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Emergent Strategies for an Established Field: The Role of Worker-Writer Collectives in Composition and Rhetoric

We argue that the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, with its dual emphasis on literacy and occupational skills, can serve as a new model for writing classrooms and writing program administrators. We further contend that the “contact zone” classroom should be replaced with community-based “federations.”

*Perhaps if you saw me
As more than a server
Grant me the credit I merit
Dispose of your pity or mockery—
Recognize the resemblance?
Could I be you?
—Danielle Quigley, “Server”*

*Ordinary people make rhetorical space through a concerted,
often protracted struggle for visibility, voice, and impact
against powerful interests that seek to render them invisible.
People take and make space in acts that are simultaneously
verbal and physical.
—Nancy Welch, *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing
in a Privatized World**

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Within selective and elite universities exist pockets of talented working-class students who are there through a combination of intelligence, determination, financial aid, and community support.¹ Existing between their home community, where occupations have a pre-hi-tech sound, such as truck driver or waitress, and the world of the university, where such work is neatly tucked away from view, working-class students often find their own voice and community experiences elided or passed over. As a result, they must constantly negotiate how much of their personal lives can enter classroom conversation and under what circumstances. For local working-class residents, working within or living around the university, there is often not even the opportunity to make such decisions, for they are too often shut out from debates and dialogues about how the institution should define “education” in their own community. Indeed, the local working-class community is often not even represented on many campus maps, where images of university buildings stand adrift in a sea of white background. As educators who believed in composition’s history of democratizing literacy education, we began to ask how the work of a writing program might ground the university in its local environment, filling in the white space of campus maps, and, by doing so, provide community support for working-class students in elite writing classrooms. And, we asked, how might the writing undertaken within and beyond our classrooms enable this work to occur?

There was, of course, a large body of scholarship focused on working-class communities as well as pedagogical and curricular strategies designed to support such students’ entry into academic literacy. Scholars from Shirley Brice Heath and Deborah Brandt to Annette Lareau have used extended ethnographic studies to demonstrate how working-class communities develop their literacy skills within (and against) the economic and social parameters of their daily lives. Recognizing how traditional composition textbooks and classrooms fail to engage with these literate strategies, scholars such as Richard M. Ohmann (*English and Politics*), Ira Shor, and Mina Shaughnessy have offered (albeit different) political critiques and pedagogical strategies for composition teachers. Emerging from this work have also been specific classroom-based studies,

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such as those by David Seitz, which draw together ethnography and critical pedagogy to create classrooms that attempt to provide greater agency for working-class students not only in their writing classrooms, but in university as well. More recently, Tony Scott has examined how working-class identity is being rearticulated within “fast capitalism” and what it means for the work of writing programs, instructors, and students.

There are also concurrent attempts to enable students to move beyond the classroom and study the landscape of the working-class communities that often surround their campuses—the streets and neighborhoods of which they are often temporary residents. Indeed, the conjoined movements of community literacy scholarship and service-learning pedagogies have moved this emphasis on working-class communities into programmatic “social change” efforts that link students with local populations, providing pragmatic experience of the literacy, political, and democratic theories that are often the feature of composition/rhetoric classrooms today. Particularly with Linda Flower, the work of classroom/community partnerships have been linked to participants developing the organizing skills (what we call “occupational skills”) to engage in a productive and goal-oriented discussion of contentious community issues. As characterized by Flower, elite college students and working-class residents here learn to negotiate both personal and community differences through a set of seemingly neutral rhetorical concepts and practices.

And yet, for the working-class student sitting within a world of privilege, we wondered if an unintended effect of such work isn’t to turn our students into exotic others—representing a different and alien culture to be explored and probed through the disciplinary lenses of the academy. And while we want to recognize the value of students undertaking literacy narratives or ethnographic studies that present either their own or their communities’ working-class identity, we are uncomfortable with such work in isolation from larger networks that present such communities as agents of their own future, creating their own rhetorical and activist models. So while recognizing the value of the above mentioned work, we want to argue against pedagogical strategies that frame the working-class as a marginal “cultural identity” defined by “habits and tastes” that can be explored within the “contact zone” of our classrooms (Welch). Instead, we believe that our classrooms and programs should form writing projects with local and international worker-writer collectives, collectives that are attempting to gain both the literacy and the occupational skills that support larger struggles for representation and rights. For as Welch

indicated above, the effort to gain an independent rhetorical space is both a *verbal* and *physical* act.

We argue that by drawing such collectives into our classrooms, not only do working-class students gain an important ally, but all the students in the class can gain a deeper appreciation for how the literate and occupational strategies inherent in such groups can impact the production of knowledge in the university. That is, rather than export rhetorical theories to the community, we can import these writing collectives' literacy and occupational practices as a means to ensure working-class student success at elite institutions. Moreover, when taken collectively, the tactical interventions by these collectives in local definitions of literacy represent a location from which a strategic partnership with an activist writing *program* (Adler-Kassner) can argue for a greater re-alignment in the actual relations of power between the university and its surrounding working-class community. It is in undertaking this pedagogical and institutional work that all our writing students can gain a deeper sense of how particular alignments of language and power act to the benefit (or disadvantage) of the communities that surround their campus.

To develop this argument, we discuss the motivations and results of creating a Trans-Atlantic Federation of Worker Writers (TAFWW), a partnership consisting of Syracuse University's Writing Program, the Basement Writers (a local writing group), and the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (an alliance of writing and publishing groups from throughout the United Kingdom). The goal of the TAFWW project was to provide an enveloping context where working-class student experience at an elite university could be authorized within a writing classroom by the work of the UK writers and held in place by the supporting voices of working-class citizens in the surrounding city, citizens who by the end of the project would also begin to take an active role in defining the goals of education for their university counterparts. Ultimately, then, the aim was not to create a "contact zone" in which the experiences of our working-class students could be observed and analyzed but to form a "federation" that, through writing and publication, would mutually support the collective literacy and political goals of the working class in the university *and* the city of Syracuse, New York.

First Contact

Steve Parks's first undergraduate teaching assignment upon arriving at Syracuse University was Critical Research and Writing, a required writing course for

sophomore students. The goal of the course is to introduce students into the structure of academic argument within the context of different cultural forms of argumentation, a context necessarily demanding a diverse representation of different ethnic, economic, and sexual identities. Having just left Temple University, at that time still a predominantly working-class school, Parks was interested in how issues of class, labor, and literacy would be interpreted within Syracuse University, a private institution. With this in mind, he designed a course in which students would read a variety of genres (fiction, nonfiction, vernacular, political, academic) and write a variety of “arguments” (academic, personal, research based) where “work” and “literacy” were the primary themes. During the course of the semester, then, the students read established authors, such as Barbara Ehrenreich, alternative labor histories, such as those produced by Mike Davis, and community writers, such as Vivian Usherwood. Throughout, students would be asked to negotiate and evaluate how these different texts authorized a particular truth and, in doing so, established a certain discursive reality about the relationship between socioeconomic class and literacy. All the while they were asked to investigate how their own discursive strategies (personal, academic, and political) placed them in relationship to these topics.

As an opening assignment, the students wrote about their own working history. As he usually does, Parks passed out two student essays that echoed many of the ideas and rhetorical moves made by the rest of the class. In the first essay, the student described a life of privilege marked by having no actual work history (her father paid all her expenses, including tuition). The essay ended by highlighting her own lack of economic skills when she stated, “I hope one day to learn how to read a bill.” Parks had expected the class to talk about how the student had rhetorically constructed her particular privilege as well as a general discussion of how one’s occupational literacy, the skills necessary to manage one’s life on a daily basis, was directly related to their position in the larger economy. Instead, the paper met with almost complete silence, with only several students affirming a similar experience. The story was so typical as to not deserve extended comment.

Undaunted, Parks passed out another piece of writing by Danielle Quigley, a student from the Syracuse area. Her response was a stark contrast to the experiences of many others in the class. Describing her work history, Quigley had written:

Growing up, I was quite aware that my parents were not going to be paying my way and if I wanted something, I was going to have to be the one who paid for it. . . .

My first job was as a paper collator. This was the glorified title for someone who sat in a dingy room stuffing ads into the mountains of newspapers surrounding them. My shift would begin at four o'clock after school on Friday afternoons. After punching in, I would go downstairs into the dusty dungeon-like warehouse that held all of the printing machines. My first task was to lift 20-pound bundles of papers and move them to our tables. Moving the stacks of ads came second; however, there was usually more than one. Once I had my papers I would put them in a neat line in front of me, sit down on my gray metal folding chair, and begin collating. This meant opening the paper and placing all of the ads in it, then shutting the paper and placing it in another pile. Sounds easy right? Try boring, repetitive, tedious, and all of the above. Where was my desk and chair, or coffee? (Quigley 34)

Here was a student who to some extent had framed her life around a future of paying bills and, as detailed in her full paper, the slow recognition of the lack of connection between hard work and adequate pay. Moreover, the paper detailed an aspect of the working world that probably few of the students considered—the work of putting ads into their daily newspapers, typically delivered to their doors. The hope was this essay would show the “underbelly” of an economy from which the majority of the students in the class seemed to benefit—or at least this is how they positioned themselves in writing. In creating such a juxtaposition, Parks’s goal was to ask them to imagine an essay, “a rhetorical contact zone,” that could hold both worlds simultaneously and frame how each student existed within a larger economic and legislative environment.² Here again the student paper was met with complete silence. Stuck, Parks suggested a ten-minute break.

Three students, all raised in or around Syracuse, lingered behind as the rest of the students left the classroom. In forceful whispers, they laid bare their experience of the course and how their attempt to talk about working-class experiences had never been supported in an SU classroom: “Of course, no one had anything to say, what’s to say but that the rich always get what they want.” Parks let the break linger longer than usual, listening in on their conversation. When all the students returned, classroom discussion moved onto the reading, a selection from Ehrenreich’s *Nickel and Dimed*, a text that details the author’s attempt to live on the wages of a typical service worker in the United States. The reading generated quite a bit of sympathy for her plight—a sympathy, or empathy, that had seemed missing for the writer of the “paper collating” essay. This image of a “well-off” writer suffering lower-class economic difficulties appeared to be a more adept way to draw them into the debate. Still, as a teacher,

appealing to this form of benevolence to generate a connection to the “paper collating” student left Parks no more comfortable than the previous silences.

Afterward, Parks selected the three local students to remain and discuss whether the course was meeting its assigned goals—these weekly meetings with students being a common occurrence in his writing classrooms. After

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some additional long silences, the students laid bare the socioeconomic viewpoint that structured student discussion—a naturalized assumption by the majority of students that everyone enjoyed the same economic privilege with, perhaps, some undertones of benevolence for those less

fortunate. Further, with so few working-class voices in the room, they argued, the deck was naturally stacked against an equal conversation. No matter how many working-class voices were read, analyzed, and revised in assigned papers, the class simply was not peopled with enough countervailing voices. In working-class politics, they stated, real strength was in numbers.

Thanks to this conversation, Parks began to recognize that the structure of the class had echoed his current understanding of the larger dynamics of the campus—a sponsoring of elite voices within an environment that silenced the local working-class population. In such an environment, working-class students did not feel authorized to speak. Or rather, they did not feel the dynamics of the classroom would validate their viewpoints. As Gary Cale explores in “When Resistance Becomes Reproduction,” writing classrooms that feature different subject positions as represented through alternative readings, even when coupled with a critical pedagogy stance, often fail to provide sufficient support to marginalized students. Speaking of the class period in which his students discussed racism, Cale notes:

When I suggested that racism affected us all, many White students again claimed that the only time they had been affected by racism was when they had been called “whitey” or “honkey.” The concept of white privilege was totally dismissed. As a result of such discussions, at least one of the Black students found it discouraging to talk about race in class and stopped out until we finished the unit on racism. (3)

While unspoken, it was clear that the atmosphere of class privilege permeating the room also “silenced” working-class students. Indeed, it was more than a silencing. Through conversations with these students, Parks soon recognized that they felt their own experience of service labor and commitment to working-

class values were being actively diminished by the other students, who would rather embrace the struggles of Ehrenreich than those of their colleagues. Why, the local students wondered, was the suffering of a wealthy journalist more important than that of their neighbors and friends?

These students' experiences also pointed to the deeper issue of how composition/rhetoric has adopted a "contact zone" structure as the basis for many of its classes—a concept Mary Louise Pratt developed at an elite institution to broaden and diversify students' understanding of culture. For while the importance of structuring classrooms that present alternative and competing cultural and political positions is an important component of a student's education about the relationship between literacy and power, the experiences of these working-class students at an elite institution clearly demonstrate the limitations of that concept. For when such students are isolated within an otherwise non-working-class student population, simply introducing alternative voices does little to alter the power dynamics. As the experience of Parks's classroom demonstrated, such a move actually exacerbates the students' sense of isolation by highlighting their status as "different," indirectly invoking a sense of empathy for the "working poor" that cannot account for the agency and skills it took for those working-class students actually in the classroom to achieve admission to Syracuse University. Indeed, it is this sense of being able to "take control" of their destiny that David Seitz highlights as a key theme within the writing of his working-class students. Creating a textually based contact zone within such a classroom negates this sense of control and indirectly replicates for students a silencing of community voices in elite institutions.

Indeed the class itself enacted this silencing by occurring strictly within the safe confines of the university's institutional geography—hi-tech classrooms, classic college architecture, manicured lawns, and so on. For elite students with little direct experience of the working-class neighborhoods that surround the institution, this created an atmosphere that enabled them to initially rely upon generalizations about Syracuse, often turning these economically distressed neighborhoods into sites of sympathy or empathy. Or just as often, as Nedra Reynolds articulates in *Geographies of Writing*, turning local neighborhoods into spaces of violence and crime and, consequently, outside the geography our students should inhabit. In such a

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classroom, students were not made aware of how the connection between literacy and work was the site of collective struggle across the city—that their seemingly self-evident definitions were being actively contested across neighborhoods and communities. Nor were the students invited into the work of changing the perception and reality of this “verbal and physical” economy (see Marback; Sennett and Cobb).

A typical solution to such a dilemma is to supplement such a course with a service-learning option. Within such a framework, students enter aspects of the working-class community (informed by the insights of the fellow students from the area) and witness firsthand the connections between literacy and economic class through volunteering at public schools, adult literacy programs, or other nonprofits—typical locations for such work. With this direct experience, students would hopefully gain greater understanding of the work and literacy skills necessary to be a successful working-class student—that is, the local framework in which literacy politics are enacted. As Bruce Herzberg has argued, however, such experiences often produce individualistic or charitable responses in students—not entirely different than the students’ response to Ehrenreich. As importantly, such organizations also represent existing nodes within the work or literacy geography of a city, held in place by federal, state, and foundation support networks. Yet, as Ellen Cushman demonstrates in *The Struggle and the Tools*, local populations often imagine having to organize against such networks not only to gain agency but also to implement their own sense of community values and culture. Democratic struggles for literacy often occur outside the framework of established institutions—however democratic these institutions may imagine themselves.

To embed students within those moments where working-class communities are developing alternative and self-generated concepts of literacy and work against the predominant legislative and economic paradigms, then, implies an alternative pedagogical structure than has traditionally been drawn out of Pratt’s contact zone—a structure exemplified in Parks’s Critical Research and Writing course. One way to articulate this difference is to briefly re-examine Pratt’s use of Guama Poma as central metaphor for classroom practices. According to Pratt, Poma was most likely “an indigenous Andean who claimed noble Inca descent” and “who had adopted (at least in some sense) Christianity, and may have worked for the Spanish Colonial Administration” (519). Poma writes, then, within a complex set of legitimate discourses—Andean royal heritage, Christianity, and an official government position. While each discourse is

placed in opposition to the other in the colonial context, they are all legitimate in their respective domains. Poma's "letter" is more a negotiation between these historically legitimate discourses than an intervention that would speak to the needs of the unrepresented mass of the Inca (or Spanish, for that matter). As represented by Pratt, Poma's letter does not imagine a call for an independence movement based upon collective struggle of the mass of oppressed citizens. Instead, a partnership among elites is recommended. Here imagine established literacy institutions negotiating how resources will be distributed across the network; institutions that the community may or may not imagine acting in their behalf; institutions that also must follow dominant legal and political structures when doing their work.

Yet alternative subject positions exist outside this framework. Imagine for a moment Poma's letter as existing within a terrain where other individuals and groups were arguing for a third position—a different sense of power that worked against both Andean and Spanish "royalty." Arjuna Parakrama attempts to explain the contours of such a landscape in his study of the Sri Lankan "revolt" of 1848. In *Language and Rebellion*, he examines the status of a "pretender king" who exists within the context of active anti-colonial struggle. Through close reading of documents written in official discourses, Parakrama argues that discursive strategies cannot offer an accurate insight into "the rebellion":

It is, therefore, no surprise that my examination of the discourses on the rebellion have established that one of the reasons for the denial of peasant agency concerns the fact that peasant discourse is predicated on an alternate paradigm which cannot co-exist with any casual-rational-legal model which is the only one that has any explanatory power within elite historiography. Even when there is some accounting for the rebel voice within the discourses on the rebellion, such accounting has become possible only through an exclusion of the types of response that call into question this very model itself. . . .

In this view, if it is possible to formulate tentative statements that arguably present the underlying thesis/theses of the discourse, then one must re-examine the discourse itself for strands that have been left out or covered over. The proper object of study must then be one that defies its propositional representation. (Parakrama 68–69)

Pratt's reading of Poma's letter attempts to position it as a text that defies "propositional representation" since it appears to articulate the collective politics of the marginalized and colonized population, the very politics that colonialism is designed to repress. We would argue that such a reading of his letter is only partially accurate. Its failure to be read does demonstrate the

inability of a mixture of elite discourses to be understood by elite Spanish authorities—in that way it did defy propositional representation. Her reading does not, however, attempt to highlight or recognize those non-elite rhetorical models and actions that “defy propositional representation” within either set of elite discourses—the voices of those outside of administrative, religious, or mainstream power structures who are appropriated into Poma’s argument. Echoing Cushman, these are the emergent discourses of the working class and working poor attempting to organize a different political and economic network within their community. Such rhetorical models rest upon the edge of official discourses—the unarticulated collection of experiential, fragmentary, and emergent understandings of potential collective subject positions (see de Certeau; Gramsci). Beyond Poma and the Spanish colonial authorities are the voices and struggles of everyday people; beyond Poma lies the possibility of the formation and production of an oppositional vernacular culture.

To return to Parks’s writing course, like Poma, the working-class students certainly had the ability to write essays that could potentially be shared with their classmates. Unlike Poma, however, they were writing within a logic and set of experiences that did not intersect with the primary representational logics within the course—a nonrecognition of systemic labor and educational injustice and an empathetic recognition by the elite of individual working-class struggles. A third alternative—representing working-class culture as containing its own set of values and literacies—could not gain traction within the classroom, that is, the student “letters” could not be “read.” Moreover, the

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classroom had not connected them to non-classroom or non-institutionally based efforts that were located across the city, efforts that were using writing to articulate a new vision of working-class identity and economic and political rights—writing groups, book clubs, self-generated literacy programs, and so on. Yet changing the representational logic that dominated the classroom required such connections

if the working-class student voices were to gain power “in numbers.”

For this to occur, the voices of our working-class students must be aligned with those of writing groups, neighborhood block associations, and other ad hoc organizations working to redefine the representations and discursive reality of the working-class lives. For if this latent vernacular culture is to become reality in the classroom (and larger community), if the students’ experience is

to reach the level of “propositional representation” among their classmates, processes must be created that can permeate this diffuse terrain and allow the articulation of a common sensibility among university students and these localized moments of literacy politics. Without such an articulation, these local efforts remain fragmented across the city and disconnected from the university, adjacent but not integrated into each other. Words are spoken but not heard; sentences are written but not understood. In this sense, vernacular culture is the successful production of a collective subject position drawn from the personal experiences and knowledges of a community. It is the result of contentious active negotiation and organization. It is this process, we believe, that most accurately represents the terrain upon which the politics of literacy, community, and democracy are manifested.

Shifting toward such a model of partnership, however, has direct impact on the type of writing expected from students. Whereas the former model of Parks’s class focused on individual testimony or academic analysis, students would now be asked to write as members of an emerging collective. Moreover, as opposed to models of service-learning where students wrote “for, about or with” the community (Deans), here students would be asked to write “as” the community (Monberg)—enacting the possibility of a greater alliance not only with each other but the larger Syracuse community. Or to connect our earlier discussion of campus maps, representations that often exclude the actual city surrounding campus buildings, with Nedra Reynolds’s discussion of rhetorical mapping, the question for Parks’s writing class would become “How do you get there from here?”

The Arts of the Power Grid

The Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP) provided the initial road map and partnership model for Parks’s revised writing course—a “course,” as discussed below, that would eventually become a network of lower- and upper-division writing courses.³ For in the FWWC, students at Syracuse could gain an understanding of how working-class communities have historically used writing as a means to organize and advocate for expanded definitions of literacy rights across workplace, educational, and legislative institutions. Indeed, the history of the FWWC, as traced by Tom Woodin, represents the slow re-articulation of this long tradition into modern context—a context marked by the movement in the UK away from national political parties and toward grassroots organizing; the economy’s movement away from traditional union-based industries toward a service economy; and

the conjoining of technology that allowed offset printing with the political movement for educational equity (“Building Culture”).⁴

By the early 1970s, these interconnected moments had created a terrain in which working-class writing groups were beginning to announce a sense of collective identity. For instance, in Brighton, a movement to resist a community spa being rebuilt as a casino and luxury hotel sparked a newsletter in which individuals wrote their personal histories of living in the city. With the availability of new printing technologies, the newsletter soon became QueenSpark Books, a formal publishing enterprise of working-class history in Brighton. In East London, a school strike in support of Chris Searle, a teacher who published a book of student poetry, led to a general community reconsideration about who could be called a “writer.”⁵ Soon after, the Centerprise Bookshop, located a few miles from the school, became a hub of worker-writer activity, publishing a number of locally best-selling authors, probably the most well known of which is Vivian Usherwood, whose poems (written when he was age twelve) sold over 18,000 copies (see Morley and Worpole; Woodin).

Indeed, a key element of this emergent movement was the deep saturation of community writing within a local neighborhood. Whereas a prominent

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national poet could sell a thousand books nationwide, a local poet, such as Usherwood, might sell a thousand or so copies within a town. These small publications served almost as an electrical charge drawing disconnected individuals into a localized power grid—a grid that authorized and gave power to the voices of worker-writers that previously were marginalized within publishing. And while each moment within this grid occurred separately or was only tangentially related, a common set of values seemed to be coursing between writing and publication groups. With some exceptions, these strategies could be summarized as follows:

Writing groups should be self-initiated and self-sustaining through the labor of group members.

Writing should be considered for how it expresses the cultural and economic history of the writer and, as such, should be understood for how it intervenes in traditional representations of working-class experience.

Writing should be seen as an organic process where revision or responding to peer comments is a necessary stage in a piece’s development.

Established popular and literary forms, such as autobiography, detective novels, or poetry, should be made to serve the purpose of expressing working-class experience in all its diversity; working-class experience should not be tailored to meet canonical literary forms.

Publication and performance serve the purpose of both individual expression and fostering a collective identity within the local community. For this reason, publication and performance processes should be managed by group members and directed by their sense of their own public or collective identity.

When the FWWCP formed in 1976 as a means to draw together these separate moments, many of these core writing group strategies were brought into the ethos and policies of the group. For instance, the practice of publications being managed by group members became a general policy within the FWWCP; writing groups had to be self-run, not led by an adult education tutor as if it were a class. One way to read the development of the national Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers, then, was the creation of a national grid of working-class voices that held itself as distinct from (or in opposition to) the traditional network of social service and literacy institutions.

Initially, writing teachers might imagine the most organic connection between their students and the FWWCP would be the writing skills developed by its members—familiarity with revision, use of literary forms, the establishment of “real” audiences, etc. Certainly, this was part of the FWWCP ethos. Equally important, however, might be skills best encapsulated under the term “occupational literacy,” a term that originates in managerial theory but that we use here to indicate the acquisition or transfer of skills from the workplace, where they serve a profit motive, to the community, where they serve the purpose of creating democratically organized cultural and social activities (Pollard, “When Adam”). What each group was simultaneously developing alongside a body of writing was a set of occupational skills—such as arranging meetings, reserving rooms, overseeing the rental of performance space, collecting funds, and managing contracts with printers and small businesses. These occupational skills were deeply imbricated with the acquisition of literacy skills. In fact, acquiring occupational skills was like “owning the means of production” since they ensured the group’s continued ability to meet about “writing” and to produce “community publications.” Moreover, these skills could then be applied to developing and maintaining a collective working-class presence

within a community, such as the Brighton example above (Morley and Worpole; Batsleer et al.). The FWWCP tradition, then, blends literacy development with the development of a “working-class literacy” power grid.

To capture the sense of how the literacy and occupational skills came together to establish a grid through which further work was supported, two examples directly related to university writing courses and structures seem important to note. Pat Smart, who plays a key role later in this essay, joined a Liverpool writing group after the death of her mother. As recounted to Woodin, Smart states:

I'd always told children's stories and made up funny rhymes for them but never written them down. I decided to go to a night class, but found it was exactly like it was in school, sat behind a desk with the teacher in front, saying things like, “Don't drift off the subject . . . you'll be sitting an exam soon.” The pressure was awful! Well I didn't like that. Then I heard about writers' workshops. I found one in my own area, which was Stockbridge Writers. The main difference between an English class and a writers' workshop was, in the English I thought I was going to concentrate on where to put full stops and commas. They had me writing essays and it had to be in the form they wanted it, and then big red crosses . . . and notes at the bottom like, “try again.” But going to a writers' workshop, nobody saw what I'd written. I'd just read it out so all the pauses were correct, where I wanted them to be . . . and the spelling didn't matter an iota, and that pleased me. I don't now why the teachers thought I was soft, because I'm not. I know that now, but 12 years ago, before I discovered the Fed, I would have agreed with them that I was a ‘stupid girl’. (Woodin, “More Writing,” 568)

Through her involvement in the writing group and national network, however, Smart also developed the administrative and bureaucratic skills (as well as

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printing and computing skills) necessary to ultimately lead her to the “chair” of the FWWCP.⁶ In other words, Smart moved from thinking of herself as outside of any literacy network to being a central figure in the national literacy movement of working-class writers in the United Kingdom. Moreover, as the working-class “power grid” further established itself,

there was a move to create alternatives to colleges and universities. Pecket Well College, for instance, was initiated as an attempt to create adult basic education “classes” that met the needs of the local community and worked

outside of traditional academic formats with courses created around student/community understandings of what would be “useful” and community building. The goal, then, was not just the production of individual writers or writing groups, but the formation of occupational skills that could allow participants to build a structure that would make manifest the experience and insights of a marginalized working-class experience—the production of a vernacular culture.

So in addition to creating a classroom where students could participate in the writing strategies that were helping to form an alternative definition of working-class culture, the FWWCP highlights the need to create a writing classroom where the related occupational skills could also be learned. Moreover, rather than imaging these skills as having to be imported from our composition/rhetoric traditions, these writing and occupational skills would be drawn from and developed within the context of local cultures attempting to create their own “power grids” through which to articulate an identity and a social and political agenda. For this

reason, a writing class focused on the connections between the production of writing and the production of a local vernacular politics would have to recast the role of student writing away from the important, yet singular, goal of learning to negotiate a set of diverse texts. Instead, the student would also

Moreover, rather than imaging these skills as having to be imported from our composition/rhetoric traditions, these writing and occupational skills would be drawn from and developed within the context of local cultures attempting to create their own “power grids” through which to articulate an identity and a social and political agenda.

be asked to participate *as* a member of a collective attempting to formulate a new sense of “community”—a negotiation as fraught with conflict as consensus. Reading student texts in this framework demands greater attention to how they are surrounded by other voices simultaneously as well as part of a larger collaborative project to creating a new subject position that can speak across university/community divides about the values and interests of working-class culture. Rather than the singular student voice, our interests as educators committed to the composition/rhetoric tradition of democratizing literacy rest in how such voices intersect within the collective attempt to alter not only the representational logic in which a population exists but also the collective political and legislative struggle around literacy as well—the creation of new literacy power grids.

Within this logic, Poma’s “letter” should be replaced with Morley and Worpole’s *Republic of Letters (ROL)*, a central text within the worker-writers’

movement. *ROL* was written in response to the British Arts Council's decision that FWWCP work had "no literary merit" and did not merit organizational funding. In response, a committee produced a collage of a book that intermixed worker-writer texts, high literary texts, theoretical literacy discussions, and socialist/class analysis to make the argument for a new "collective working-class aesthetic" category and literary movement. Similar to Poma's letter, this book also had a limited or non-existent reception within the elite culture of the academy—rarely, if ever, being assigned in university classrooms and never receiving any "literary awards." Unlike Poma's letter, however, *ROL* served to further connect (and act as a catalyst for) writing groups and local partnerships across the United Kingdom. It was a letter that was received because it was sent to an emergent collective "republic of letters."

So while we agree that it is certainly necessary to imagine the writing classroom as engaging with texts representing different subject positions, it is not sufficient if the goal is to enact for students and local community residents a true partnership—a space where collective writing is used by individuals for

So while we agree that it is certainly necessary to imagine the writing classroom as engaging with texts representing different subject positions, it is not sufficient if the goal is to enact for students and local community residents a true partnership—a space where collective writing is used by individuals for gaining social status as a recognized community that can then argue for legal and political rights.

gaining social status as a recognized community that can then argue for legal and political rights.⁷ Instead, we would argue that this infused sense of pedagogy demands not a contact zone but a writing classroom partnered with emergent communities. For as articulated within the FWWCP tradition, the work of the writing class should be to both highlight the situatedness of its particular writing domain (the university) while demonstrating how writing collec-

tives operate and can participate in establishing new pathways or grids that can re-articulate existing literacy and political pathways. Moreover, stepping outside the particular literacy goals of a specific writing class, we would argue that the role of a writing program should be to consider how its institutional location might support new connections across university or community collectives that can argue for a more inclusive and democratic vision of writing instruction within its particular region. Or to invoke Linda Adler-Kassner's recent work, rather than producing "contact," an activist WPA might also work collaboratively to produce actual change across the political and social terrain.

While the arguments above could be applied to the specifics of any local university or community setting, the dynamics within Parks's university course

necessitated these insights be applied to support the efforts of moving working-class identity from the edge of conversation into a mainstream presence that would alter the range and import of emergent literacy practices. What needed to occur was the creation of a venue through which this cultural framework could be developed by working-class individuals across Syracuse and, eventually, acted upon in a variety of public spheres—educational, occupational, and political. It was out of this sense that Parks partnered with Pollard, an FWWCP Board member, to create the Trans-Atlantic Federation of Worker Writers (TAFWW). As the working-class students in WRT 205 had stated, for the working class, there was strength in numbers.

Federations

Our attempt to create such a writing course began the following term in Civic Writing, an upper-division writing course. As we corresponded online, a belief emerged that the FWWCP's membership and archives could provide a tradition of writing and occupational skills that would enable Civic Writing students to have an alternative conversation in class and act as a ballast for working-class students at the elite university.⁸ The eventual goal would be to create a manifesto of working-class literacy rights as well as a related publication that articulated both the experience of working-class individuals within educational systems but also drew upon their own occupational skills in its production, a “republic of letters” of sorts. Together, the hope was these documents might be used to structure additional curricular and community activities.

The initial framing for the course and extended project grew out of the work of a local working-class writing group, the Basement Writers, a name drawn from their basement meeting location and coincidentally the name of an existing FWWCP group member. The writing group was initially an outgrowth of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 1199 Bread and Roses *un-seenamerica* project. Emerging within this structure, Parks was initially asked to form the group as a means to model a different type of classroom environment for local labor classes, both as a means to ensure worker attendance and to highlight a more cooperative learning environment within such programs. Over the course of several years, the group had morphed into a steady contingent of about six to eight writers, representing individuals from the trades, health, and service industries, ranging in seniority from union heads to rank-and-file members. And while the initial motivation might have been to record their working lives, the sheer act of looking backward, considering how they ended up as laborers, led to writing that reflected on their own education, drawing

together the connections between their working history and their initial literacy goals. In the process, the group developed its own leaders and agenda, with Parks serving a more limited role as facilitator of the group's partnership work with Syracuse University.

As the idea took shape for a collective classroom focused on supporting the emergence of a class-based view of education, latent themes began to emerge within the Basement Writers work. For instance, David Kent, a postal worker in a local hospital, had spent significant time writing about his work history. Within this new collective context, his writing also began to connect with the voices of working-class students in Parks's earlier writing course. In a series of short pieces, which was ultimately published as "I Am a Taurus, Producer, and Hard Worker,"⁹ Kent wrote:

In 1982, while in high school looking forward to graduation, my world as I knew it crashed and burned. I was told by educators I could not graduate based on my competencies, which were under state education requirements for graduation at the time. "You will have to stay back another year to make them up." Well at the time the United States President was Ronald Reagan, who signed a bill that basically said you must be enrolled in a college curriculum by age eighteen in order to keep on receiving social security disability benefits on my mother's behalf. Mom was disabled physically now. We could not afford to lose her SSD benefits or we would lose everything. I could not allow this to happen. So, without any college prep classes and no high-school diploma, I had to enroll in a college curriculum at Onondaga Community College (OCC). I wanted to enroll in electronics technology program at OCC. The program had been filled for two years and there was a waiting list, but based on my entrance exam I was put at the bottom. Yes—a very low exam score. Again saying to myself, *Damn, where do I go from here? Enroll in another curriculum or what?* (Kent 12)

By the end of the piece, Kent has answered this question by demonstrating his ability to successfully find work as a postal clerk at a local hospital, get married, and raise a family. As he concludes, "It's priceless."

Initially in response to this piece, the Basement Writers group spent time talking about the impact of Ronald Reagan on the working class. But there was another story here as well. Kent's piece is also about the struggle to develop an occupational literacy—the literal ability to learn how to "pay the bills." It was this literacy that Quigley, through her paper-collating job, was seeking to acquire (and that other students, such as the wealthy student, had yet to find a reason to learn). In each case, the writing produced operated on several levels. While each used traditional writing genres (autobiography/memoir), the

stories that developed represented an interruption of common ways of speaking in their respective contexts. In addition, both Kent's and Quigley's pieces covertly detailed the "occupational skills" necessary to move these voices into the larger discussion—for Kent, negotiating university bureaucracy, working within federal government policies, maintaining family structures, organizing a worksite; for Quigley, organizing a worksite, developing procedures for efficiency, managing funds to secure long-term goals. Yet neither the Critical Research and Writing classroom nor the Basement Writers group had enabled those skills to be put to work in building a collective space to articulate the educational needs of working-class students.

Indeed, very few of the pieces even imagined such a collective space for educational and economic justice was possible. For Kent and Quigley, their histories were each tales of individual struggle. Within the group as a whole, the writing did not attempt to portray how high schools or colleges could be structured to support their personal goals and, in effect, the larger goals of working-class communities. Nor were union-sponsored educational institutions seen as a possible answer. In a piece that was initially read as about gender politics, one writer wrote about how unions educated their workers:

He called me that afternoon and informed me of my acceptance into the ever so sought after apprenticeship program. It hadn't settled in by the time I took my first steps inside. The classroom was bright and I felt exposed. They all seemed to know exactly what they were supposed to do—My school books were still covered in that clear plastic, exposing my biggest fear of being different. I took my seat in the back corner hoping those two walls would shield me. It was the longest hour of my life sitting in my corner listening to the teacher talk of things that back then was like a preschooler understanding the theory of relativity. The other guys were college students and I was an infant, my insides were screaming . . . What are you thinking. You're not smart enough. "YOU DON'T BELONG HERE."

In fact, the full text of the story traces the destruction of her friendship with one other woman union worker under the relentless assault of chauvinistic union members. She is called a lesbian and accused of sleeping with male co-workers. She is called a "dyke," then accused of being too feminine to succeed. Yet, within this narrative also emerges her ability to continue through this onslaught and hold onto a stronger sense of community values, drawn from her life in the community. In fact, she develops a community among the women in the union program and, despite obstacles, attempts to maintain this community while completing her education. What is only latent in Quigley and Kent, a sense of

how to actually build a local supportive educational community, becomes fully articulated in her writing.

Civic Writing, then, would be structured to allow these different populations—the FWWCP, Basement Writers, and SU students—to discuss the connections between education and economic class, developing the issue within the contexts of access, disability, equity, and curriculum. Through face-to-face and online conversations, the project created a permeable seam through which different populations could transgress boundaries, establishing a dialogue that altered the dynamics that marked Parks’s previous class. What became almost immediately apparent was

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that the partnership with the Basement Writers and FWWCP provided a local and international context that legitimated the voices of the SU students. (In this regard, Parks’s role became not to be a participant in either group but to demonstrate the “collaborative” skills required to make such partnerships work.) Instead of generating silence, a person’s class background became a generative lens through which to examine the goals of writing and

civic engagement. In part, this was done through writing academic papers in which their experience was examined through the theories of Antonio Gramsci, Nancy Fraser, and Geneva Smitherman, among others. Yet, the local students and self-identified working-class students also began to use technology to align their personal stories with a larger set of working-class experiences and skills. This was probably nowhere more evident than in the ability of the collective to establish a “blog” where each participant could frame their initial experience and have it placed into a larger social and political context through interaction with the Basement Writers and FWWCP group members.

As condensed and approved by TAWWF, the following represents their understanding of how the “blog” conversation enabled development of a common understanding of class and education:

Nick Pollard, UK

The key thing probably in the Fed is an experience of marginalisation, of writing from the periphery. However, there might be more periphery than centre, and the problem is that the centre dominates culture at the periphery. Thus what you see in the mainstream culture of telly, popular press and literature is a kind of Disneyfication of everything, which reduces and insults and encourages a false consciousness or false perception of the way things are.

This is an interesting issue and also core to some of the origins of the Fed.

... Some of the early writing that came out of the Fed or that was around when the Fed started was with schoolchildren. Chris Searle's work began—with the publication of *Stepney Words*—because when the kids he was teaching started writing about their real lives as opposed to the material they were supposed to submit for schoolwork they were writing with a new depth and vigour. Of course when he published their work he was disciplined. The children organised a strike and he was reinstated.

Pat Smart, UK

I was one of the 'scruffs' I was pushed aside, left at the back, not included in discussions etc. in class. If I put my hand up to ask a question one certain teacher would give me a 'withering' look and tell me to put my hand down! When I did get to ask a question I was usually told, "because I said so!" or "don't be stupid girl!" I wasn't the only one, there were quite a few of us. So that kind of thing (class divide—no pun intended!) certainly did 'impinge' on my education.

Even in the State-run (Catholic-run) schools there were class-divides also. I know I was one of the poorest ones, so I was the scruff, the 'thicko', the stupid one who's parents couldn't afford the correct school uniform, I was poor, so, therefore I was stupid, etc. etc. (even the school's head mistress, A Nun, told me so quite often usually when she was giving me 'six of the best' (a good whacking with a long cane on each of my hands)

Joan DeArtimis, USA

The strange thing is, somehow, I didn't realize that there would be so much of a class difference between me and other college students ... age, yes, but not class.

I have to pass up on MANY opportunities here on campus because I either don't have the time, because I have to work so much, or else I don't have the money. For example, I simply cannot take an unpaid internship. I can't volunteer my time to anything. I simply must be paid, because I have no other source of income.

Eric Davidson, UK

My parents were working class but strived and found the money to send all 4 children to a fee paying school ... unusual. But at school my accent was different from the rest and in the boys club where many of the top schools boys were represented it was even more different. However, there was one organization called the COUNTIES and there I met guys I could really relate to. Eventually I became one of the leading lights and was able to help effect change—to let the organization become more open and inclusive and to let all schools participate.

Melodie Clarke, USA

Our discussions about class, education, and disability made me become interested about what is being done on our campus to address these issues. I had a wonderful experience with a particular event that I would like to share with you.

At Syracuse University they're doing a program called Writing on the Wall (WOW). In this program they are having 130 concrete blocks painted with symbols

or words that symbolize oppression. They can be painted by students and Faculty. . . . I painted a block with the word disability and a small flower. They had us fill out a card explaining why you chose the word that you did or what the symbol you used meant. I wrote that people don't see me, they see the disability and don't look past that to see me. I feel like I have to prove myself to become visible again.

I've been thinking about this subject for a couple of days now. I am using a walker (I'm being weaned off of it, to using a cane) and wear braces on both hands. I feel that when I meet people they look at my disabilities and don't look farther to see me as a person. I am a person beyond the disabilities. I have dreams, feelings, and aspirations like every one else. I feel that people are putting me in a box and it gets harder and harder to push or break my way through.

It even goes on at the University level, where just because you have a ramp on the outside of a building does not make it handicap accessible. I get so frustrated at times because I can't get downstairs to the Bursar's Office or upstairs to Financial Aid. I also get frustrated by people who treat me like I'm not there or they have prejudged me based on my appearance or disability. Frustration eventually turns into depression and sadness. I keep pushing against the box wall to get people to see me for who I am, not my disability, not my disease (Sarcoidosis), not because they feel sorry for me and not treating me really different from every other student.

Eric Davidson, UK

I don't know first-hand what it's like in the USA, but in the UK, there is a lot of prejudice against Survivors—we are seen as incapable, socially inept, self-obsessed, boring, incapable of self-expression . . . right down the list to 'smelly'.

Steve Oakley, UK

You know, so many of us wander around this world never questioning our place in it, every door can be opened, every level reached, every direction understood, and all without a single thought. Why wouldn't it? It doesn't need thinking about, it's natural, the doors are there to let us in, the levels are a logical use of our space and the directions help us to find our way . . . surely? But they do something else that your experience highlights, they're a very real very present part of the 'norm'. But as you say, it's a norm based on the assumption that we can even get close enough to the doors to reach the levels, that we can actually read the signs that tell us where to go, and it really gets my blood boiling that when you look closer—for whatever reason—these assumptions are everywhere in everything." (Parks 6–7).

It is important to note that, simultaneously, each constituency was also using the skills gained through the experiences they discuss to gather the resources to further develop the project. The FWWCP highlighted the university partnership to their national foundations by inviting the project to be a featured plenary session at their annual conference, the FedFest. The university students began to write petitions or letters to administrators get the resources to be

able to attend the conference—often deploying the rhetoric of service-learning and community partnership, and disability rights to talk about such work as central to the university. The Basement Writers used their union connections and, through blind luck, one member's connection with a local foundation to enable members of their group to attend. These "occupational skills" allowed the production of a working-class literacy framework to be connected to the development of a self-defined "power grid" through which access to resources and literacy institutions was achieved.

At the main plenary session of the FWWCP festival, the combined students, SU community, and FWWCP participants read excerpts from online correspondence (of which the above was a section). Festival participants were provided with writing prompts and asked to share their own experiences of education. Many responded with stories of being marginalized through class prejudice or discrimination against physical and mental disabilities. The discussion ended with the announcement of a special workshop the following day where members of the TAWFF would meet with conference participants to frame a political response to these experiences, festival events, and prior online discussion. Over the course of several hours, the following points were developed:

1. Education should teach a global humanity (not the humanities) based on an alternative sense of history and where cooperative values and restorative justice are primary.
2. Education should take place in a safe environment free from traditional social/economic biases with self-respect for each other as individuals as well as members of different classes, heritages, and sexualities.
3. All educators must move from subconsciously teaching students to be a Westernized version of "them" to teaching the essential equality among all individuals and cultures.
4. The conceptual equality taught to students must also be manifested in equal funding and equal access to well-maintained school facilities.
5. To base an educational system on any other values accepts a fundamental inequity in society and acceptance that not all human potential will be fulfilled. (Abel, Clarke, and Parks 180)

The TAWFF Project and manifesto were then featured in the FWWCP magazine, with a call for more individuals and writing groups to participate. During

the remainder of the conference, the TAWFF members were invited to present at a conference in Atlanta; one SU student was even approached about running for the board of the FWWCP.

Upon their return, the SU students and Basement Writers were now in a position to change the visibility of working-class identity on campus. At the semester's end, for instance, representatives from the TAWWF read their work at the Writing Program's annual celebration. This event followed the standing ovation given to the Basement Writers a week prior at the university's Mayfest. To a great extent, there was such strong cross-pollination and dialogue that the populations seem to have melded into a common framework that stood outside the initial university context from which it emerged. Perhaps this was because the benefits transcended the university context and merged into an occupational literacy: students were given advice on how to navigate the costs of living in Syracuse; Basement Writers had support in learning how to navigate the complex terrain of a university. Basement Writer members were profiled in student publications to highlight the strains working-class families faced in the city. A book published by the Basement Writers, called *Working*, featured writing by students and community residents. Some of the members were also invited to produce a book chapter in an occupational therapy text in which they discussed the relevance of the writing group in asserting a debate about disability access in the university (Abel, Clarke, and Parks). A working-class student publication group was formed, gaining access to student activity fee funds. Without romanticizing a conclusion, silence had been replaced by dialogue; solitary experiences had been replaced with collective support.

Yet, the university context could not be ignored. Nor did the TAWWF want to ignore it. As everyone involved recognized, while the above connections were important, they did not change curriculum or issues of educational access. A singular writing course, no matter how seemingly successful, was an inadequate response to the issue. For this reason, there was strong support to take the work of the TAWWF and to integrate its work into the structure of educational institutions. The vehicle to undertake that work was the development of the collective publication "Crossing Class: The Work of the TAWWF." Over the period of two years, the TAWWF Manifesto and blog became the object of study and investigation in a series of lower- and upper-division writing courses: Critical Research and Writing, Advanced Argument, Civic Writing, Language and Politics, Writing, Rhetoric and Identity, among others. These courses attracted a strong contingent of working-class students who found in

the manifesto and community partnerships that grounded the class discussion a tradition of work that enabled them not only to speak but to use their own experience and skills to interrupt the dominant discourses of privilege in many of their classes and draw on their own experiences as bases of legitimate knowledge production. Each course continually added writing to the proposed book, ultimately producing a publication that will serve as a continual object of collective writing, designed to both articulate the working-class experience of education as well as to further invest that experience in the “power grid” of support and guidance that now exists.

Of course, it might seem far afield from the established terrain of composition/rhetoric to imagine our writing courses and programs as existing upon an emergent grid of working-class struggles for greater self-representation and more democratic access to literacy education. It could be objected that such a framing of a writing classroom or writing program moves us into the realm of politics, not pedagogy. We want to stress, however, that

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within each classroom discussion many of the “established rules” applied—as noted, students studied academic discourse structures, read and studied key figures within our field, engaged in debates that attempted to define what “literacy” or “good writing” means, and wrote argumentative papers to further their viewpoints. We also want to stress that as a field, composition/rhetoric grew within the progressive political framework of the Civil Rights and social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s—movements that authorized open admissions and the focused study of multiple literacies and heritages in our classrooms. Today’s economic stratification—producing both more “working” students and less working-class access to literacy—demands we become part of the effort to re-ignite these progressive frameworks, not just for our students but for the many in our field whose economic exploitation creates the privileged possibility of our being able to write this very article. As Tony Scott suggests, we need to imagine our work and the work of our students as “embodied” in a political economy of which we are necessarily actors.

Within that larger effort, the TAWFF stands as one example of what we hope (and know) will be a thousand “points of light” upon an emergent worker collective power grid.

Coda: A New Tradition Interrupted

It would be easy to end with the optimism that marked the initial conclusion of the TAWWF project—ending with the promise of a publication that will circulate widely and support the continued work of bringing working-class experiences into the university curriculum. We want to end on a different note, however, a note that we hope will register the difficulty of developing a pedagogy and programmatic commitment that, in small ways, attempts to level the educational and economic playing field through developing new community-based collectives.

At the end of the academic year in which the TAWWF publication was finalized, the college faculty met to approve the Writing Program's writing and rhetoric major (a struggle that deserves its own article). At the outset of the meeting, our dean, who has been very supportive of the TAWWF project, proudly announced that the college had continued to improve the quality of its freshman class, pointing toward raised test scores and increased "geographic diversity." While this clearly struck a chord with many faculty, within the lens of the TAFWW project it only highlighted the voices that would not be present—the voices of the local working-class students, those graduates of an urban school system without the resources to launch large numbers of its students into elite institutions.¹⁰ To invoke the language of de Certeau, it became clear that the TAWWF project had become a tactic (a small intervention working off what the system will allow), but not a strategy (the establishment on a solid space from which to enact systemic change). Sitting there, I had to wonder both what else needed to be added to this emergent "federation" of working-class interests and, ultimately, if elite institutions can change their DNA enough to move toward "open access"—to serve as vehicles of educational equality.

Within weeks of that meeting, the FWWCP had to go into "involuntary insolvency"—bankruptcy in the U.S. context. After thirty years of existence, this important strategic intervention could no longer raise funds to support its continued work. Although a new organization is being developed, such a moment highlights the tenuous nature of any network of working-class writing and literacy projects (Tait). Ultimately, "it's the economy," and the economy for supporting the self-defined voices of the working poor and economically depressed is structured to almost always ensure their exclusion. So if I had imagined the TAWWF as a new beachhead of such work in the United States, perhaps for the moment the campaign was more Dunkirk than Normandy.

And perhaps these two moments explain the power of the "contact zone" within composition/rhetoric. Without diminishing the intellectual contribu-

tion of Pratt's article, we would highlight that it draws upon very traditional occupational skills in our profession—reading academic texts and creating text-driving writing classrooms and programs. Yet a new set of occupational skills will be necessary if composition/rhetoric is to take on the mission of supporting in collective terms the diverse voices often excluded from an actual presence in our classrooms. These skills can best be learned from the experiences and knowledges of those who are excluded—or only included as disembodied words of assigned essays. The question becomes whether we want to expand our traditions to include these voices and insights. Do we want to gain renewed strength for our field by joining in their struggles? Will we add to their strength with our numbers?

We want to end this article, then, with the full text of Danielle Quigley's poem, cited at the outset of this article. Quigley's poem has been read at numerous public readings and conferences nationally. It has received strong support and applause. Quigley has almost never been there to either read her work or to hear the audience's response. She was always working. We want to end with her voice, hoping it stands for the larger systemic work we all need to do to ensure educational equity in public and higher education:

Server

Perhaps you have seen her
Rushed and flustered
Belittled and beaten down
Forcing smiles
With strained politeness
Biting her tongue?

Perhaps you mock her
"Ignorant profession"
A server tending to your needs
Her trite existence
With meager means—
A lifestyle unlike your own

Perhaps you pity her
"Oh look she's pregnant!"

Yet a new set of occupational skills will be necessary if composition/rhetoric is to take on the mission of supporting in collective terms the diverse voices often excluded from an actual presence in our classrooms.

“And so young!”
Quick, ring check—
“at least she’s married . . .”
Poor baby

Or perhaps you are her—
Struggling, hardworking
A college student with honors
A writer with potential
A happily married woman
An excited mother-to-be

Perhaps if you saw me
As more than a server
Grant me the credit I merit
Dispose of your pity or mockery—
Recognize the resemblance?
Could I be you?

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We want to thank Collette Faye, Carol Lipson, and Beth Wagner for their support and ingenious scheduling of classes that ensured equal participation for everyone involved. We are also grateful to Irv Peckham, whose careful reading of this article and generous advice greatly improved our argument. Finally, we want to acknowledge Eileen Schell and Adam Banks, whose leadership in supporting and expanding community partnerships within our department has served as a model for much of the work discussed here.

Notes

1. For an important discussion of the distinction between “elite” and “second-tier institutions,” as well as a way to go beyond the biases involved in such terms, see John Alberti’s “Returning to Class.”
2. Working from Sheffield Hallam University, a more working-class institution, Pollard uses FWWCP materials to highlight to future occupational therapists the importance of local working-class occupations such as the “fish and chip man” in understanding the complex relationships that create a community and structure the needs and supports of patients. He uses the example of a local hairdresser who, without knowing it, was the only way a therapist could convince one patient to leave her home. A similar argument could be made for the work of Danielle Quigley, whose placement of advertisement coupons in the newspaper created the savings

that allowed the purchase of writing materials or attendance at a writing group. In each case, what becomes clear is the tentative and tenuous set of relationships that must be maintained to allow working-class individuals to fully participate in society. This inclusion of local individuals to highlight the way community must work to ensure access to health care and literacy skills would become a central aspect in the creation of the TAWWF and subsequent publications.

3. Working-class writing and self-publishing have been occurring in the UK since at least the nineteenth century (Vincent 1981).

4. While most of these events occurred during the conservative restoration of Margaret Thatcher, even when Tony Blair became prime minister in the 1990s, culture was understood as an economic engine rather than a means of working-class expression.

5. Since publication of *Stepney Words*, Chris Searle taught in Sheffield as well as becoming involved in international campaigns for literacy projects in such countries as Grenada and Mozambique.

6. Smart has documented some of this in “A Beginner Writer Is Not a Beginner Thinker.”

7. For a discussion of how this point intersects with the work of occupational therapy, see Nicholas Pollard’s “Notes towards an Approach for the Therapeutic Use of Creative Writing in Occupational Therapy.”

8. For Diggles, in particular, the establishment of such a partnership with a “prestigious” university in the United States would also serve as a ballast for the FWWCP as it continued to seek support from arts and culture foundation.

9. The full text of Dave Kent’s piece reads as follows:

In 1982, while in high school looking forward to graduation, my world as I knew it crashed and burned. I was told by educators I could not graduate based on my competencies, which were under state education requirements for graduation at the time. “You will have to stay back another year to make them up.”

Well at the time the United States President was Ronald Reagan, who signed a bill that basically said you must be enrolled in a college curriculum by age eighteen in order to keep on receiving social security disability benefits on my mother’s behalf. Mom was disabled physically now. We could not afford to lose her SSD benefits or we would lose everything. I could not allow this to happen. So, without any college prep classes and no high-school diploma, I had to enroll in a college curriculum at Onondaga Community College (OCC). I wanted to enroll in electronics technology program at OCC. The program had been filled for two years and there was a waiting list, but based on my entrance exam I was put at the bottom. Yes—a very low exam score. Again saying to myself, *Damn, where do I go from here? Enroll in another curriculum or what?*

So I swallowed my anger and my stress, I went to go and talk to my advisor. She suggested that I consider a humanities program for now, until an opening in my choice program occurred. After a bout of self-doubt, I said I'm going to do it. Boy was I stupid! The study of the human mind! I didn't even make matriculation (the grade point average). The best I received was a 1.9 (of a 4.0 scale). I had 100% participation in this class!

By May of 1982, I was out, and wondering how I was going to pay back a \$1,700 school loan. Higher education services knew. At a 1982 education and vocation seminar, I met with Karl and May Knowlton. They operated the industrial work division at Olsten Temporary Services. While under a lot of stress, I approached and asked what type of temporary employment they offered. "We have Industrial labor positions right now," they said. So I figured with my background as a laborer I had a good chance of getting a pretty good job with Olsten Temporary Services. For once, I was right.

They had a position opening for an industrial laborer at Bristol Myers Squibb Company, a very large international pharmaceuticals business. They offered me a temp assignment for about one year on the third shift, which gave me time to plan ahead and start an active full-time employment search, and access those employment and training programs available for dislocated workers, which I was at this time. Even knowing I would not receive great employment opportunity, I still pounded the pavement, read the classified ads daily in the *Syracuse Herald-Journal*, bussed the distance to the suburban Syracuse area or where a classified might take me. Still I never gave up the search, being an optimist permits me to do that. Perseverance was my partner. So I stayed with Olsten Temps until June 1985 in different areas of industrial employment. Yes, I did return to Bristol Labs to various positions. All I know is I was receiving a weekly paycheck that helped my family's economic hardship. I was very thankful for this opportunity.

Let's remember the important issues here in my life are about being from a working class family and, yes, my relationship was much different than those who are privileged to have two working parents, being able to have the finances to afford a good education. I do have a chance to return to school in the future. What matters to me is to make sure that my mother's able to pay our monthly responsibilities without falling under. Through this sacrifice in my life it was all worth it and if I had to do I would do it all again. The lessons I learned as a youngster and working to bring money into the home to make sure there was food on the table and a roof over our head. To sacrifice this and to persevere is much better than not having anything at all. There is a chance that there is someone out there in this same economic struggle. May I say to that person, remember to persevere there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Just walk forward to the next step and soon enough you'll be there. Don't give up. If you fall, get up and keep walking. Strive to survive. Look at me. I made it. I did not stop. I kept my chin up and my feet in front of me.

I am a Taurus, producer, builder, and hard worker.

10. SU Chancellor Nancy Cantor has recently established an Early College High School Initiative program in Syracuse designed to provide graduating seniors with up to thirty credits toward a university degree. Such efforts, we believe, represent the type of systemic partnership that universities and writing programs should both foster and support.

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