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Review Essay

Sponsors and Activists: Deborah Brandt, Sponsorship,
and the Work to Come

Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research after Literacy in American Lives

John Duffy, Julie Nelson Christoph, Eli Goldblatt, Nelson Graff, Rebecca S. Nowacek, and Bryan Trabold, eds.

Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2014. 244 pp.

Writing Home: A Literacy Autobiography

Eli Goldblatt

Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2012. 258 pp.

PHD (Po H# on Dope) to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life

Elaine Richardson

Philadelphia: New City Community P, 2013. 251 pp.

Rhetoric of Respect: Recognizing Change at a Community Writing Center

Tiffany Rousculp

Urbana: Conference on College Composition and Communication/NCTE, 2014. 185 pp.

Sponsors, as I have come to think of them, are any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way.

Deborah Brandt, *Literacy in American Lives*

I am sitting a restaurant at the CCCC Annual Convention talking to Elaine Richardson. Recently, through a mutual friend, we had been put in contact about her manuscript, “PHD (Po H# on Dope) to Ph.D.” Like many in the field, I had read Richardson’s scholarship on African American literacies and hip-hop, as well as admired her community-based work. The manuscript before us traced the personal journey that led to those research and community interests. It was not, however, a simple exegesis on a scholarly career. Rather it tells the story of her life as a child and young adult. It was a life that included a strong and loving mother, a network of important friends, and a string of academic accomplishments, but also prostitution, crime, and drug addiction. It is a compelling and powerful story.

For the past ten years, my press, New City Community Press, has been publishing the work of undocumented farmworkers, disability activists, union advocates, and urban school children. Each story, in its own way, challenges traditional notions of literacy as a simple decoding of letters and sounds. Each presents a vision of literacy that mixes writing with community, insight with activism. And each has its moments of violence, of hard lives, and of experiences that seemingly crushed opportunity. Perhaps because of the power of personal narratives, the books have circulated widely, across classrooms, communities, and countries, gaining a readership that includes and goes beyond the professoriate. My conversation with Elaine was to consider whether my press might be a good match for her book. It seemed an obvious choice. The work of Linda Brodkey, Keith Gilyard, Mike Rose, and, more recently, Morris Young had clearly established a foundation for such memoirs in our field. The book’s insights also spoke to a much larger audience than just academics. And yet, the book led me to consider more fundamental questions, questions I couldn’t quite shake: Into what disciplinary frameworks might such a personal work be placed? What community-based responses and actions might it help to sponsor? How could such a literacy narrative serve as a tool to produce social change?

The conversation concluded, but the questions remained.



Over the past ten years, our disciplinary interests have become increasingly focused on the literacy narrative—on the personal stories through which we can track literacy’s production in the context of economic, cultural, and political trends occurring within national and international communities. (See, for example, Cushman’s chapter in Duffy’s book; Young; Berry, Hawisher, and Selfe; as well as the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives). In many ways, this focus seems to build off of our field’s historic interest in how students’ literacies emerge from their home communities. Beginning as early as the 1960s and 1970s, for instance, applying normative standards of correctness onto the diffuse languages and dialects existing in our classrooms came to be seen as a denial of community-based ways of understanding and articulating the world (see Smitherman; Heath). Recognizing these alternative literacies also became one means to connect our work in the classroom with the political work being done in the streets (Mathieu).

Beginning in the 1980s and early 1990s, however, the field seemed to move away from students’ community heritage and movement politics as an organizing principle, choosing instead to articulate student identity into a variety of other contexts, such as the focus on academic discourse or cognitive rhetoric (see Bartholomae; Flower). This is not to say politically informed scholarship vanished; see the work of the CCCC caucus and special interest groups (Blackmon et al.). Yet, a shift clearly occurred: the motivation for which, happening at a time of increasing conservative politics and university restructuring, is a subject for another time. Eventually, however, the concern with how students’ literacies emerged from larger community contexts, coupled with a belief that we might as a field engage in support of those communities, returned as an important area of focus for a field now firmly established as a “discipline,” even if it is a discipline premised on exploited adjunct and graduate student labor.

Today, I would argue that community partnership work and community publishing have become a modern manifestation of early disciplinary attempts to foster activist connections between the literacies of our students and literacies in the neighborhoods that surround our campuses. For much of community partnership work emerges from, exists within, and widely circulates literacy narratives, whether those narratives are based on learning how to decode

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printed symbols or demonstrating a cultural literacy about the prison industrial complex. This sense of literacy as a connective tissue across different domains, as a lever through which to produce a collective change in understanding, in policies and practices, echoes the commitments of almost fifty years ago. Rearticulated across a broader range of identities and geographic and digital collectives, that is, our commitment to those for whom literacy is regulated, suppressed, and withheld continues.

One possible way to read the emergence of interest in “literacy narratives” is to imagine that it speaks to an equally renewed commitment to issues of social justice, a commitment to confront the larger neoliberal policies that are turning our universities into hunting grounds for predatory creditors and corporate interests; that are shifting formerly public entitlements into privatized choices; and that understand democracy as a highest-bidder enterprise. Perhaps by exploring the larger contexts in which literacy is acquired (and denied), by understanding the structural frameworks into which individual practices emerge, we might also begin to develop a set of coordinated responses to the policies that are making traditional academic literacy harder to acquire for the working class and working poor and that are increasingly turning literacy, in general, into an economically and test-driven enterprise.

It was within these then emerging disciplinary and political trends that Deborah Brandt’s *Literacy in American Lives* arrived in 2001. Indeed, in her blending of our traditional interest in how literacy gets produced with the term *sponsorship*, with its corporate connotations of “brought to you by,” Brandt seemed to have perfectly announced the complicated position we found ourselves in as teachers and as citizens, wrapped in a neoliberalism paradigm but continuing to work for alternative and more expansive literacy goals. Moreover, her method of providing a nuanced portrayal of the ways in which economic networks, both traditional and emergent, interact with literacy organizations and individual sponsors to structure opportunities or roadblocks for literacy acquisition has provided a road map for those who want to understand how community literacy can be more than a name for a research agenda or off-campus-based practices. That is, understanding literacy sponsorship can also enable us to understand what it might mean to intervene effectively for those on the wrong side of privilege. For implicit in her framing is a call to our own field: How can we expand our own literacy sponsorship practices to be more inclusive? How might we become active sponsors in our classrooms and communities for those lacking the traditional means of access to the literacies that potentially provide political power and economic security?

At the same time, however, sponsorship as an activist intervention is a troublesome concept. Sponsorship is one step removed from solidarity, a providing of resources for action rather than an active joining in the work at hand. It is the naming of a building that others constructed; that is, it can seem like a form of alliance built upon a disciplinary hesitation about whether brick and mortar politics should be the work of the field. We “enable, support, teach, and model” literacy, but do we (or should we) actually join in the activist struggle that confronts the political context in which education occurs? In this sense, *sponsorship*, as a term, can appear more an analytical tool than a means to develop an actual collective response to the economic and legislative worlds that are shifting our resources and abilities as literacy teachers. What might a sponsorship-based response mean in a city, like my own, that has had its public school budget cut by one billion dollars over the past three years; where unionized faculty are having to advocate to protect a state college education system; where fracking and prisons seem to be the beginning and endpoint of what our legislatures want to endorse (another economic term of endearment)? What are the differences between sponsors and activists? Between the different ways each might confront the political context of the current moment?

We are fortunate, however, to exist in a time when rich theoretical, historical, and personal work is emerging in response to these questions. Such works explore how Brandt’s original concepts have been invoked and utilized within our field. They consider to what extent sponsorship and literacy narratives have been used to intervene and alter existing power dynamics, educational networks, and economic systems. And they pose the question whether Brandt’s methods can continue to impact and shape our work as teachers, scholars, and community members. It is to their insights that I now turn.



Literacy, Economy, and Power: Writing and Research after Literacy in American Lives, edited by Duffy, Christoph, Goldblatt, Graff, Nowacek, and Trabold, positions itself as an exploration of the impact of Brandt’s work on the field. Arguing that her work emerged out of a time period when a focus on literacy, particularly New Literacy studies, was producing a wide range of scholarship, the editors position her work as not so much as original in methods but unique in how her work blended together the different emphases then emergent in the field. (See Harvey Graff’s essay within this volume for a study of the emergence of literacy studies.) Within this framing of Brandt as representing an important distillation of emerging work, the editors intend the collection to explore how

our field has adopted the methods and concepts within her *Literacy in American Lives*, noting specifically her emphasis on history, sponsorship, and individual interviews. To this end, the collection is broken into three sections focused on past literacy practices, current literacy projects, and future directions. Within each section, the majority of essays offer case studies to animate the discussion.

The explicit organization of the book is somewhat to be expected and, in this way, exists within traditional categories of analysis. What makes the collection compelling, however, is the commitment of the editors to represent a broad range of cultural experiences within the essays proper: Native American, Asian/Asian American, African/African American, rural/urban, as well as gender identities. Rather than shunt such experiences off to a special category (difference, cultural identities, etc.), this collection works within the paradigm that these identities and heritages are already understood as central to our field. The power of this collection arises from the ways in which Brandt's methods and terminology are refracted through this diversity of influences, drawing from these historical experiences to enrich sponsorship, in particular, as an investigative term.

Take for example the opening essays, framed under "Looking Back at Literacy: What It Did to Us; What We Did with It." The section begins with an essay by Ellen Cushman, "Elias Boudinot and the Cherokee Phoenix," which draws from the historical context of the Cherokee Nation's production of its own newspaper to highlight how any subject position contains the possibility of being a sponsor and being sponsored. Here the difficult subject position of Boudinot, who was the paper's first editor (thus sponsoring literacy), but who had to negotiate the demands of liberal white funders and tribal elders (thus sponsored), is explored as one such case. (Notably, Boudinot was ultimately murdered for his failure to negotiate these demands effectively.) If one way to understand sponsorship is linear (A sponsors B), Cushman uses this historical case study to make the important point that "[l]iteracy sponsors serve at the behest of others" (27).

Rhea Estelle Lathan's "Testimony as a Sponsor of Literacy" then builds upon the expansion of sponsorship to talk about the role of testimony, highlighting how it draws into the conversation not only a focus on religious affective expression but also the demand that action be taken. That is, if Cushman highlights the ways in which any sponsor is also sponsored, existing within a necessarily fluid position, Lathan reminds us that even in those complex moments, action is required—that personal testimony holds within it the demand

to push forward. By drawing the act of testimony into the conversation, Lathan then expands both the means by which sponsorship can occur as well as the actions that follow from it. Morris Young's essay, "Writing the Life of Henry Obookiah," draws together this invigorated sense of sponsorship, arguing that publications can both sponsor literacy and action—highlighting the impact Obookiah's memoirs had on the history of Hawai'i. What emerges from these opening essays, then, is an attempt to build from a range of cultural histories a sense that literacy narratives and sponsorship practices can be used to actively intervene in existing power structures, though not always successfully or as intended.

Indeed, in the next section, "Looking Now at Literacy: A Tool for Change?," the essays detail the ways in which sponsorship, when enacted, can move toward unintended shifts in how we imagine our role as sponsors. Here again, though, the "lessons" learned originate from complex and diverse communities, demonstrating how local cultures and heritages affect the way that traditional literacy sponsors are understood and impacted. Julie Nelson Christoph's "Sponsoring Education for All" discusses UNESCO's literacy campaign within the context of Zanzibar and demonstrates how such centrally organized campaigns are reinterpreted by local residents. In this case, the campaign failed to understand the existing local religious literacy networks in which many of the Muslim citizens participated. As a consequence, many residents did not see the value of taking part in (or recognizing) how the UNESCO vision of literacy might (or did) affect their literacy goals. Kim Donehower's, "Connecting Literacy to Sustainability" builds upon this theme of locally sustainable community networks focused on literacy by detailing how such networks helped create a sense of community in Hammond, North Dakota. Speaking from the position of "central organizers," Eli Goldblatt and David A. Jolliffe argue that universities that wish to play a constructive role in these local literacy networks have to realize sponsors do not simply "gain" but also must risk changing to fully realize their role as partners. Our institutions are not, it seems, perfectly structured to be effective partners, a lesson in humility that UNESCO might have benefited from in their work. Beverly J. Moss and Robyn Lyons-Robinson, in "Making Literacy Work," provide a case study in enacting humility on a personal level by highlighting how "literacy experts" need to negotiate their role in any local literacy environment, in this case an African American women's book club. Throughout this section, then, there is an implicit argument that we need to reposition ourselves, our expertise, if we are to move from a position of sponsoring a literacy program

to becoming an active partner within a literacy community. As these essays represent, humility seems to be the foundational value.

While my focus has been on how this collection draws Brandt's work into specific non-university-based local, regional, and international communities, it should also be noted that resting within this collection are explorations that focus primarily on the conceptual and theoretical framework of Brandt's work. Michael W. Smith, in "Seeing Sponsors, Accumulating Literacies," demonstrates

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how Brandt's concepts of accumulating literacy and sponsorship might inform English education. Paul Prior, in "Combining Phenomenological and Sociohistoric Frameworks for Studying Literate Practices," demonstrates how

the former term shapes the meaning of sponsorship. The final section of the collection, "Looking Forward at Literacy: The Global and Multimodal Future," features Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher discussing how their research in digital literacy narratives emerged from a talk given by Deborah Brandt, prior to *Literacy in American Lives* being published. Within this context, Selfe and Hawisher argue that through embedding feminist research practices into an increasingly international focus, their work represents a continuation and extension of Brandt's work—which seems profoundly true to me.

Taken as a whole, *Literacy, Economy, and Power* represents an important discussion and extension of *Literacy in American Lives*. The essays included in the volume demonstrate the lasting value of Brandt's key methods and terms by demonstrating how research into different historical, cultural, and international contexts can produce important new research. As importantly, the essays begin an argument about the importance of literacy sponsors for public work, of the necessity of imagining ourselves as not only testifying to community literacy concerns but also taking an active role in solving them. While such work must be taken on with humility and with a collaborative spirit, these essays demonstrate that it also cannot be avoided. Ideally, this collection might also have provided essays that demonstrated how university faculty prepare themselves for such work and develop their sense of what public work involves out of their own literacy histories, as well as perhaps an additional essay on what such work might look like from within an academic setting (though the essay by Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu takes on this latter focus). Fortunately, there are recently published studies that do address these topics.



With rare exception, our field has not produced many sustained memoirs that detail the emergence of disciplinary sensibility. Even fewer are the works that demonstrate the emergence of a professional identity committed to literacy as an activist practice—Brodkey, Gilyard, Rose, and Villanueva being previously noted exceptions. The reasons for such an absence are probably manifold, related to a sense of how our field emerged, what university publishers want, and what the market can support. Yet in a period where we are asking community members to “record their lives” for circulation and study, it seems equally important that we trace our own individual histories, our own literacy struggles that resulted in such public commitments. This is particularly the case if we believe, as is often invoked, that such narratives can produce important insights about literacy. As a template for such future projects, Eli Goldblatt’s *Writing Home: A Literacy Autobiography* represents an important intervention in our field. Written strictly as a memoir with few or no “academic footnotes,” Goldblatt demonstrates how literacy narratives can become a means to trace a professional trajectory committed to public work and, in the process, highlights alternative ways to produce “knowledge” in our academic-discourse-laden discipline.

Goldblatt positions his memoir as a case study in how he became a writer as well as a teacher of writing, specifically one with a commitment to his home community. For scholars who have read his published work, such commitments might seem a foregone conclusion. He begins his memoir, however, by positioning his early life as marked by a series of displacements from then dominant conceptions of community. First, his family was one of the few Jewish families living in a predominantly Christian community. Second, his father, a plastic surgeon in the US Army, died suddenly of a heart attack, placing Goldblatt’s family as an anomaly within his peer group, a single mother-led family. And, finally, his father’s death displaced Goldblatt from military culture to civilian life, a move that necessitated a shifting of many of his daily attitudes and interactions. Within this ever-shifting sense of the meaning of home and community, Goldblatt soon devotes his energies to writing, specifically to a desire to become a poet.

With this personal goal set, *Writing Home* then shifts to Goldblatt discussing his efforts to embed himself, through a solitary, intensive, and extended self-motivated reading project, within the community of poets—Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams being the primary figures. (His extensive use of

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personal journals, personal letters, and early poems provides a rich textual background for this discussion.) The vision of the solitary and committed writer, however, consistently bumps up against his efforts to find a sponsoring institution or community that would support this goal, either through actual opportunities to study (college) or through economic security (medical school). This period of his life is marked by a series of beginnings in “professional literacy organizations”—Beloit College, Cornell, Case Western Medical School, Neighborhood Journey School—and a constant return to community-based literacy groups—farmworkers, self-organized poets, and fellow travelers. Along the way, the book introduces the reader to numerous individual “sponsors” who help him transition between different literacy networks until, by the end of the book, Goldblatt’s “writerly” identity is represented as a result of these many individual and community influences, an identity that holds and works within many contradictory and complimentary visions of literacy and community.

Goldblatt’s public commitments as a writer also develop through a shuttling between official sponsors of such work, student government, and community-based sponsors, the grassroots political activism of the late 1960s. (In many ways, the book is an extended mediation on the political role of the writer.) It is during his trip to Nicaragua immediately after the Sandinista revolution, however, that his political vision fully emerges. Throughout his journey toward Nicaragua, he is consistently on the margins of the local communities he visits (given his inability to speak Spanish fluently for much of his trip) while simultaneously finding ways to bridge this divide (by creating friendships and temporary communities of fellow travelers). As with his childhood experiences, Goldblatt is consistently having to develop a sense of community that stitches together individuals, heritages, and histories. In Nicaragua, he begins to see that while such micro-communities are, perhaps, necessarily temporary, when directed toward a greater cause they can produce possibilities for those involved to write, to imagine, and to create new futures.

As importantly, Goldblatt comes to understand the humble stance that is necessary to fully understand and take part in supporting a community’s collective vision. That is, he demonstrates that becoming literate is inherently a project about listening, incorporating, and negotiating. It is recognizing the many historical layers that exist within any one moment, on any one street corner or neighborhood. It is acting respectively within that history, coming to understand how your skills fit into this larger collective trajectory. Further, after recognizing the limited role he could actually play in Nicaragua, Goldblatt decides that a writer’s responsibility is to use one’s skills to create justice where

one lives, in the context and community whose history is an active part of one's being. A writer, a teacher, doesn't need to seek foreign lands; oppression and discrimination often exist on the street corner adjacent to your classroom. The writer and teacher's role is to work for justice at home, "because we live here."

The book concludes, then, with Goldblatt ensconced in Philadelphia, discovering that the classroom is a temporary community in which good work can be done on writing and, as his later work argues, in the community. While he still seeks the time alone to write, he positions himself within a network of communities that inform his language use— family, poets, teachers, activists, and community baseball players. And each of these communities exists within his home of Philadelphia. Near the end of his memoir, in describing his wife, Wendy, and son, Leo, he writes:

Wendy grew up in the Philadelphia area, and entering her large family helped me accept the city as my own. In fact, she accepted much about me I assumed no one would notice, let alone love, and her attention released me to trust our physical setting, to accept that no higher authority was going to order me off to a new post far away. *Literacy in a city means you know its neighborhoods like a vocabulary and its history like a syntax. A city's characters shuffle in infinite permutations, but its drama is continuous and stable within the daily rhythms.* Although we have left for months or years now and then, we've lived and worked together in northwest Philly since we've met. Our son, Leo, regards Philadelphia as his hometown, and that alone is worth paying city wage taxes all these years. (237–38, my emphasis)

The melding of his writing and the city, the mixture of syntax and urban life, held within a complex set of personal, familial, and legislative frameworks, represents a hard-won insight. It is a recognition of being sponsored and sponsoring, to invoke Cushman; of the sustaining ties that grow out of literacy communities, to invoke Donehower; and of the need to get work done, to invoke of Lathan. These insights, however, emerge out of the personal literacy narrative. They emerge out of an extended examination of how language and life intersect to create intellectual projects and public commitments. While Goldblatt intentionally avoids pulling his memoir into disciplinary debates, such work can serve as a generative text for many of our discussions about sponsorship, our roles as writers, and, ultimately, what it means to work within the spaces we call "home."

Goldblatt's memoir, however, does not actually provide examples of what it means to work within a city from the position of a teacher/writer—though his essay in the above collection by Duffy et al. clearly articulates similar themes. And perhaps this new work needs to be seen as an extended prequel to his other published work, such as *Because We Live There: Sponsoring Literacy beyond*

the College Curriculum. As a template for how other writing teachers might produce literacy narratives to inform our disciplinary work, however, *Writing Home* clearly stands on its own.



The Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) Community Writing Center is one of the most well-known sites within the network of community literacy projects sponsored by universities and colleges. It is notable, then, that the center's origins can be traced directly back to Deborah Brandt's work on sponsorship, as discussed by founding director Tiffany Rousculp in *Rhetoric of Respect: Recognizing Change at a Community Writing Center*:

During the late 1990s, Stephen Ruffus, then the writing program coordinator for the SLCC, had been thinking about writing, literacy, and community. He had worked with youth groups and prison inmates, and he imagined a place that could explore “the ways in which writing leads to and enables action, how

With knowledge of community-based literacy projects, such as Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, Ruffus decided to create a public literacy center, supported by the college and its students, but located in the community. Rousculp's book offers a compelling history of this Community Writing Center (CWC), its origins and development.

it shapes and constructs both identity and social structures” (Rousculp 42). He had been reading Deborah Brandt's work on literacy sponsorship, specifically how literacy both empowers and limits human beings—depending on the social, economic, and political contexts (or environments) of their lives—and how relationships with

“sponsors” play a regulating role in that process. Ruffus was intrigued with the institutionalization of sponsorship—and thus regulation—in traditional education systems (42).

With knowledge of community-based literacy projects, such as Pittsburgh's Community Literacy Center, Ruffus decided to create a public literacy center, supported by the college and its students, but located in the community. Rousculp's book offers a compelling history of this Community Writing Center (CWC), its origins and development. In doing so, Rousculp makes good on her announced intention to show how the “CWC's particular intentions, resources, relationships, and sustainability . . . distinguish it in ways that lie at the heart of its value to progressive and activist educators” (6).

The CWC began as an essentially single-roomed project in a building, named the Bridge Projects, which was sponsored by Artspace, an organiza-

tion that developed affordable workspace for nonprofits and artists in underresourced or distressed communities in Salt Lake City. At the outset, this location meant that the community participants were diverse and, to a great extent, working class or working poor. The center was not, however, an adult education project. Instead, it was designed to support writers and organizations that already possessed essential literacy skills but that had a specific project at hand, a résumé, or a group-writing project, such as one focused on memoir. To support this mission, the CWC developed writing coaches, for one-on-one work; writing workshops, for self-defined group projects; and writing partners, for organizations that might have a specific need or project in mind. In developing these different areas of work, there was a consistent emphasis on an egalitarian framework—a need to see the writers as writers, students as peers, and everyone sharing a fundamental intellectual capability that could support the goal of creating a space where literacy could achieve more than the scripted literacy often demanded by schools, work, or, perhaps, even the larger culture. Ultimately, then, CWC was founded upon a “rhetoric of respect.”

Almost from the outset of her narrative, Rousculp highlights that the CWC understood its mission as aligned with progressive educational practices that were premised on the need to support community-defined literacy needs. Indeed the book is an extended meditation on the ecologies in which those terms exist and the difficulty of bringing them into a consistent sustained dialogue. To take a case in point: Early in the history of the center, Rousculp discusses a reading in which an individual, after having previously written a stirring antiwar message, chooses to read a personal memoir instead. Initially, this leaves Rousculp believing the program had failed in its mission of sponsoring a progressive literacy, one that fostered collective attitudes or movements for change. Upon reflection, she comes to understand that the progressive gesture is to allow the individual to choose his or her own literacy path and to grant participants an agency that is self-defined, that doesn't need to fit into an academic vision of what “progressive writing” entails. It is the daily struggle to keep open such spaces for self-defined agency that demonstrates what it means to support a progressive literacy. In a world of budget cuts, shifting college mission statements, and more, the work of the center and its staff is to keep supporting such agency. Moreover, at such moments, sponsorship means taking on the active struggle to ensure that an “authorized literacy institution” uses its resources in the service of nonregulated literacy—or rather literacy that intentionally seems to step outside of or beyond the expectations as currently defined in secondary education: literacy for education, for volunteerism, for career.

In this way, Rousculp argues, the CWC acts to “deroutinize the flow of literacy education and academic-community partnerships” (55). Too often, she argues, the progressive agenda distorts writing along a particular ideological track, or partnerships turn into a monitoring of community literacy for academic purposes. In such a world, maintaining a writing center that allows the greatest agency to the community (individual or collective) represents an intervention in literacy education. It is this intervention that Rousculp deems a rhetoric of respect: a rhetorical (and ideological) framework that guides the CWC to be always attentive to how it is quietly and unconsciously creeping toward a sense of expertise and agency defined by the university and that has little to do with the community’s own definition of these terms.

It is interesting to note, however, that the CWC did not imagine itself as sponsoring a community-led collective counterweight to the insidious and legislated forms of literacy, a counterweight that might actively and intentionally lobby for less restrictive definitions of literacy in public schools, community college classrooms, or work sites. Nor were collective politics around economic or political attacks on literacy part of its mission. In a world where the resources are always slight, in a center staffed by a faculty director and undergraduate students, Rousculp argues that to pretend to help participants organize for such ends speaks of an idealism that is necessarily a false promise. To return to the theme of humility, raised in essays in *Literacy, Economy, and Power* by Christoph and by Moss and Lyons-Robinson, Rousculp reminds us that it is important to understand the specific and productive role possible in support of a community’s individual and collective literacy goals.

Still, there is an understated argument in the book that also troubles this conclusion. CWC sponsored important moments of agency for community writers. It was also, à la Cushman, sponsored by the college. Thus, as discussed in detail in the book, the college was able to decide whether the CWC would exist as well as the actual course of its development. And here is a fundamental issue with even the best community/higher education partnership efforts: more often than not the “purse strings,” the power, rest with the institution of higher education. Such partnerships, in some ways, endlessly leave the community at the whim of university or college funders. That is, the sheer success of the CWC to continue to exist, the sheer effectiveness of its advocacy within the institution, shows the danger of any model that is premised on non-community-generated funding. Decisions rest outside of the actual community.

And here, it is important to return to the difference between sponsorship

and activism. As long as our primary identification is as sponsors, it seems to me, we will imagine our role as directing university or college funding outward into the community, creating valuable programs that provide a wider sense of literacy, a greater sense of writing agency, than can typically exist in many communities at this current political moment. These efforts, however, will never provide the full agency of owning their own collective literacy resources. As Goldblatt and Jolliffe argue in their essay in *Literacy, Economy, and Power*, sponsoring institutions will have to accept the need to change their internal workings, their very sense of sponsorship, for this more egalitarian model to occur. Power will have to be premised, in part, on the belief that it is the community's labor and tax dollars that fund the institution. Budget decisions about how monies are spent will need to be opened up to greater scrutiny; the "outside community" will need to become a primary actor in the "internal" workings of our institution's public literacy goals.

Of course, such power is not shared easily. Sponsors respond to demands for change best when confronted by activists—individuals whose power is not based upon the sponsor's sharing of resources but on community support and collective actions. This is the indirect story told by Rousculp, who organized the community partners to save the center; the story told by Cushman, who demonstrates the attempts by the Cherokee nation to represent their own culture; by Christoph, who demonstrates the collective power of a community to hold its own literacy definitions in the face of "centralized efforts." And this, I believe, should be the story of where Brandt's sponsorship framework should take us next—to an exploration and understanding of how a rhetoric of respect, a testimony to the insights and values in a community, necessarily leads to concerted actions to ensure that the community has the power to enact its literacy values. Sponsorship exists best, that is, within the context of activist organizing in all its nuanced and aggressive forms.

And it is this conclusion, this important work, that Rousculp's book so wonderfully leads the field to consider.



Two to three years have passed since my conversation with Elaine Richardson. I published *From PHD (Po H# on Dope) to Ph.D.: How Education Saved My Life*. And as Morris Young argues in his essay on Obookiah's memoirs, discussed above, I have witnessed how a book can change individual and collective lives. Books, that is, can be their own sponsoring agents. As I think about the

sponsorship networks Richardson describes in her book—networks consisting of not just professors or pimps, students or drug dealers, but of both; a world where goodness and evil move across these seemingly set identities in a way that questions the easy categories too often applied to those working on the right and wrong sides of privilege—I can imagine academic research emerging, testimony arising, and calls for action occurring. Like much of the writing discussed above, Richardson’s book is not so much a conclusion about a life as an announcement of the work our lives should undertake—in our classrooms and our communities.

But what of my role in such work? It is somewhat easy, I believe, to boldly announce the type of activist work that the field should undertake. It is not hard to write that it is both sponsorship and activism that must mark our commitment to student and community voices, to the work of addressing the political and economic policies that are limiting what literacy can mean, to what it can do for individuals and communities. And yet the question remains: what should follow from our publishing a book? Writing a review? Presenting at a conference? What do such calls for action look like on a daily, monthly, yearly basis? What does it mean to be both sponsor and activist?

And here, perhaps, is the ultimate value of the books discussed above: our “sixth sense” moment of deeper insight into what is actually happening in these books. It is true that the essays and books discussed above offer us a pathway to an enriched understanding of sponsorship, of the power of literacy narratives, of what the next set of work for our field might contain. This is how we are taught to read such work—as a theoretical intervention into our discipline, as a reworking of the trope of *literacy* for the current moment. And yet, just outside of our disciplinary vision, our sense of scholarship, these writers are also collectively enacting in a myriad and complex fashion an engaged activism. They are working in their urban communities creating bookstores, archiving indigenous knowledge for future generations, advocating in their departments for better labor conditions, serving on executive committees in professional organizations, developing regional literacy programs in rural communities, creating community writing centers. The fullness of their careers, only hinted in their writing, demonstrates how scholarship, sponsorship, and activism can be combined, can be part of brick-and-mortar campaigns for social justice.

And it is this complex literacy narrative of what it means to work for literacy rights, to blend composition and activism, research and organizing, that we might want to start writing. Perhaps such stories are our next form of

academic research. For while each journey may be inherently personal, the collective insights of such work might transform our sense of what is possible in the future. And if this were to occur, it would only further strengthen Deborah Brandt's already considerable legacy.

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