pedagogical activities. Finally, my project matched the founding principles of RG60: participation and self-government.

My initial meetings with the staff and the director were characterized by positive responses. It turned out that RG60 fairly often receives requests from institutions that wish to work with them. Most often these invitations are turned down, since they rarely

point towards actually engaging and supporting the residents. Encouraged by this opening, I visited RG60 a couple of times to hang out and get a sense of the place and talk with the residents. Few of them showed any interest: typical responses ranged from “Who are you, don’t you think we can write?” to “I do not like writing at all.” Despite this apparent reluctance from the residents, I decided, with the director’s approval, to explore what would happen if a workshop was actually set up. This decision was in part inspired by Flower’s work with urban high school students with learning disabilities: “For them, rhetoric is an embodied act that opens them to being co-opted by the discourse of disability in which they become the object of its rhetoric, not a rhetorical agent” (“Going Public” 138). Of course, I could not presuppose that all residents had learning disabilities; some had, I knew. I did not meet the residents with questions about their baggage, but instead with an invitation to write. I wanted to get a chance to show the residents that this project sought to build upon and strengthen what people actually can do instead of what they cannot do, and to work with a rhetorical approach to reading and writing, that is a holistic, functional and purposeful approach, foregrounding meaning-making instead of teaching fragmented skills (Flower, “Going Public” 140).

Our plan ended up looking like this: nine writing workshops were to be offered in February 2011 at the long table in the living room each Monday and Wednesday, from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. At the end, and upon request, we prolonged the workshop series with four additional sessions, of which no one came to the last two. Each workshop was setup to be based upon student-driven imitation and include related kick-about exercises of various kinds, dialogue, and response. Participation in the workshop series was not binding. The residents could drop in halfway through the workshop series, or in the middle of one workshop, and attend one or all workshops. At a subsequent house meeting, I presented the workshop. It was entitled *Strong words*.

The project was designed in an action oriented research manner, that is, grounded in dialogue, concrete action, and reflective practice, allowing all participants room for intervention in order to shape content, goals, and process (Lewin 38; Huang 99; Rönnerman 19), much in line with the pedagogy of Freire. As is significant for action research, the project was aimed at exploring and developing a new experience and a possible new practice for all participants: residents, staff, and myself as a writing educator with a special interest in the concept of student-driven imitation.

The material for this investigation is my logbook and workshop plan. Having my logbook as a source for the study gives the account an autoethnographic touch. I will present glimpses of the world of RG60 and the workshop series in order to tell, not the whole story, but an integrated and balanced one.

Initial Experience: The Blend of Public/Private and a Glimpse of the Third Place

On Tuesday nights, RG60 have their house meetings. Sometimes they last ten minutes, sometimes thirty. Updates are given. Disputes discussed. Afterwards they clean the

house for about fifteen minutes. On such a house meeting, two weeks before the first session of the workshop series, I presented the workshop. The staff did not indicate that residents could sit still for very long, so my presentation had to be brief and engaging. With me I had a poster for the workshop series, a visualization of the concept of student-driven imitation, and pens, and post-it pads. Inspired by Andre Breton's surreal parlor game, my plan was to get them to write just one half-sentence each. Every other person is supposed to write an if-phrase, while the other half writes a so-phrase. Afterwards, the phrases are read aloud and combined into a sentence by the person sitting next in line. I wanted to explore if they would walk away from the task, as I had been warned, or actually write, and, if so, whether they would groan or feel excited. As is the case of student-driven imitation, Andre Breton's surreal parlor game is about connecting words and writers in a free manner. The surreal parlor game especially highlights chance and attentive listening, and often evokes unexpected creation of meaning and joy.

Eleven residents participated in the house meeting: Four girls, seven boys. Some smelled of alcohol. On the table was stale cake from the local bakery. "Please, have some cake," they said. Five minutes later, the floor was mine. With the poster in my hand, I presented the workshop series. "None of us escapes language," I said, "the language of others, the language of ourselves, therefore we should approach language with a conscious attitude and train our awareness and skills as readers and writers." I stressed that the workshop would combine reading and writing attuned to their interests and needs, from job applications to poetry. They seemed to listen. I was surprised by their attention. Then, one said, "Don't you have a poem with you?" In my bag I had a short poem by the Danish poet Lars Skinnebach, desperate and philosophical.

"Read it again," they say. Some of them want to see it. We talk about it, its meaning and words. Who is egocentric? A girl, E, wants to keep it. Shortly after, I present the visualization of student-driven imitation. Their attention, I feel, is more polite. Then, I hand out post-it pads and pens. Some look skeptical. Then they write. No one leaves the table. I am thrilled to see them all putting pen to paper. Then we combine their phrases. They listen to each other. Applaud. Laugh. They seem excited to read their own phrase aloud. One boy, B, has written several sentences, full of rhythm and rhyme. He is eager to read it aloud. It is beautiful and philosophical. Everyone seems surprised.

While they cleaned the house, I put up posters for the workshop. Quite a few spoke to me, stressing that writing is important, that Danish grammar is a struggle. They would like to work with songwriting and poetry, they told me. One wanted to work with job applications.

Between the house meeting and the first workshop session, I visit RG60. The residents are talkative. Two of them are painting. One comes by with a plate full of scrambled eggs. "Do you want any?" he says before he sits down and grabs the daily newspaper. The conversation turns from the other day's documentary on Egypt to personal stories about having no contact with relatives. When I unlock my bike outside the house, three of them are smoking a joint the size of my thumb. "See you Wednesday," they say, and look as if we have an appointment.

So, did they sit and wait for me, ready with pen and paper, five minutes to one on the day of the first workshop? Of course not. I did not expect them to, either. Three residents were in the living room; one is sitting at one of the two computers in the house, the other two, V and S, are watching a film with Charles Bronson. None of them wants to participate. Their turning away is polite and firm. After a while, they leave the room for a smoke. There I am, sitting in the sofa, wondering what to do. I look at the clock on the wall. It is 13.30.

Then, through the windows I get a glimpse of F. She is in the office talking to one of the social workers. Maybe she would like to participate? I will have to wait to find out. Energized by this, I move to the kitchen, just to have a look. There is K. He wants to participate. Meanwhile, S has turned up in the kitchen. He tells me about his experiences with school: about always behaving well, but not being able to concentrate. He does not know his age. He would like to sit with us and listen. We place ourselves at the long, worn wooden table in the living room. F is there now. She does not know whether she wants to participate or not, but she will sit with us and eat her lunch, rye bread with liver paste. It is two o'clock in the afternoon now. There are a handful of residents in the living room watching television. They do not want to participate, but they are paying attention to what is happening at our table. I have the feeling that they are paying attention even with the back of their heads.

K, S and F want to know where I am from. I tell them about my project, about rhetoric, its educational tradition. K wants to improve his song writing. He already has several drafts on his computer. He agrees to bring them to the next workshop. F wants to work with poetry. She admires the beautiful sadness of Tove Ditlevsen's poetry and the snug humor of Benny Andersen's. F makes us a cup of tea. Then, she goes to her room and returns with four notebooks. Somewhere in one of them, there is a poem that she would like to show me. It is a poem she has written some years ago. It is about a burning candle. A young man appears. He wants homework. All of us agree to bring a text with us to the next workshop. K a song. F a poem. I will bring both. The guy that wanted homework has walked away. F and I are shaking hands. She is looking forward to choosing a poem, but she is not sure if she can come to the next workshop because of the Super Bowl. I will be here, I say. Hm. Are we on a roll now? And if so, how and where to?

These initial experiences show that the residents do have an interest in writing, an interest that does not seem apparent when they are asked point blank about writing, but which appears when they have writing presented to them. The house meeting as well as the first workshop session indicate that this interest in writing is fragile, easily ignited and just as easily forgotten or rejected.

Also, these initial experiences underscore the fact that a shelter is a mix of the private (a living room with remarks such as "have some cake") and the public (an institution with staff and rules), zones that the Western tradition commonly has understood as spatially distinct (Warner 26). The concept of student-driven imitation is a blend too, mixing and bridging private and public: the starting point of student-driven imitation is the fascination of the individual, but the texts are public, circulated

and open to everyone. Likewise, the concept calls for personal reflection as well as interaction outside the home - see Warner's list (29). Certainly, it is not unique that private and public are intertwined: "Public and private are not always simple enough that one could code them on a map with different colors - pink for private and blue for public. The terms also describe social contexts, kinds of feelings, and genres of language" (Warner 27). Thus, they are merely hosts of norms and contexts that intersect, evolve and differ in culture and time, and are regularly challenged: in Western politics, for instance, by former counter publics such as women's and gay movements (Warner 51), in theory by such as Hauser's concept of vernacular rhetoric. Maybe we even have social contexts and genres of language where private and public not only blend, but actually merge. Such social contexts could be Oldenburg's third place. For Oldenburg, though, the third place is an open physical space: the pub, the street. But if, as Warner proposes, we instead link public and private not to space, but to social contexts, types of feelings, and genres of language, then I propose that private and public merge in the third place, and that an example of such a textual genre could be poetry, the residents' preferred genre, characterized by third-place traits such as an open neutral ground for dialogue, low attention to social status, playful moods, and a homely feel.

Poetic as in Poetry: Confidence, Dual attention, and Public Discourses

On a roll was certainly not the right expression. Particularly at the beginning of the first couple of workshop sessions, I started out with a tour around the house asking if anyone wanted to join the workshop. The number of participants fluctuated between one and five. Three participants became regulars: the girl F, and two guys, B and V. F, age 26, was a high school graduate with two years of additional education. B, age 20, had dropped out of high school more than once. V, age 22, had never entered high school. He had quite successful work experience as a telephone salesman. They represented three levels of literacy: F was a relatively skilled writer, accurate and with a talent for rhythm and suspense. V was untrained and unaccustomed to writing, but possessed basic formal writing skills. B, on the other hand, had problems with basic formal writing skills such as spelling and coherent sentence structure, but he had a copious vocabulary and was eager to communicate in general, and also in writing.

Increasingly, other residents would come by, sit down and listen, join the conversation, talk about reading and writing, education and politics, sometimes about family life and experiences at institutions. When asked directly about what kind of texts they would like to work with, the answer was poetry.

Poetry, as opposed to the telling of one's story, provides a neutral ground, with low attention to social status, where private and public merge. The writing space of poetry is both personal and universal: it is a genre that strongly stresses the individual temper and at the same time, with its implied fictional distance acquires a universal character. In this free writing space, inquiry and expression can unfold while escaping some of the demands of fiction and persuasive writing in terms of length, coherence, conventions, and grammar. Poetry per se is a right to shape your own language.

As inherent in the concept of student-driven imitation, the residents were themselves supposed to bring texts to the workshop, based on their fascination as readers and reflection as writers. This happened only once, when F brought a poem by a former fellow student at a boarding school, about a little girl in a children's home.

At the end of the third workshop, we agreed that for the next workshop I would bring ten different poems. I chose poems that differed in terms of theme and form. All of them were fairly short, one page, and written between 1920 and 2009 by Danish poets.

On the long table are ten poems. In turn, we, that is, B, F and I, pick a poem and read it aloud. We respond spontaneously to each poem. Meanwhile, V shows up. He wants to see what we are doing. "But I am not going to read it aloud," he says. The others pick a poem again and read aloud. Afterwards V, too, reads a poem aloud. They read aloud with care and concentration, shaping words in their mouth, some of which they are not familiar. They listen to each other and easily grasp and describe the emotions at stake in the poems – from Leth's poem about controlling the body, competition, and performance, to Hammann's poem about the trivial acts of a well-behaved person, foreshadowing not only frustration but an animal underneath.

After having read all ten poems aloud, they each pick a poem for student-driven imitation. We are going to work with the following dimensions of student-driven imitation: fascination, qualities worth imitating, and interaction. F sticks to the poem that celebrates love; V picks a surreal poem; and B picks the poem about the trivial acts of a well-behaved person. With a green marker they now underscore ideas, subjects, lines, and words that fascinate them. All words are shared and unfolded – from the idea of the lover as a surveyor and the word "life doubler" (F) to lines such as "do I fall out of society and into a dream" and "The stars are psychotic children" (V). Then, with a blue marker, they underscore ideas, subjects, lines, and words that they find worthy of imitation. Overlaps appear. Newfound aspects are valued. The findings are shared and unfolded. Subsequently, they start writing their own poem, inspired by the poem that they have worked with, and by their findings. I stress that they can do whatever they feel like: quote, twist, mock, choose to reuse the theme or just a word.

After a while, they read their poems aloud. V has interacted with the surreal poem in a *mimetic* way, reusing the theme and style in a loyal manner, even quoting a few lines, but adding rhyme at the beginning of the poem. F has interacted with the homage to a beloved person in an *inspirational* but independent manner, reusing the theme, skipping the surveyor metaphor, using a more straightforward style, adding rhyme throughout the poem, reusing the word "life-doubler" at the end as in the source text. B, on the other hand, has interacted with the poem about civilized behavior in an *antagonistic* manner, twisting the theme by underscoring the idea that comparing human to human is far more important than comparing humans to animals. B's poem goes even further and ends with a reflection on how the responsibility of man constantly increases.

These imitation strategies illustrate that the residents easily interacted with their poems in a free self-governed manner. They each independently found and shaped a

strategy of imitation suitable for their individual temper and intention and expressed joy over their processes and results. They did not need a presentation of already listed strategies, as for instance *following*, *transformation*, *eristic*, all taken from literary imitation practice in the Renaissance (Bender 345). Immanent in the literary imitation strategies of the renaissance is the source text. This is the case too with the restricted imitation exercises in rhetorical education: memorization, translation, and paraphrase (Corbett 246; Sullivan 13; Terrill 305). The restricted imitation exercises may train both comprehension and sentence structure (rhetorical skills), but they allow little room for the individual temper, situation, and intention (rhetorical capacity). On the other hand, I argue that the fourth typical imitation exercise in rhetorical education, close analysis (Corbett 245; Sullivan 13) holds the potential to train both skills and capacity, at least if the source text is used in writing as a means of invention in relation to individual temper, situation, and intention. Here, mirroring is not an end in itself, inspiration is.

In line with Quintilian's notion of imitation and the concept of student-driven imitation, the crucial starting point is pedagogical, and the aim is inspiration. Thus, the outcome in relation to the source text can be more or less mimetic, more or less atomized, even to a degree where it is hard to trace the source text. Hence, an endless variety of imitation strategies can materialize.

As illustrated in the varied imitation strategies of the residents, the process of interaction came easily, naturally, and with unpredictable and diverse results, both in terms of invention and style. These strategies are far from pattern practice, even though pattern was studied. The strategies may overlap, as is the case for instance with the antagonistic and inspirational strategy. An outline of a typology is not within my scope here; instead, I would like to highlight fluctuation and hybrids as premises for student-driven imitation – as is the case with traditions of imitation generally (Muckelbauer 66; Warnick 128).

So, what value does poetry hold in relation to student-driven imitation, besides sharing and underscoring a need for a right to one's own language and a space that is both private and public, in which one can act independently, with confidence, and a sense of agency? I think two aspects are worth highlighting, 1) the dual attention and dialogic interaction of imitation in itself as valuable, and 2) the literary genre's potential to reflect, explore, and play with multiple public discourses, as delineated by Bakhtin (292).

Concerning the first, in all text-based imitation a dual attention of the student to both a public text and to herself and her own writing is fostered, thereby anticipating a democratic stance: "*Imitatio*, as a tenet of rhetorical pedagogy, is as central to the tradition as two-sided debate and strategic effacement, but less often noted as valuable for the crafting of democratic citizens" (Terrill 300). What Terrill highlights is the stance and movement of duality in imitation, not a specific discourse. Hence, the process of imitation in general is valuable, regardless of the choice of discourse, poetic or political, from the past or from the present. Especially, I argue, unrestricted imitation strategies, as opposed to the restricted strategies Terrill highlights, promote a dual attention with a rhetorical approach, in contrast to a technical.

Concerning the second, the literary genre's potential to reflect, explore, and play with multiple public discourses. I stress that poetry and fiction should not be set aside in relation to public discourses. Literary language can "unite in itself parodic stylizations of generic languages, various forms of stylizations and illustrations of professional and period-bound languages, the languages of particular generations, of social dialects and others" (Bakhtin 292). Only a few of the ten poems in our workshop happened to have such polyphonic traits of recurrent public discourses, but focusing to a higher degree on such poems could be worth exploring.

Poetic as in Imagination and Deep Feeling: Dialogue, Discovery, and Trust

Despite the fact that all three residents, B, F, and V, ended this session of student-driven imitation by selecting two poems each for future work with books by the poet whose poem they had interacted with, this kind of thorough work with student-driven imitation did not happen again. I naively envisioned us moving up a level towards some kind of mastery as if we had our feet on a ladder. I envisioned posters with their poems in the living room. A reception. But our feet were on slippery stones at the sea. And what I had not envisioned was anger.

At the following workshop, B and F participated. B's body was boiling. Legs pumping against the floor. He delivered a long, seemingly unstoppable monologue of frustration: over people in power, relativism in general as opposed to one religious truth, the written word as sacred, and untouchable, the workshop, the assumption that rhetoric could make a difference, democracy. I naturally wanted him to turn his words into writing. That would also force him to slow down and focus, as well as explore his ideas. B, being especially frustrated with the lack of justice in a democracy, became highly upset when I suggested he should write about it: "Do you want the Secret Service to come after me? I don't want to put anything on this subject to paper. Are you crazy?"

Generally, the workshop sessions at RG60 were unpredictable on every level. I did my best to adjust to the current situation and the residents' reactions and requests, from anger to a wish at the end for prolonging the workshop series. Repeating the moves from the fourth workshop did not appeal to them. Instead, I came up with exercises that supported the literate practice of student-driven imitation stressing self-governance and especially dialogue. Alongside this, F pursued through the workshop series her newly found interest in haiku poems, while V worked with descriptions of his hours at job activation. In both cases, I assisted with text examples and feedback. Below, I will describe three exercises that in different ways support the literate practice of student-driven imitation:

Connect to a Sentence You Come Across: 'You and Publics Around You'

Since I wanted to know more about their attention to whatever publics, and I wanted them to pay attention to words and texts around them as both readers and writers,

I asked them to find sentences that somehow appealed to them or set their mind in motion and, in a free manner, use the sentences as starting points for their own writing. Between Wednesday and Monday, they were asked to find four sentences, write each sentence at the top of a paper, including its source, and then write their own text below. B did not choose sentences, but words: power, justice, love, and his interaction led to some well-written aphorisms. I was allowed to read but not to comment on his writing. F had found sentences in mainstream online newspapers, silly headlines that annoyed her, and her interaction led to chatty elaborations of the silliness, as if she were talking directly to the media behind. This exercise supports the principle of self-governance in student-driven imitation as well as the dimensions of both fascination and interaction.

Collaborative Story Writing: ‘You and I and Our Imagination’

In the middle of one of B’s outburst of anger, for some reason—out of the blue, actually—I suggested we write a story together. He accepted this invitation. He wrote one passage; I wrote the next. A story of a wounded soldier took shape. This dialogic way of writing forced both of us to read, understand, and connect with the writing done by the other. In this manner, I found a pathway to comment on his writing, whenever I had a good reason, with regard to problems with grasping the meaning, typically because of missing words or misspellings. This exercise highly supports receptiveness to the words of another, a basic premise of student-driven imitation, as well as the dimension of interaction, stressing especially coherence and surprise.

Chreia: ‘You and Your Expansion of Famous Quotes’

With the ambition to engage more residents and examine their reaction to a more directive set of rules, I introduced the classic progymnasmata-exercise *chreia* (Kennedy). I brought in quotes by Disney, Woolf, and Cohen, amongst others. In this session five residents participated, selecting their favorite quote, struggling with the elements in the *chreia*, from praise and paraphrase to example and testimony, all of them expressing both frustration as well as excitement over working with a strict form. The *chreia* was compared to a puzzle, releasing a feeling of fulfillment when every bit ended up fitting together. As in the case of student-driven imitation, the *chreia* cultivates the creation of meaning, investigation, and receptiveness in relation to the words of another, while at the same time cultivating the ability to connect to and develop the words of oneself. In addition, the *chreia* supports a systematic, thorough approach also available in student-driven imitation.

These dialogic exercises were accompanied with various emerging conversations on reading (Wikipedia, Harry Potter) and writing (in school, on facebook), education and institutions (turnover of teachers), democracy and justice, religion and family. Some days other residents would join us at the table, typically curious about our conversation and what we were doing. Sometimes, not mechanically, I suggested questions and feelings to be explored in writing, from journal writing to persuasive

writing. I also suggested that we make posters with their poems. Only F was tempted by this idea.

These points of impact show that a group of the residents recurrently engaged in the writing workshop series in a curious and conscientious manner. Also, these points of impact signal that the workshop on some level ignited not only engagement in reading and writing, but also a wish to create, commit to, and nurture a dialogue comparable to Oldenburg's third place, the recurrent voluntary participation, the low attention to status, and the homely feel. This was reflected not only in their writing, but also in acts such as sitting still for two hours, often without a break or a smoke, making coffee, bringing biscuits, shaking hands at the end of a session, sending apologies in advance if they were unable to show up, and in the topics and nature of our conversations. Even the outbursts of anger can be seen as a wish to communicate and a sign of confidence, trust, and curiosity: "How can I dialogue if I am afraid of being displaced, the mere possibility causing me torment and weakness?" (Freire 71). These third-place traits may have been sparked or supported by the self-governed and dialogic approach of the workshop. Nevertheless, they are not an inherent consequence: the residents could have preferred to work individually with job applications and with a minimum of dialogue with regard to other matters. I came with the aim to examine whether, and to which degree, student-driven imitation could engage marginalized learners. I did not enter RG60 to manifest rules, but to come to know and match individuals and subject matter so that as many as possible could contribute (Dewey, "Experience" 56). Freire emphasizes:

do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of "salvation", but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding. (76)

In regard to student-driven imitation, it is clear, though, that some kind of scaffolding and revised approach is needed. The residents did not bring in texts, and they apparently did not wish to repeat moves that they had already tried out. Various related dialogic exercises that supported the literate practice of student-driven imitation, on the other hand, were welcomed, including exercises that drew on their attention to publics, and exercises that trained a systematic, thorough approach to connecting reading to writing.

Student-driven Imitation and the Third Place as Potentially Transformative

Student-driven imitation draws on and combines reading and writing in community engagement. The project at RG60 based upon student-driven imitation sought a Freirean dialogue where students hold power as individual readers and writers, but neither the project nor the concept holds a collaborative problem-posing agenda, as Freire promotes (Freire 60), and as we find today in community literacy think tanks (Flower, "Public Engagement" 65). Similar to the street theater projects with homeless people facilitated by Paula Mathieu (73), student-driven imitation has a strong focus on individual expression, but then no immanent public performative dimension. Instead, the project and the concept tried to highlight entering into publics via reading, not via publishing or performance. So, relevant metaphors to describe the project are a *cultural womb*, and partly a *gate*, establishing a dialogue between people, institutions and discourses who might not otherwise meet.

The metaphor of a cultural womb implies characteristics such as nurturing, preparing, and inspiring, and the metaphor of a gate implies creating access, connections, as well as room for conflicts to unfold (Long 23). The two metaphors describe the nature and function of the third place well. This space surely has its limits. It is not the ideal public as described by Dewey: a public aroused, as a reaction to and in contrast with specific government decisions, in order to change a policy or for mutual defense (Dewey, "The Public" 27–28). Dewey described this as an ideal, aware that the complexity of modern society, especially the character of mass communication and multiple publics, is a strong constraint (126). Therefore, Dewey strongly underscores communication, the give and take of language in public and across publics in the everyday, as the ground on which a community is built and from where a public can arise (154). The third place has similar potential, but whereas communication is a practice between people everywhere, the third place is a specific space, open, neutral, and characterized by recurrent voluntary participation in dialogue and low attention to status.

The writing workshop series at RG60 based upon student-driven imitation provides insight in relation to both marginalized young people as readers and writers and the literate practice of student-driven imitation. The writing workshop series signal that young marginalized people can and wish to engage in reading and writing, including writers with a low level of formal skills as well as more experienced writers. The writing workshop series indicate that poetry can be a preferred genre for marginalized young people: a free writing space of open neutral ground, with low attention to social status; a textual third place, in which they can act independently and with confidence. Specifically in relation to student-driven imitation, the writing workshop series at RG60 discloses that this literate practice has the potential to engage and include writers of various kinds, also those on the margins. The experience reveals that this literate practice is easy to work with independently with confidence.

In addition, the writing workshop series at RG60 indicates some challenges in working with literate practice of student-driven imitation and marginalized young

people: a need to provide the participants with selections of texts, a crucial need to vary exercises instead of aiming at repeating all or a selection of the dimensions, and finally, I suggest, a need for strengthening reflection and progress. With regard to variation, working more exclusively with each dimension of student-driven imitation could provide not only variation, but also a deeper understanding of each dimension, including aspects such as subject shaping, reader relation and writer's presence. Related, dialogic reading and writing exercises can also be used to support the literate practice of student-driven imitation, from Andre Breton's surreal parlor game to the classic *chreia*. Finally, I anticipate that working with journal writing could strengthen and unfold the participants' reflection in relation to central questions, such as "what fascinates me as a reader?" and "what would I like to learn?" Thus, journal writing could help explicate and maintain purposes and goals, and potentially make progress more evident.

These are the results of working with student-driven imitation in a shelter with the aim to engage young homeless people in reading and writing. This open-ended approach is one way of working with student-driven imitation. Another way is working with student-driven imitation in relation to one specific discourse or genre, which partly compromises the concept's essential property of self-governance, but opens up several scenarios, from using student-driven imitation in traditional education, in projects aimed at collaborative problem-posing in public, e.g. news paper production, to using student-driven imitation in projects aimed at reaching personal goals, e.g., job applications or dispensations, which are projects of change within reach (Cushman 13).

The residents at RG60 engaged in student-driven imitation in an open-ended manner and formed a space and dialogue around reading and writing with traits of a third place, marked by the residents' preferred genre, poetry. Oldenburg describes the third place as a place situated between home and work. Paradoxically, the residents have no home and no work. Thus, a third place may be far from what a homeless person really needs. Or maybe it is closer to it than we might think.

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