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## Re-considering the Range of Reciprocity in Community-Based Research and Service Learning: You Don't Have to be an Activist to Give Back

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## Re-considering the Range of Reciprocity in Community-Based Research and Service Learning: You Don't Have to be an Activist to Give Back

*Dirk Remley*

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This essay presents perspectives on the range of potential reciprocity in literacy research and service learning, focusing attention on opportunities for individualized and institutional reciprocation, as observed by Takayoshi and Powell. Researchers and students involved in community-based research or service programs have several opportunities to give back to their research participants and service organizations. The more they are aware of these opportunities or can make these entities aware of these benefits and act upon them, the more productive such research and service can be to the field of literacy studies as well as to those who participate.

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*“Reciprocity includes an open and conscious negotiation of the power structures reproduced during the give-and-take interactions of the people involved in both sides of the [research] relationship. A theory of reciprocity, then, frames this activist agenda with a self-critical, conscious navigation of this intervention.” (16)*

*—Ellen Cushman, “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change”*

### Introduction

Literacy researchers have the ability to impact not just the field of literacy studies by developing new knowledge about the effects of literacy and conditions that affect literacy learning, but also the lives of the people who participate in their research studies by helping these “human subjects” or “human participants”—as institutional review board (IRB) forms tend to refer to them—to understand the value of their own literacy practices, as well as enhance their access to literacy. Those who participate in service learning programs, also, have similar agency to impact others’ lives a variety of ways. This agency can be at the personal level or at a larger-scale,

community level—or both. Ellen Cushman’s statement above reflects the potential for having a large impact on communities when the researcher and the participants understand each others’ goals relative to a given study. At the level to which Cushman refers, the researcher becomes an activist, acting on behalf of a particular community, represented by the study’s participants.

However, Cushman’s quote above also acknowledges the negotiation that occurs throughout a research process. The agency that the researcher has can range from this activist level to that of personalized benefit for the participant. Further, one need not be a literacy scholar to pursue such research and reciprocal relationships; this reciprocity can occur among student researchers and those who participate in their research. As students enter the public space to conduct research for class assignments, be it a service learning project or their own literacy experiences, they can exercise this agency, particularly when a researcher-teacher knows of an organization within a community that may benefit from a service learning program.

Increasingly, publications of research in literacy practices encourage activist strategies wherein the researcher is able to use the agency provided as a rhetorician and researcher to act on behalf of those who participate in the study to improve their lives, whether through locating funding opportunities to offer literacy development programs or generating proposals to enhance awareness of the challenges to accessing literacy (Cushman; Sclove, Scammell and Holland; Grabill; Porter; Fischer; and Simmons and Grabill). However, in “Accepting the Roles Created for Us: The Ethics of Reciprocity,” Pamela Takayoshi and Katrina Powell call attention to the challenge of establishing an “a priori” reciprocal agenda and the personal level agency related to the researcher providing information to help research participants understand more about themselves on a personal or professional level. In activist research, the researcher may define a relationship with the participants prior to beginning the project; however, Takayoshi and Powell challenge researchers to let individual participants define that relationship or let it evolve as the research unfolds. They acknowledge

seeing reciprocity as a context-based process of definition and redefinition of the relationship between participants and researcher helps us understand how our projects can benefit participants in ways that they desire...While researchers usually benefit in material terms from the publication of their studies (tenure and promotion, professional reputation, royalties, such as they may be), the form of participants’ benefits can only be determined within the context of the participants’ lives. (396-397)

This assertion does not counter Cushman’s; it refocuses attention toward a forgotten part of Cushman’s argument. Indeed, in her article “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” Cushman observes, “The degree to which we gain entrance into the daily lives of people outside the university in some measure depends upon who we are. The boundaries of our access must be negotiated with the people” (20). Takayoshi and Powell discovered that their participants may not have been able to identify what they wanted from their participation. The researcher needs to try to understand when opportunities for participants to benefit occur. They observe, “Reciprocity requires that researchers pay close attention to their participants’ needs as they evolve and be ready to embrace moments for reciprocity as they emerge” (414). Reciprocity also requires that researchers understand what access their participants give researchers to their lives, whether the reciprocal relationship be established “a priori” or not.

Few of these personal to institutional-level, non-activist-related projects are reported; so, in this essay, I call attention to this personal to institutional-level, non-activist agency while observing other kinds of agency for reciprocation to help researchers—scholars and students—understand the range of their agency and the importance of benefits across that range for participants. Such an understanding may help researchers better engage participants and make them aware of potential benefits of participation. This understanding also carries implications for service learning projects, wherein the teacher may know of opportunities for organizations to benefit from service learning projects and a student has the ability to share knowledge beyond putting together a document for an organization (Donahue, Bowyer, and Rosenberg; Stanton; Deans). To do this, I share the reciprocity associated with my own research experience related to an historical study of literacy sponsorship within a particular geographic community. My study, generally, involves research into how a workplace acted as a literacy sponsor within the community in which it operated during a particular historical period and exigencies that affected that sponsorship. The research method included interviews with people who participated in the historical practices under study and text analyses of archived documents. Literacy researchers can reciprocate by helping participants—individuals and institutions with which they are affiliated—realize considerable benefits in their participation in the dialogue that ensues within the interview process and public sharing of research findings.

During the interviews, it became clear that participants were learning about the personal value of their own literacy practices, some of which they did not recognize as literacy practices until our conversations about them. People also came to understand how their participation would help the particular geographic community develop an historical record of its literacy practices. I was able to share my research with two historical societies, giving

each access to information that was previously classified, helping those interested understand various aspects of the workplace's practices. I was also able to give back to the community's historical society economically to help maintain the society and purchase artifacts for its collection—some of these purchases have literacy connections as well.

First, I will review some literature that characterizes the range of reciprocity; then, I will describe my own study's dynamics, facilitating a discussion of ways researchers can make such benefits explicit to their participants. Finally, I will indicate how instructors can facilitate this agency among their students as they pursue research for class projects.

### The Range of Activist “Reciprocity”

In her award winning book *Other People's Words: The Cycle of Low Literacy*, Victoria Purcell-Gates reports on her ethnography of an urban Appalachian family and its struggles to acquire school-valued literacies. The mother “Jenny” approaches Purcell-Gates, who is directing a university literacy center at the time, and asks for Purcell-Gates's help in developing the literacy skills of her son “Donny.” Neither Jenny nor Donny is literate, and Purcell-Gates asks if she can study their practices. Jenny agrees to give Purcell-Gates this access in return for her son's literacy development. As she studies the practices of each member of the family, Purcell-Gates becomes a literacy coach and educator for them. She visits with them regularly and teaches them how to read and write. Purcell-Gates, thus, uses her agency as a literacy scholar to act upon their interests.

Purcell-Gates exerts even more agency as she intervenes when Donny's school attempts to place him in the next grade level as an academic year begins after Jenny and Donny's teachers had previously agreed that he would be retained in the second grade. Responding to Jenny's concerned call to her, Purcell-Gates contacts the principal's office directly. Gates introduces herself and her position as Director of the University Literacy Center. After explaining to the secretary that she felt that Donny should repeat the second grade and wanted to attend a meeting between the principal and Jenny about the matter, the secretary called back to acknowledge that the principal “declared, when informed of my interest, ‘If she wants him held back, then we'll do it. No problem’” (160). This intervention could not have been anticipated when the study began; the need for it emerged during the study, and Purcell-Gates recognized the agency that she could offer.

By helping Jenny and little Donny develop literacy skills beyond the visual literacies they already possessed, Purcell-Gates personally reciprocates their allowing her to study them. Though she is not able to help other urban Appalachians on such a personal level, through her efforts, Jenny and Donny are able to acquire literacies valued by mainstream society. While she does

not write of the reciprocity associated with her study, Purcell-Gates was among the early literacy scholars to demonstrate the agency researchers can have on the lives of their “subjects.”

Shortly after publication of Purcell-Gates's work, Cushman's seminal work, “The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change,” appeared. In this text, Cushman calls attention to the ability of a researcher to have an impact on a community through activism. The rhetorician, she explains through her study of improvements to “the Approach” that separates Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute from the community of Troy, NY, and its symbolic and material social relationship building, has skills necessary to affect change that can benefit entire communities. She calls for instructors to engage their community by considering “...our own *positions* [emphasis hers] in the academy, of what we do with our knowledge, for whom and for what means” (12). In her experience as a literacy volunteer, Cushman acknowledges that she was expected to bridge a gap between social workers and their clients by providing information the social workers could not access about their clients. She is able to be an activist for her clients and for social workers in the community.

Cushman also recognizes that “the very same position as scholars that distances us from the community also invests us with resources that we can make available to others” (19). Activism, here, includes both community-level and personal-level reciprocity. However, our position as scholars and the perceived separation of scholarship from less-expert communities may hinder the degree of access we have to the personalized agency. If we access participants at work as we study workplace literacy practices, we are limited to their workplace or organizational environments. For example, Michelle Simmons and Jeffrey Grabill, in “Toward a Civic Rhetoric for Technologically and Scientifically Complex Places: Invention, Performance, and Participation,” call attention to websites that provide non-expert citizens with information they need to be able to present effective arguments to benefit their communities themselves. In her research at the offices of the developers of one such website (MCG), Simmons uses her familiarity with multimodal theorists such as Kress and Van Leeuwen as she helps the developers understand how to design information to enable users to interact with the information they need (433).

These studies represent the opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of potential activist agency. Purcell-Gates's work occurs at the very personal level for both Jenny and Donny; while Simmons and Grabill's as well as Cushman's work considers a larger community dynamic. They also represent agency that may not be established “a priori” or before the study's initiation; Purcell-Gates's intervention shows the agency one can exert kairotically for individuals.

## Broadening the Range of Personal and Institutional Reciprocity

The experience I will relate does not involve the drama associated with Purcell-Gates's intervention nor the activism of Simmons and Grabill; nevertheless, it represents implicit and material reciprocity. As I interviewed participants as part of an historical study of literacy practices, I observed moments when I could share some information about recent conceptions of multi-literacies and various forms of literacy practices that they had not considered as such. Also, despite the fact that these participants perceived their contribution to be minimal at best, I was able to help them understand how sharing their literacy experiences could contribute to literacy research.

In addition to these personal level reciprocal opportunities, I have been able to share my interview and archival research on these practices in presentations to two different community historical societies. One of these was a paid speaking engagement, which allowed me to donate money to the other in recognition for its assistance in that research. In addition to the economic reciprocity, the speaking engagements allowed me to give the communities an aggregate understanding of the collected information, as well as provide them with access to historical information about a local workplace's literacy practices that they could not acquire until recently. This personal to institutional to community reciprocation provides some perspective to the range of potential reciprocity in literacy research that extends to the activist dynamic that can be at the personal level, like that of Purcell-Gates, or the community level, such as those of Cushman, and Simmons and Grabill.

In the course of interviews people are able to share a great deal of information about themselves beyond work-environments. Interview questions, like those posed by Deborah Brandt in her book *Literacy in American Lives*, ask participants about work as well as community and home environments. Such questions invite participants to open up about personal practices they may not have ever talked about before, thereby giving the researcher certain access to the participant's life. As an interviewer gets to know more about the participant, he can come to understand at a given moment that he may provide some information the interviewee did not know about or never considered. When the researcher offers that information, there is reciprocity.

The focus of my study has been on the intersections between home, school, community, and workplace literacy practices. Because it is an historical study, I am unable to use ethnographic approaches that are popular in literacy research to observe actual practices. I have been interviewing several members of the community about their literacy experiences. In these interviews I asked questions related to workplace,

home, school, and community literacy practices. As I asked about home-based practices, I offered a few examples of such literacy practices so participants might understand what is generally considered in the spectrum of home-based literacies. These examples include letter writing or reading, writing notes to help oneself and others remember something, maintaining journals or diaries, and reading newspapers, books, or magazines.

When I asked about home-based practices and alluded to personal letter writing, one female participant spoke of learning how to use Braille technologies to write letters to her brother who was attending an academic institution for the blind away from home. However, she acknowledged that she never considered that as a form of literacy. The relevant portion of the transcript is below:

(Note: I=interviewer; R= respondent)

I: Other than school-based kinds of reading and writing training, instruction, are you aware of anyone else or did you help anyone else with their literacy instruction that you can remember?

R: During my school years?

I: Yeah, like even in high school. Like helping younger students.

R: Younger students?

I: Friends or relatives?

R: Well, I'm trying to think...well, my brother, yeah. I remember my younger brother who was blind. And he attended [school district name] schools cuz he had to go during the week and come home on the weekends. So, I read a lot to him and I even...we were talking about this this morning, he also taught me Braille a little bit back then. So I wrote...I was telling this young lady who was here this morning that I wrote him a Braille letter one week. He left his slate at home, and he had a stylist, and I would have him write down, or you know... put Braille to alphabet, and I would slowly do that; but he did Braille and so I did a lot of reading to him. An umm...

I: Well, believe it or not, that's actually another kind of literacy activity.

R: Well, you don't think about it at that time, but I did.

I: Well, then you know Braille.

R: Well, I knew a little bit. I don't know it now.

I: And you used that to communicate with him?

R: Yes. Yes I did.

I: That's amazing.

R: And the little young lady who was here this morning said that there is a Bible in the schools that is translated into Braille, which I'm very anxious to learn about. So yes I did do the Braille and helped him actually write letters. Did a lot of letter writing back then, but that was home based.

Through the discussion this participant is able to come to understand a particular literacy practice that would otherwise have gone unnoticed. Her practice with Braille in composing messages to her brother will help her as she reviews the Braille Bible. By calling attention to different kinds of literacy events, researchers can help participants understand what a literacy event entails and reframe the discussion of literacy practice, helping them understand the value of what otherwise may have been disregarded as such.

In response to a question about school-based practices, another female participant happened to mention having to draw maps of a state that she had studied in elementary school. The relevant portion of that interview is below:

I: And what kinds of reading and writing activities do you remember from middle school or junior high school to high school period? I'm looking at question number six...six and seven.

R2: That's hard. I don't remember that too well. But I remember him one teacher had us making books. So that was a big deal. And so I had like my kindergarten students making books too. But I don't remember junior high school and high school. I just don't remember too much.

I: These books were much creative pieces then...poetry or stories?

R2: Yes, well, somewhat. But then there would be about a book about Ohio, and we would draw the shape of Ohio and talk about the different products and resources and that kind of thing. I had that teacher for three years so no wonder I like books but the...

This participant was a retired kindergarten teacher. After the interview, I mentioned that drawing the map was a form of literacy practice, which surprised her. Even though she had been a teacher, she had never considered drawing to be a form of literacy. She had learned that literacy pertained to basic reading and writing skills. I spoke to her about the relatively recent notion of multi-literacies; how the traditional notion of literacy—reading and writing basic texts—was still a part of traditional educational environments, but that literacy scholars now recognize other forms of literacy practices, such as visual representations like drawings or diagrams. It was interesting to observe a retired teacher's conceptualization of literacy change.

Another dynamic that I observed as many interviews ended was that the participant did not perceive value to the information they shared in the interview. In each case, I tried to reassure the participant of the value of their contribution, referring to how it added to the larger set of data that I could consider. While I was in the process of turning off the voice recorder, they articulated this perception. Excerpts from the end of two interviews illustrate this. One conveyed concern that she wasted my time:

I: I think that's all that I need as far as the literacy information and consequently that's all that's related to my study. Thank you for participating.

R3: Well I hope I didn't waste your time.

I: Oh, goodness no. Thank you.

Another articulated a similar concern about a perceived lack of information that he contributed, and the transcript records my response:

I: All right that does it then. Thank you for participating.

R4: Well, I don't think I give you much information.



I: Well it may seem like a small amount of information; a number of people have mentioned that. But it does add up. All the information...

Further, the particular historical society that helped me locate these participants asked me to share information from my research with them. At the time of this presentation, I had not begun the interviews; however, I had collected considerable information about literacy practices at a local workplace that was associated with national defense during three wars. I shared a draft of a manuscript associated with this research with them, and they also invited me to speak to their group at one of their meetings open to the public. I focused this presentation on certain kinds of training dynamics that occurred at a workplace (see Remley for more information about the study), and it became clear that the people who attended the presentation were not aware of certain literacy dynamics until my presentation. The historical society President acknowledged this in a follow-up email message, a portion of which is below:

**Sent:** Thursday, November 15, 2007 9:44 AM  
**To:** author  
**Subject:** [locale] Historical

Hello Dirk,

I wanted to Thank You for your presentation last night regarding the type of “training” given at the [workplace] in the early days. Many did not realize the impact in the homes concerning the “literacy” issues surrounding the type of training and “why” that type of training was utilized.

I can certainly appreciate all of the time and effort you put into your research on this subject. We are fortunate to have people like you who do make the effort to dig for information such as this and then compile it for future use, as well as presenting it to the general public in a timely manner.

The message articulates appreciation for gaining access to information that was not available to the community historically. Indeed, because the workplace was associated with national defense, documents were classified and employees were discouraged from talking about their work at home. This policy is conveyed in a few interviews, such as in the excerpt below. I had just asked about any talk at home about work, and the respondent spoke

of driving vehicles between work and home. I then clarified the question for him, at which time he acknowledged the policy:

I: But see I’m thinking, did you talk much with your family at home about the work that you were doing at the [site]?

R5: You really wasn’t supposed to do that. Because that was a no-no. From indoctrination when you first got hired, and there was...myself okay, there was a person who might talk to ten of you at one time and then as far as safety procedure, that was the same. Like that. They didn’t allow you. Also, they weren’t particular keen about, unless you were just coming to work and going home.

This secrecy withheld information about many dynamics at the workplace, including literacy practices. However, archival documents at the site that were classified historically provide information about the actual practices. Those classified documents were de-classified within ten years of the start of my study, and few people had actually attempted to research them. Clearly, the historical society appreciated my sharing that information, giving them access to it that they had not had previously.

The Program Planner for another historical society of a nearby community in the same county read of my presentation and asked me to speak about the subject to their group as well. As I corresponded with this person, it became clear that they wanted to know about the impact that the workplace had on the area. I accepted this society’s invitation, and I spoke about general dynamics within the historical context and the impact they had on the area economically. They paid me for my presentation, and recognizing the contribution that members of the first historical society made to facilitate the research, I donated almost half of the amount to the first historical society to help them collect more materials for their collections.

I did not anticipate these opportunities for reciprocity as my study began, but as I recognized them in the course of interviews and other discussions, I offered information that may have helped the people understand their own personal and communities’ literacy and history. The activist approach to reciprocity encourages establishing goals before the study begins. Researchers can articulate potential benefits to participants and their community prior to their participation within recruiting messages and consent forms. Such acknowledgement may help potential participants to understand the value of their contribution, perhaps motivating them further to participate. I included such language in my consent forms for interview participants. I acknowledged how the participant’s contribution

through the interviews could help others in the community understand their own literacy history:

If you take part in this project you will be contributing to the knowledge of how community literacies can facilitate economic and educational development. Further, these narratives will be shared with the [locale] Historical Society to help the citizens of [locale] learn about their community's history.

Including this information helps the participant understand the value of contributing to the study of literacy practices not only in terms of helping advance the field of literacy studies but in advancing knowledge about their own community.

### Reciprocity in Service Learning

An interesting dynamic of the particular historical society that has facilitated some of the research is that its president received a grant to develop instructional materials for a course about the community's history. That course was then to be included in the school district's high school curriculum. The president has also given presentations about local history at the high school. After the presentations, she asked students who may be willing to participate in a non-paid internship program to sign up for projects with which the historical society needs help, such as video productions and webpage design. A donor to the society also has enabled it to offer \$500 scholarships to students who do research as a class project and present that research to the society.

Some of the students who have heard her programs are now helping the historical society. The statement in the first transcription above—"...this young lady who was here this morning..."—is a reference to a student who was helping develop the historical society's website. Other students have attended meetings of the historical society and filmed presentations like the one I gave and acknowledged above. These students lend their technological expertise to the society so it can establish a larger presence in the community and maintain an archive of presentations. The students also become engaged with the history of their community. My point in presenting this example is to raise the awareness that there are organizations in our communities that may be seeking benefits of service learning projects but which may not know how to approach colleges and universities for such service. Researcher-Teachers who are doing community-based research may see how a given organization can benefit from a service learning program. Bringing interested students to that organization is another way to reciprocate. Further, it also shows that, while the particular students associated with this example are not involved in

a coordinated service learning project, their volunteerism reflects potential reciprocity within service learning.

A growing corpus of literature discussing benefits of service learning exists. Within this corpus researchers and instructors have acknowledged how students can benefit in such settings. Beyond the obvious resume building experience, this corpus identifies benefits relative to engaging students with their community beyond the academic institution, giving them a sense of civic engagement (Cushman and Emmons; Schutz and Ruggles Gere), or helping them negotiate between academic writing and community-oriented literacy practices (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters; Bacon; Brack, Gay, and Leanna Hall; Cushman and Guinsatao Monberg). According to a survey conducted by Buffalo State University of its own service-learning program, "80% of respondents indicated that they learned course content best, when connections are made to real life situations [sic]." Buffalo State encourages service learning projects in several courses and encourages students to use the same organization for multiple projects. Boston College is another institution that encourages such projects throughout coursework, not just in composition courses. Wayne State University offers a "Community Engagement" program that serves as a coordinating site for service learning projects. Wayne State's Community Engagement site lists several benefits to students for service learning projects, including:

- Makes learning more useful and relevant.
- Heightens awareness of community needs.
- Provides real-life application of what students are learning in the classroom.
- Provides an opportunity for students to learn about and give back to the community.
- Enhances sensitivity to diversity.
- Strengthens critical thinking skills and communication skills.
- Promotes personal and social growth.
- Fosters a sense of civic responsibility.
- Allows students to serve as involved citizens in their communities.
- Facilitates the development of a lifelong commitment to service.

This is not the complete list offered at the website, but all of these have been articulated in previous research into service learning. I call attention to the fourth item in the above list. Item four acknowledges that students can give back to the community as they learn about their community, reinforcing the reciprocal dynamics possible.

As composition and other academic programs include service-learning activities, students need to be informed of their own potential agency so that the community participants can benefit (Stanton; Cushman; Donahue, Bowyer and Rosenberg). In "Sustainable Service Learning Programs," Ellen Cushman acknowledges that "professors in service learning courses can



better sustain these initiatives when they view the community site as a place where their research, teaching, and service contribute to a community's self-defined needs and students' learning" (40). The more involved the instructor is in the organization, the more he or she can understand the organization's needs to guide service-learning projects. Such instructors can coordinate a given organization's relationship with students who participate and lend insight to goals and other organizational and community dynamics.

Often times, instructors who are not able to use their own research sites to facilitate service learning encourage students to serve organizations with which they are already involved or that might have an entity that facilitates service learning. For example, programs such as Buffalo State, Boston College, and Wayne State that integrate service learning at an institutional level often have a coordinator that may act in a similar capacity to that of the teacher above. This coordinator will contact several organizations in the vicinity and establish a relationship with those organizations with the understanding that students will perform various service projects for course credit. Similarly, some institutions, like Kent State University, the University of Connecticut, and the University of Northern Colorado, offer writing internship programs through the Department of English that are coordinated by a single professor or within a single unit, perhaps with assistance from a doctoral fellow. While these programs tend to engage students in workplace forms of service learning experiences, as well as with civic organizations, opportunities for reciprocity exist there as well. Indeed, as the Simmons and historical society examples above illustrate, scholars or students can share their own rhetorical or technological expertise with a civic organization or workplace to help improve its communications.

Prior to engaging students in such civic-oriented or workplace-directed service projects, instructors can share information like that identified above about the agency that exists in such settings. The more students understand how they can help the community throughout the research or service learning process, the more benefits the community can realize as well.

Finally, recognizing the value of service learning and literacy research and the importance of encouraging these, researchers and teachers can help participants and students locate publications that may be interested in their work or programs. As the historical society president corresponded with me about the instructional, internship, and scholarship programs she offers to students, I mentioned that several publications would be interested in these unique programs. I invited her to develop a manuscript and offered assistance with the following message:

These are very interesting programs: your presentations to the high schoolers, inviting volunteerism, offering scholarships and developing the history course. Some high schools require students to do "service learning" projects, which are similar to the internship opportunities you offer. Does [district name] do that—require service learning?

I'm sure the superintendent is very interested in your involvement; the service learning and community outreach dynamics are popular issues in education these days, and what you're doing is unique.

You should think about developing an article manuscript for an education-related journal. I'll be happy to help, even co-author, if you'd like. The following site lists journals that would likely be interested.

<http://www.servicelearning.org/library/journals/index.php>

Lots of opportunities to share your programs' stories.

Dirk

When researchers or teachers recognize potential contributions those who are not as familiar with academic publications can make, they should encourage those contributions and offer assistance to facilitate such. The invitation and assistance are reciprocation practices that allow community members to have a voice in community-based and service-learning scholarship. Such an invitation recalls Cushman's observation in her article "The Rhetorician as an Agent of Social Change" about the perceived gap that exists between the community and the academy articulated above: "The very same position as scholars that distances us from the community also invests us with resources that we can make available to others" (19). Inviting community members to take part in scholarship by making them aware of publications that may be interested in their work and by offering assistance to facilitate developing manuscripts for publication consideration reduces that gap further. Community members are able to recognize the value their voice brings to the scholarship that enhances the field.

## Conclusion

Through sharing their own knowledge about literacy phenomena in interviews and in speaking engagements, and sharing economic rewards

inherent to that sharing, researchers can reciprocate to the participants. Participants may not recognize how they may be able to benefit from a given study, even while the study unfolds. However, when researchers and students engaged in service learning projects recognize that participants may benefit at a given moment, the researcher should offer information to provide that benefit. Finally, researchers can share material rewards in reciprocating to their community participants, help potential participants understand explicitly how their contribution may benefit their own community, and invite participants to participate in scholarship.

Literacy researchers should identify any possible benefits for the community as they begin their research with the community members. Then, as other opportunities to reciprocate personally or institutionally arise in the process of collecting data, they can offer that information to individuals and institutions in the community. There are many opportunities for literacy researchers and students to “give back” to the communities that they study. The more researchers and students understand those potential opportunities and use their agency to act upon them, the more those participants and others can benefit from the research.

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Dirk has been teaching business writing and technical writing courses at Kent State University for over twenty years, and he is interested in connections between workplace literacy practices and home and community literacy practices.

## Book and New Media Reviews

### From the Review Desk

Jennifer deWinter

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Buses. This is my current cause. I moved into a city in order to reduce my family's carbon footprint. I willingly entered a social contract that took from me privacy and a certain amount of autonomy concerning my property in order to benefit from the city infrastructure. It turns out, however, that my city (and many others besides) see buses as expensive and (ah-hem) not high priority. So off to the car dealership to buy a new commuting car.

This seems like a strange and perhaps irrelevant preamble, but I assure readers that it is not. The question that I join students in trying to answer is a rhetorical one: How can I work with my neighbors to move my local government to civic action in a time of austerity? How, in other words, can I teach and participate in community action and (because I am a teacher first) how can I involve my students? It appears that my colleagues at other institutions are struggling with the same questions and proposing analytical tools and readings that enable us to draw upon the strengths of academic disciplines to affect positive local change. Take, for example, Christina LaVecchia's review of Ryder's *Rhetorics for Community Action* in which LaVecchia emphasizes Ryder's rhetorical sense of public writing and communication—one that responds to particular situations by taking into account all actors and their different expertise. An overriding theme in this book is Ryder's emphasis on a problem-posing pedagogy and balances multiple approaches. To compliment this review is the one on Nancy Welch's *Living Room* by Diana Eidson. Eidson identifies Welch's frame as one of balance between action and constraint, or the desire to affect public change in the face of private corporations and precedential government. This same theme between public and private can be seen in Jerry Lee's review of Prendergast's *Buying into English*, a noteworthy book for those of us interested in the control and possibilities of literacy and language in local and global contexts. Finally, this issue's Keywords essay "Prison" by Laura Rogers explores the complexities associated with prison literate practices and pedagogies as important to "for inmates to continue to obtain education, literacy skills, the chance for reflection and collaboration, and the opportunity to use writing to explore their worlds and lives" (internal page reference please). In all, I hope that the books and topics reviewed in this issue are as much as an inspiration to our readers as they were to me. Now to get my students as excited about buses as a topic of civic importance.