

TEXTS OF OUR INSTITUTIONAL LIVES: Strategic Speculations on the Question of Value: The Role of Community Publishing in English Studies

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Value is a slippery term that permeates our work in English studies. Within literary studies, value has a long history of being associated with canon formation and curriculum reform. One way to mark changes in literary studies is to examine the revaluing of formally subjugated writers and their inclusion in the daily practices of the academy, such as the classroom, the scholarly journal, and the academic conference. The focus on subjugated or marginalized voices is not unique to literature, however. Over the past decade, there has also been a focus in composition studies on connecting its practices to underrepresented populations through such vehicles as service learning or community publishing projects. This work has emphasized including and revaluing formerly excluded or ignored voices. The value of this work is not only in the “discovery” of new voices but also in the actual services offered to these communities.

Portraying these two trends within English studies as simultaneous, however, raises the issue of whether or not these efforts are actually part of a similar project. Does the “value” of service learning and community publications intersect with the “value” associated with canon and curriculum reform? If not, what might it mean to bring this work together and to push it to the next level of articulation? How could such work be transformed, to invoke Michel de Certeau, from a local tactical response to a strategic intervention into how English studies operates? That is, where can the concept of “value” actually take us?

To explore these questions, I examine one of the early community publishing projects between an institute at Temple University and a local urban neighborhood,

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which I call Glassville.¹ The goal of the project was to publish an oral history of the neighborhood by bringing together a service-learning course, the community's neighborhood association, the first-year writing program, and faculty from multiple departments. Instead, the project resulted in a community-led protest, in which issues of race, class, and power had to be recognized and negotiated. It is in the working through of such a moment, I argue, that a revised conception of "value," one embedded in the process of community publishing, can draw together the work of English studies and composition studies.

PARTNERSHIP

The project began when a professor contacted New City Writing, an interdisciplinary institute, housed in our University Writing Program and English Department, that Eli Goldblatt and I had founded several years prior. The professor had initiated an ethnographic field project and encountered Glassville, a 15-block neighborhood that, for fifty years, had maintained an integrated neighborhood with no apparent racial strife or hate crimes. This was notable because an adjacent neighborhood was known for its history of racial conflict.² Glassville had experienced many of the economic downturns and job losses that have confronted the rest of the city. The fact that Glassville had remained an integrated community in the face of such changes stood in stark contrast to other areas.³

As a result of the ethnographic project, the neighborhood association expressed an interest in having its history published. The professor contacted our institute because I had recently formed New City Community Press (www.newcitypress.org), a community press dedicated to formalizing much of the writing produced in our literacy and service-learning work with Philadelphia neighborhoods. After discussions among institute staff, the neighborhood association, and involved faculty, a project was soon formed that bundled these interests together to produce a book of resident interviews, tentatively titled *Glassville Memories*.

Each partner went into the project, however, with a variety of interests. For those in the Glassville neighborhood association, the book would do more than just record their voices. Part of their struggle was for the association to be recognized as a unique entity within the network of city neighborhoods. In that regard, the book would act as a symbol of the community's distinct identity and, as a consequence, validate its arguments for increased political and economic support. One of the association's goals for the book was thus political—to document and legitimate the community's needs within the city's urban renewal plans.

From my perspective, the book would enable the institute to move further toward an expanded vision of "Writing Beyond the Curriculum," a concept designed to link student, faculty, and community writing to concepts of social justice (see

Parks and Goldblatt.) Over the previous two years, the institute had attempted to integrate the different literacy/community voices of the surrounding neighborhoods into the writing curriculum, through expanded readings and service-learning opportunities. Much of this work had occurred at the upper end of the English Department curriculum. *Glassville Memories*, however, would be used in our introductory writing courses. The hope was that such a text would disrupt an introductory writing curriculum that, by focusing heavily on the values of academic discourse, had not paid enough attention to the exclusions that shaped literacy in our city.⁴ Produced in conjunction with a community organization, the proposed book would make evident how issues of literacy and power were present in a student's "backyard." In this regard, the Press and the community members would be coming together to form a new community-based textbook for our first-year writing course.

To advertise the existence of the community and to expand the reach of the book, the Glassville neighborhood association and the Press also agreed to introduce this book into the "network of exchange." In one sense, this was happening already, because the book would be assigned across forty sections of courses in the university's basic writing program, meaning that approximately one thousand students would purchase it. It was also decided, however, that the book would be advertised to other writing programs and disciplines, as well as to local and national booksellers. Ultimately, it was hoped that the book would reach a wide audience of those generally interested in urban life. To ensure that the neighborhood residents were not exploited, a portion of the profits from all of these different venues would be shared with the Glassville neighborhood association, returning to the residents some of the economic value of their stories.

The project was to be directed by two professors, each of whom brought unique talents to the project. One professor was a trained ethnographer, who brought extensive experience in community-based projects. She also had the trust of the Glassville neighborhood association. The other had extensive experience working with community writers and had taken a leadership role in our emergent community press. Together they brought a range of expertise and insight to the project.

Difficulties occurred almost immediately, however. As part of the project, the two professors were to co-teach a specifically marked undergraduate course that was cross-listed between their two departments. New budgeting procedure made it impossible to have the course co-taught or cross-listed, however. Instead, the professor with community press experience was assigned as the sole instructor. Moreover, neither was given release time to work on the project. Although one was at least "assigned" to the class, the other faculty member had to volunteer extensive time to working with the students. Despite these complications, the two professors brought the students to the community, arranged for interviews, and discussed interview protocols in class. This project depended, however, on their providing sufficient

time and support to conjoin their expertise for the benefit of the student “ethnographers” and community members. Systemically, this did not happen, and gaps in communication began to occur, which soon influenced the future direction of the project.

Also, the neighborhood association had never before been involved in such an extensive project. Even though some of the residents had had the experience of being interviewed for other community history projects, a focus on their particular community was new. In addition, as discussed after the book’s publication, many of the residents had been unaware of how their voices actually phrased or articulated ideas in everyday speech and, thus, would appear in print. Many of the residents interviewed were also senior citizens, with a different sense of what it meant to interact with college students in terms of respect and building a relationship. For these residents, the model of students dropping in to interview them and then returning to their class seemed alienating and, to some extent, rude. (This sentiment was expressed to me personally at the community meeting after the book’s publication.)

Finally, there were the particular issues around editorial control of the book. New City Community Press had made a commitment to producing books that focused on community voices that were not often represented, as well as showcasing those voices with high production values. The belief was that each community should be able to frame and develop its own communal/historical identity, as well as to have its aesthetic identity fully represented. Previous publications, such as *No Restraints*, a book on our city’s disability community, had used handwriting, artwork, and graffiti to represent a community’s sense of its voice. In each case, our editorial staff had produced books that were well received by the intended audiences and that garnered awards from city leaders. Given my goals for this project, however, the audience for this project was more nebulous than for any previous publications. For instance, the potential readers included students in writing programs, the community residents, and academics, as well as an unformalized “general audience.” In addition, unlike any other book produced by the Press, this book, in my view, also had to represent itself as the result of an undergraduate course—the specific context from which the book would emerge and, for the university, to which it would return.

Consequently, numerous populations and individuals now felt they should have a say in the book’s formulation, so that it became an open question as to what conglomeration of interests represented the book’s “community.” In order to have the book ready for the following academic year, however, we also had to define this “community” very quickly. Despite these radical departures from the Press’s earlier projects, we did not create any new process for the Press to negotiate this terrain or the competing sense of ownership and authority. To some extent, we did not realize the ways that producing a text for “classroom use” and “community use” would

infiltrate and mutate the project and the workings of the Press.

As might have been expected by the more experienced, the project slowly began to unravel. The original “bundling” of interests had failed to create a firm sense of how these competing needs would be negotiated. Communication among the partners, already hindered by a lack of systemic university systemic support, was further damaged by school calendars, faculty leaves, lack of transportation, the health problems of elderly residents, the need for students to work extra jobs to stay in school, and other difficulties. Under these conditions, the course slowly became cut off from continued dialogue with the community. Imperceptibly, the overarching goal of the project became more about representing the work of the students than about the voices of the community.⁵

This shift altered both the editorial process and the status of the student interviews. As a product of a service-learning class, the interviews came to reflect the uneven commitments of the students to the project. Some interviewers were able to grasp the history of the neighborhood and asked the residents to discuss the loss of businesses, the attempts to rebuild the job base, and changing demographics within the community. One such student/resident exchange went as follows:

[Student]: And what were some of the issues that were of concern to the community?

[Glassville resident]: We have things such as the quality of life issues such as too much trash. People come down here and unload big dump trucks in our neighborhood, thinking it is just a dumping ground. We have a lot of light industrial business down there. We have no recreation for our youth whatsoever. We have some homes that are in desperate need of repair. There is a high unemployment rate amongst our teens. There are many things that we just ignored, but we are on the ball now.

In these interviews, the development of the Glassville neighborhood association was represented as an important act of community politics. However, the book also included moments of confusion between the students and the neighborhood residents about important community institutions. Here is an example:

[Student]: St Mary’s what?

[Glassville Resident]: St. Mary’s of Szczecin.

[Student]: How do you spell that?

[Glassville resident #1]: S-Z

[Glassville resident #2]: C-Z

[Glassville resident #1]: E [. . .] you got me.

[Smiling]

[Glassville resident]: [Laughs] Write it down.

[Student]: [Handing a resident a notebook.] Here, do you want to write it on this?

[Glassville resident]: S-Z-C-Z-E-C-I-N

[Glassville resident]: [Handing his wife the notebook]

Here you write it. I'm the Pollack and she has to write it.

[Student]: What does that mean, *Szczecin*?

[Laughs].

In one sense, this was a friendly interchange. It also demonstrates, however, that the student did not seem to have the necessary community or historical details to conduct the interview effectively. Other interview questions also remained at a personal level, such as “When was your first kiss?” Here community members had to struggle to create a context for a broader community or worldview to emerge. Even though they were weak in terms of research strategies, such moments were seen as appropriate for inclusion because the book was coming to be seen primarily as serving a pedagogical purpose: in terms of the goals of the Writing Program, these weaknesses would teach students how to do better ethnographic work.

Pedagogical goals, however, were not the goals of the community. Upon publication, the book immediately became a target of disappointment and anger for Glassville. Many residents were unhappy with the unequal lengths of the interviews, believing that certain residents were featured more prominently than deserved. Others felt that important aspects of their own lives or of the community's history should have been included in the book—either through additional interviews or supplementary materials. The book also contained several historical mistakes about the community. Concern was also raised that the student-created interview transcriptions had been used in the book instead of organizing the community voices around themes or categories. Because of this decision, many were shocked at seeing how they “sounded” on the page. (One resident, noting that the interviews were exact transcriptions, complained that she sounded like the “village idiot.”) Some comments, casually said in conversation, now appeared to them as racist or anti-religious. (It is one thing to refer to yourself jokingly as a “Pollack” in the privacy of your living room, but it is another to have that comment read in a university classroom by a thousand students.)

The cover also became the object of anger because it infuriated elements of the community. The self-image of the Glassville neighborhood association would have been best represented by a cover showing an integrated neighborhood scene. During the term, however, the students had not worked with the community to select a cover in class, so, once the term was over, many students were no longer available. In the absence of such input, a cover was designed to reflect the students' perception of

the book as a historical study of individuals. Instead of a cover featuring an integrated neighborhood in the present, the front cover featured a handwritten title, a picture of a white resident on her way to the prom, circa 1940, laid over a the scene of a city map, which bled over to the back cover showing photographs of an African-American family, circa 1940. This attempt to create a continuity of images was not endorsed by many residents, however. Instead, as one resident stated: “White on the front, Black on the back, of course.” In response, the Glassville neighborhood association wrote letters of protest and demanded retractions/revisions throughout the text.

Almost immediately after the book was given to the community, I received a call from the president of the neighborhood association, who presented the residents’ concerns in no uncertain terms. Promising to make it “right,” I offered to meet with any and all residents to discuss what had gone wrong and what needed to be done to fix the project. A community meeting was called: the sole topic of discussion was be the publication. Neighbors spoke of being betrayed and ignored. Complaints were lodged against the student ethnographers who had “suddenly” stopped coming to talk with residents. The commitment of university to be a true “partner” was questioned.

Prior to the meeting, I had decided not only to apologize for the mistakes in the book but also to stress the positive value of the publication—how it showed the remarkable nature of Glassville and how students could learn from the residents’ voices. No one wanted to be told that his or her participation was meaningless. In this sense, I stood my ground on the importance of the residents’ voices being heard, even if the process and publication had failed them. I also publicly promised that New City Community Press would fix the book to their satisfaction. As might be expected, folks questioned whether it could ever be “fixed.” Here, there really was no response except to ask for another chance to make it right—whatever that might take.

These dramatic moments, however, do not capture the full response: it was not as simple as the rejection of the book by the entire community. Even during the height of the controversy, the book began to integrate itself productively into the community’s networks of exchange. Some community members were happy with their interviews and sold the book as a fundraiser for their church. Some also felt that, seen as a continuous image, the cover was “quite striking.” Many residents bought extra copies to give to family members. At the same meeting in which anger ran so high, some argued that the community simply did not want to admit to some of the features that were represented in the book. One neighborhood resident offered a prayer of thanks for the book’s publication. Community anger also lessened when an involved professor used hard-earned community respect to endorse the possibility of finding a solution. As a result, the attempt to have a retraction or apology put on the cover was rejected. Finally, as discussed later, the association ulti-

mately endorsed the use to which the book was put in our basic writing classrooms—where, in ways not intended, it served to highlight the difficult and exacting nature of university/community publication partnerships.

Still, in light of its own goals, the Glassville project had failed on many counts. The neighborhood association would not use the book to advertise the community or to recruit members. Without the association's support, plans to market the book to other writing programs and to bookstores had to be shelved. Tensions—between participants who defined the goal of the book as a community publication and others who defined the book as a student research publication—reached a point at which future collaboration no longer seemed possible. In an attempt to cross the divisions between the university, the community, and the curriculum, a divisive and flawed product had been produced.

RETHINKING VALUE

In retrospect, it seems clear that the Glassville project embedded itself within a particular version of value, one that initially might be explained by Karl Marx's theory of value and its incorporation into the academy. The shorthand version of Marx's theory goes as follows: individual workers, dispossessed of the means of production, are forced to sell the only value that they possess, their "use-value" as laborers. For this labor, the capitalist provides them with enough wages to sustain their daily existence; this is the labor's exchange value. The capitalist trick is to force the workers to labor beyond the point of their mere reproduction—i.e., workers provide more "use-value" than they receive in "exchange-value." Marx concludes that the worker fails to see this exploitation because of the "fetishism" of commodities—the workers believe that it is the inherent quality of an object, and not their labor, that creates value (125–244).

Marx's view that capitalism produced a culture that masks worker exploitation has been translated into an argument that the canon has worked to exclude the full range of writing being produced within a culture, as well as the economic/historical context from which that writing arose. The canon has fetishized certain texts and claimed them as "art" by removing them from the context of their production. Under the guise of objectivity, the canon has become a vehicle for representing the desires of the bourgeoisie/middle class. In response, Marxist literary critics have argued that previously marginalized texts, such as those written by the working class, should be placed within the "literary" canon. Marginalized writing is often held to possess the progressive values that critics claim the canon has traditionally denied. This version of canon reform has led to a situation in which professors of English studies are asked to choose between two opposing sets of texts (canonical and noncanonical), each seen as possessing opposing moral values (Guillory 25).

A similar narrative could be made about the integration of nonstandard texts into composition classrooms. As James Berlin argues in *Rhetoric and Reality*, the “canonized” text for composition classrooms is the expository essay that is embedded within the current traditionalist paradigm. Since the late 1960s, however, nonstandard writing and nonhegemonic voices have become part of the picture. A look at mainstream readers, such as *Negotiating Differences*, or standard texts, such as Mike Rose’s *Lives on the Boundary*, reveals how “marginalized” identities have been incorporated into a “composition canon.” As was the case with the literary canon, these alternative voices are often brought in as a way to represent alternative moral values for students to study. Their inclusion poses the question of which set of essentialized voices composition should endorse.

In both composition and literature classes, the “value” of introducing these texts has been seen principally as creating a more representative set of literary/cultural voices. Guillory argues that, in a time of conservative politics, this push for canonical representation stands in for actual political representation. As Guillory notes, including Latino literary voices in a literature course is a poor substitute for ensuring that Latinos can enter the classroom or government.⁶ In this regard, it is not clear how such curricular inclusion has significantly changed the actual political relationship of a university to its local or national partners.⁷ Increased representation in the classroom via assigned texts has not necessarily resulted in increased resource sharing with underrepresented populations at the local level.

Nor has the introduction of these texts necessarily challenged the political relationship of how “writing” might be produced, published, and distributed in partnership with the “marginalized” communities being studied. Students tend to read finished pieces that are nicely framed within anthologies. In such situations, the community’s sense of how it wishes to be represented is greatly mitigated or even negated. (For an extended discussion of this issue, see Diana George.) It might be argued that Marx’s theory of value has been adopted only in the most limited sense; it has been used to acknowledge exclusion, to detail the history of that exclusion, and to allow the “literal” voice of that excluded population into our curriculum. In the process, however, fundamental questions on the nature of language, community, and property have been finessed.

Certainly, the Glassville project demonstrated the failings of such a limited vision. The voices of the community were included in the curriculum; they were not, however, developed in a context affording equal control of the book’s content or developing its visual qualities. It was the students, not the community members, who collected and edited (or failed to edit) the oral histories. It was the Press who framed the community voices through images, font, and cover design. It was the University Writing Program that seemed to have the power to decide how the book would be used in its composition classrooms.

Within a community-publishing context, the fundamental issue becomes more than just exchanging one text for another—canonical for noncanonical. In such projects, we need to recognize the right of a local community to have input into the publication, as well as into subsequent curricular materials. For this reason, I argue that such moments of curriculum reform must be seen as part of a larger effort to form university/community partnerships. That is, we need to explore how our inclusion of nontraditional voices might call for a general reworking of the current sponsorship networks existing within a university.⁸ For these issues of control to become central, however, we must shift our attention away from the “exchange-value” of teaching one politically oriented text over another and toward the “use-value” of texts in general.

Notably, some Marxist scholars have already argued for an increased focus on use-value. In “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value,” Gayatri Spivak reminds us that “use-value” is both inside and outside the network of exchange (162). For this reason, use-value can speak to both the labor relations from which the object emerges and the cultural/aesthetic value of that object.⁹ Working from her insights, a teacher could design a classroom practice for *Glassville Memories* that highlights how the book developed within certain networks of economic exchange, networks that allowed New City to control the image of the community as well as determine the way in which community voices would be discussed and analyzed within the college course. This conversation might also lead to a larger discussion of how *Glassville Memories* is an example of a generalized pattern for university/community partnerships in which the community is the object on which the university, as subject, acts.

However, although such a definition allows us to enunciate the responsibilities of the teacher within a classroom, it does not enunciate the rights of the community to help define that classroom. A student’s becoming aware of how a text is used (and framed) does not change the actual working practices or the relationship of the institution to the communities being studied.¹⁰ For this reason, we also need to imagine how a focus on use-value might interrupt our current practices in connecting with community and neighborhood organizations. Here the work of G. A. Cohen becomes important. Whereas Spivak ultimately accepts Marx’s conception of “surplus labor” as a conceptual tool to explain exploitation (“Subaltern”), for Cohen, exploitation occurs through how the “value of a product is appropriated” and to what uses and ends it is put.¹¹ He believes that, by creating the object, the worker earns the right to determine how the product is used: “[T]he crucial question for exploitation concerns the justice of the distribution of the means of production” (234).

Earlier, I argued that nontraditional texts were being introduced into classrooms to make the canon more “representative.” Cohen’s argument demonstrates

the inadequacy of such a move, because the inclusion of marginal voices within traditional networks of production—curricula, required courses, textbooks, and publishers—simply reproduces the current networks of sponsorship and power. (Certainly, this is one of the lessons of the Glassville project; the neighborhood was represented, but without representation.) What is needed is a new model of aesthetic and cultural production that not only provides alternative cultural products for use inside and outside our classrooms, but also alternative systems of production for our students and community partners.

For all of these reasons, I have come to believe that cultural and educational institutions should understand part of their work as “socializing” the means of cultural and aesthetic production.¹² Or, as Guillory argues, aesthetic and cultural production must be reintroduced as a right of every citizen and become an aspect of everyday ordinary life: “The point is not to make judgment disappear but to reform the conditions of its practice. If there is no way out of the game of culture, then, even when cultural capital is the only kind of capital, there may be another kind of game, with less dire consequences for the losers, an aesthetic game. Socializing the means of production and consumption would be the condition of an aestheticism unbound, not its overcoming. But of course, this is only a thought experiment” (340). Guillory’s “aestheticism unbound” is an argument for the right of communities to create their own aesthetic self-definitions; it is an instantiation of Cohen’s view that exploitation can be overcome only by expanding access to the means of production.¹³

Rather than see its work strictly in terms of canon (re)formation, English studies should imagine itself as a field that is engaged in fostering new local public writing spaces. It should demonstrate to its students how the binary concepts of in/out and canonical/noncanonical are the result of negotiated literacy acts and practices. Ultimately, English studies could push against a literal view of language, one in which language is seen as a reflection of a community’s reality, to a view of language as the means by which different language communities bring themselves together for greater explanatory (and political) power, replacing the literal text with a catachretical text. I would even go so far as to argue that, for students undertaking such collaborative work as part of their general education, it would demonstrate the true use-value of the writing process.

It should be recognized, however, that the effort of socializing the means of literary/literacy production necessarily demands a different relationship between English studies and the local community. One of the ways to read the initial formulation of the Glassville project is as a tactical intervention into a local community. Michel de Certeau, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, defines a tactic as follows:

[A] *tactic* is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for au-

tonomy. The space of the tactic is the space of the other. Thus, it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. [. . .] It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy [. . .] It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of “opportunities” and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. (36–37)

Within de Certeau’s logic, the Writing Program wanted to become a tactical ally, marshalling resources for a “quick strike” against a larger public dismissal of Glassville (although, as noted, we actually operated as a foreign power). Within the Writing Program itself, the *Glassville Memories* publication acted as a tactical intervention into the first-year writing program, moving it toward greater inclusion of locally marginalized community voices. However, when the tactical project fell apart, the partnership could have just drifted away, the book could have been put in storage and eventually forgotten, and the individual faculty could have drifted to other projects. For many “failed” university/community projects, the individual (read “tactical”) nature of the work allows the department or university to be unaffected. In this way, a tactical approach represents a limited ethical and practical commitment to connecting the disciplinary work of a field to a local community.

For this reason, as English studies moves toward “socializing the means of production,” it is a strategic sense of value that must become dominant. According to de Certeau, a strategy is “the calculation (or manipulation) of power relations that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will or power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a *place* that can be delimited as its own and serve as a base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats [. . .] can be managed” (35–36). Within the institute (which, as stated earlier, was housed in the Writing Program and English Department), New City Community Press had become a strategic space whose very existence depended on community-based partnerships. By definition, it was a university/community collaborative. For this reason, the “failure” of the Glassville project called into question the integrity of its borders, creating a scenario in which “foreign powers” (deans, department heads, grant agencies, and other community partners) might use the moment to reclaim the space and resources for other initiatives. It was this development of a strategic community publishing space that necessitated institutional responsibility and recognition of the importance of correcting the project. There was simply no possibility of allowing the Glassville project to “fade away.” It would affect not only the community, but the English Department as well. For this reason, I argue that the “hope” of such community-based work can be realized only by the creation of strategic university spaces that bring with them a collective ethical and institutional commitment to the numerous literacy populations that make up a neighborhood, city, or state.

Returning to the connections among English studies, value, and community publishing, I reiterate my argument that the history of English studies (a rubric covering both literary and composition studies) has involved the slow inclusion of vernacular or marginalized voices—a limited definition of value. English studies now resides in a space, however, from which it can take on a strategic role in alliance with marginalized populations—not only to produce community-based publications, but also to ensure that the emerging commitment to publishing the words and voices of our local communities is enacted in an ethical and institutionally responsible manner. In doing so, English studies will not only further articulate its own traditions, but it will develop a framework to enrich the work of students, community members, and faculty. For this reason, English studies should become part of the effort to socialize the means of literary/literacy production by becoming active in community publishing networks within the residents’ local communities or establishing their own small/low-level community publishing efforts. Such are the “common values” that could unite community publishing and English studies.

COMMON GROUND

So how does the story of the Glassville project end? How did this revised sense of value shape my response to the controversy? To answer these questions, I focus on two particular elements of the response: the use of the book in our composition classroom and the production of the second edition.

In the aftermath of the controversy, we were still faced with the commitment to use the book in our first-year writing courses; there were two thousand copies in our storeroom. Recognizing the need to coordinate with the community over the inclusion of the book in our curriculum, I decided to discuss with the neighborhood association how the book would be “used” in university classrooms. In doing so, I explicitly promised the president of the association that, when we used the book in university classes, we would not hide the project’s mistakes or the community’s anger. It was decided to use the book’s history as a way to frame the difficulties and possibilities of a neighborhood/university partnership. The flawed product and the history of its production offered an interesting text for students in our introductory writing courses to study how universities and neighborhoods create “value.” (This is not to say that the course abandoned its traditional goals or that judgments based on composition research were ignored; instead, these disciplinary judgments were placed in dialogue with the community’s insights. As Guillory argues, the point is not to make value judgments disappear, but to reform the conditions of their practice.)

The particular theme of this first-year writing course grew out of comments by the community member who exclaimed, “I sound like the village idiot,” when she saw her interview for the first time. After this remark was made to me, I spent more

than an hour talking to the president of the neighborhood association, arguing that everyone in the book sounded like an “intellectual.” I offered alternative ways to understand what it might mean to “sound like an intellectual,” citing such “cultural studies” luminaries as Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams. None of academic readings of the community “voices” seemed to have much traction, however. As we talked, I realized that I was arguing from an incredibly privileged space, ignoring the situation of those who don’t have the “university” standing behind their “intellect.” This led me to consider who is really allowed to exist within such broad and “alternative” definitions of the intellectual. Who has the power to decide that they can afford such a definition? This conversation sparked a debate among those creating the course on what it meant to sound like or to be “intellectual.” Or, as it was posed to students, how do we understand the relationship between intellectuals sponsored by a community and those sponsored by the academy? How should these different intellectuals relate? In a sense, the idea of the intellectual became a metaphor for the class to examine how university/neighborhood organizations might interact in the production of knowledge.

Throughout the course, students were asked to inquire into how the book represented the working relationship between students and residents. They were not asked to read the text as an authentic and literal expression of a marginalized voice; they were asked how the text represented a negotiation among different “intellectuals” on the concept of “community.” It was also hoped that students, by being engaged in this process, would come to learn the tentative and ever-changing character of community. In this way, the course moved *Glassville Memories* from a commodified product into an ongoing social practice in which they could participate.

The students were aware that they were taking part in an ongoing debate about the publication and that they were, in effect, part of the material practices shaping its future. Perhaps because of this, they picked up on the tensions within the book. In particular, a significant number of students felt that the interviews were disrespectful of the residents, both by showing a lack of knowledge about the community and by the brevity of the actual questions. Students pointed out how the interviewers’ questions were predominantly personal and rarely asked the residents to offer systemic or theoretical analyses of why the community had managed to remain harmonious in the midst of economic change. In this way, the students’ behavior reaffirmed research demonstrating that working-class individuals are often asked questions that imply a lack of authority and knowledge to supply extended information, leading to short answers and a failure to provide them with the opportunity to represent their worldview fully.¹⁴

Within this context, the students also developed an argument that the book itself failed to accord the residents the space to publish materials that demonstrated their collective intellectual vision. There were few economic facts in the book, ei-

ther as addenda or graphs, to affirm the personal insights of the residents. No information was given on documents that were produced by the neighborhood association or on any plan being developed by the community to address the economic concerns presented in the book. Although calling for such texts might be seen as an attempt to make the book academic, it was also the case that such work would have highlighted the association's political goals, as well as their personal experiences. As for the students, the Glassville book allowed them to see how a failure to imagine the community residents as intellectuals had determined both the scope and the limitations of the project.

Student readers did not, however, romanticize the Glassville residents. They consistently pointed out that many elderly residents appeared to be uninterested in modern culture. The residents, as represented in the book, seemed more interested in reproducing their past than in creating a different type of community that could intersect with the economic and multicultural terrain of modern Philadelphia. Even though residents saw the world and their network of friendships in “black and white,” our students inhabited a multicultural world, with a variety of languages and ethnicities. They consistently noticed the lack of stories and images of Asian neighbors. Many of these issues were framed around the book's cover. Students believed that the cover images accurately represented the book's emphasis on personal stories and historical nostalgia, in contrast to one of the residents' critiques of the book. In agreement with the community, they also faulted the placement of the black family images on the back of the book. Notably, they also faulted the book for failing to represent the new Asian population in the neighborhood on either the cover or in the content of the book.

The *Glassville Memories* book allowed students to see how a focus on “personal relationships” had failed to imagine the residents as community intellectuals or to challenge their very vision of a “race-free” community. In so doing, it demonstrated to the students the ways in which the seemingly literal language of community was actually the result of a metaphoric act of bringing disparate voices and interests together as though they were unified, even if that unity was actually exclusionary. For a final project in the course, students were asked to rewrite the book by imagining what else the residents might have said, to recategorize the book's structure, to invent oppositional voices to critique the questioners, and to develop new cover and image montages. These moves allowed the students to move beyond simple critique toward a type of metaphorical writing practice.

Even prior to publishing a second edition, the book was a curricular success for the Writing Program. The book did more than “exchange” one text for another. It reframed the relationship of students to their writing about community, as well as the Writing Program's relationship to “community.” Through the Glassville book, the disciplinary interests of English studies were placed in a material dialogue with

the immediate context in which issues of urban literacy and community development occurred. The book also demonstrated how the work of students could not be seen as separate from the neighboring area surrounding the campus. For this reason, the *Glassville Memories* began to model how a curriculum might be seen as the result of more than just strictly disciplinary interests. It offered a different model of how a curriculum could interact with a community, and it articulated the responsibilities of students working in that community.

But what about Glassville itself? How were the community concerns addressed?

Soon after the community protest meeting, discussions began on how to produce a second edition of the book. This was not an easy or contention-free process, because many community members simply would not believe that such a big institution could change its pattern of behavior. Throughout the book project (and the plans for the second edition), the residents had talked about the example of Federal Express. Prior to our collaboration, the company had agreed to build a plant right next to the neighborhood and to hire residents to work there. The residents saw it as an opportunity to revitalize the neighborhood. For reasons that are still hotly debated, Federal Express hired individuals who were primarily from outside the community. Residents constantly invoked this incident as a precedent for the Press's complicated relationship with the community.

The process of talking to residents while developing the composition course, however, began to create some trust between the neighborhood association and New City Community Press. In talking to the president of the association and other community members, I was able to invoke this student work to show how, despite the controversy, the book was still a useful tool to teach students about race and community/university partnerships. Particularly important in this process was the student work critiquing the university's behavior in the production of the first edition. This demonstrated that the community concerns were being heard and validated. As a result, a belief in the collective ownership of the revision process gained some traction, especially because it led to discussions about equalizing power and sharing among partners. In this context, a new model emerged, which placed all participants on a common plane for decision making and mandated common access to the "means of production." And, although a full consideration of the category termed "intellectual" is not the work of this essay, it is useful to briefly note Gramsci's insight: "All men are intellectuals, one could therefore say: but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals" (9). As the parties moved forward in the revision process, each began to take on intellectual responsibilities that had formerly been accorded to the students and faculty alone.

Initially, sharing decisions and opening up the means of production meant a new focus on revising the aesthetic and framing aspects of the publication (the cover, the introduction, etc.). For instance, the neighborhood association, the involved

professors, and I agreed that the second edition should be jointly designed and approved by representatives from the community and university participants. In response, new covers were designed, featuring a neighborhood scene on the front and a picture of an interracial friendship on the back. Individual pages were also redesigned and organized to meet the residents' vision. The title page was changed to include the neighborhood association as one of the primary editors, and an introduction by the association president was added.

As discussions continued and deepened, however, it became clear that all were inflected by race. As discussed at the outset of this chapter, the Glassville residents imagined themselves to be a community in which "race" was not an issue. To a great extent, this turned out to be true. Among the neighbors, longstanding friendships had overcome many of the racist or class-based attitudes that marked surrounding neighborhoods. Although we were new to the neighborhood, we assumed that we also had entered this network of "friendship." (It should be added that one professor involved in the project, through a longer and more extended relationship with the community, had actually become part of the friendship network.) Despite all of the members of the Press being white, we imagined that we had transcended "race."

Yet the project clearly had not transcended race. The controversy over the first cover demonstrated this fact. As we moved forward, we had to consider how our elision of issues of race had damaged our partnership and the book. Ignoring race on the university's part also ignored the extent to which our personal and professional positions were based on discriminatory sponsorship networks—networks that intentionally left behind the citizens who lived and worked in neighborhoods such as Glassville. The discourse on "friendship" masked the racial and class components with our assumption that we would control the process and production of the book. For those of us at the Press, strong lessons needed to be learned.

We were not the only ones learning from the process, however. I have come to believe that those who were active in the book's revision also learned the difficulty of presenting their community as having solved the issue of race in strictly "personal terms." By not highlighting the broader worldview out of which their friendships grew, they failed to put in place a discourse or rhetoric to claim rights or power from a large institution. To some extent, I like to believe that the process of completing the second edition of the book allowed them to develop a stronger argument about the rights of a community when it is involved in university or corporate partnerships. (However, to be honest, not everyone agrees with this reading, and it is unclear whether any major corporation would cede power to such a small community group, no matter what arguments were deployed.)

As the second edition emerged, arguments declaring that racism could be overcome by personal friendships or by offering to publish a book addressing this fact

were no longer viable. This resulted in an interesting mix of “old and new.” Residents ultimately changed very little in their interviews. The disagreements concerning race relations within the interviews remained and, in some cases, were highlighted, although some residents went back to the interviews to clarify their statements about neighborhood history or neighborhood institutions. Some residents appeared to be more open to representing race as an ongoing issue in their community and allowing the tensions in their neighborhood to serve as a case study of negotiation. That is, the “harmonious” new cover and introductory materials were now to be seen in dialogue with the voices of residents who were trying to achieve that goal.

In some senses, the residents began to think of the book less as a literal representation of their community and more as a document that expressed one particular working-through of the issue, a discussion piece for use in their neighborhood. This was evident in their decision not to include more demographic or research materials in the book. In part, residents felt that the editorial changes to their interviews cumulatively expressed their worldview. In part, they felt that the university courses were providing this perspective for students. In this way, the second edition resulted in academic and vernacular cultures being metaphorically conjoined to produce a dialogue about the nature of language and community, as well as about the intersection of race and class. Therefore, with the second edition of the book, although the Glassville neighborhood association did not have a perfect publication that expressed a utopian vision of their community, they did have a publication that they felt comfortable sharing at community events, giving to new residents, and using to advocate for community rights.

I do not want to leave the impression that everything was permanently solved. That is not how collaboration works. Despite the attempt to reframe the discussion of race, the second edition failed to represent the full diversity of the community: new immigrants, as well as some long-time residents of the community, are not represented in the book. (As the second edition was heading to press, a resident in the community refused to allow a group photo featuring her grandmother to appear in the book because her family had not been interviewed. This act rekindled old feuds.) Although it is true that the book was used in the composition program for two years, neither *Glassville Memories* nor any other New City Community Press publication is currently being used in Temple University’s first-year curriculum. Finally, personal divisions still exist among between faculty, community, and program leaders about the history of the project and its value.

Despite such moments, what has succeeded, however, is the strategic space supporting the goals of community publishing. Since the production of *Glassville Memories*, the Press has worked collaboratively to publish oral histories of Mexican farm workers, the photography and writing of displaced union members, the poetry of

urban school children, and community dialogues on slavery/freedom. In each case, these publications have been collaboratively produced and designed by teams of community, university, and student participants. Each of these books found a home both within the participating community as well as within literature and composition classes; their adoption across the curriculum (not just for first-year writing) can serve as a sign of the long-term success of such projects at drawing together opposing aspects of an English studies department in support of community-based organizing.

In addition, a collaboratively developed curriculum for each of these community publications has enabled them to be integrated into high schools, community organizations, and government agencies in the immediate local context of their production, as well as literally across the country and internationally. In that way, the crisis of Glassville has created a strategic intervention into the work of the department and college, which has enabled a vision of English studies as an active participant in the creation of not only a community-based literature, but also a community-based curriculum at all levels of literary and composition instruction nationwide.

HARD CONVERSATIONS

I conclude with some general thoughts about how a shift in the meaning of value can bridge some of the divisions between English studies and composition/rhetoric. As we have seen, when value is framed strictly in terms of exchange-value (exchanging one text for another), a certain set of expectations/practices seems to be put into place. The principal agents become the professors and students; the principal site of activity is the university. However, with the introduction of use-value as a guiding metaphor, a different set of interests becomes part of the equation, forcing a different set of responsibilities onto the institution. It becomes possible to imagine each partner (the university and the community) as providing value to the project and being accorded the right to determine its use. Value production can be seen as a communal process, the aim of which is to produce a mutually reaffirming literacy product. Invoking use-value as an organizing principle demands that a common (if contentious) space of negotiation and production be created.

For this reason, I believe that curriculum reform must be more than the simple inclusion of texts that represent “alternative values;” it must mean more than providing diverse texts for students to judge by some moral standard or to use to learn academic discourse. This is important work, but it is only one piece. One of the goals of English studies, and of composition/rhetoric programs in particular, is to help students understand the connections between language and cultural power. To do this most effectively, English studies must create a path for students that is based

in both traditional course offerings (which teach the history of literary texts, cultural theory, key concepts in rhetoric, ethnography, and linguistics) and in courses that engage students in the informed production of use-value; that is, in addition to traditional courses, students must participate in both the creation of the aesthetic written object and the economy of partnerships out of which it emerges. Ultimately, the work of producing collaborative publications between the university and their local communities, socializing and expanding the aesthetic means of production, should become a key element of our pedagogical and professional work. Community publishing projects are a primary vehicle for such work.

English studies should also be about embedding our classrooms in a process that allows students to realize that the seemingly most literal language is metaphoric, the result of intense negotiation, of bringing disparate worldviews together. It is this vision of language that will enable them to be active participants in local, regional, and national public spheres. In “Rogue Cops and Health Care,” Susan Wells takes the prison visiting room as a metaphor for engaging our students in public writing:

The image of the visiting room suggests that our work establishes a point of exchange between the private, the domain of production, and some approximation of the public sphere. It is not directed at the political opinions of students, however progressive or retrograde, but toward the production and reading of texts that move between the public (the political, abstract, the discussable) and the private. [. . .] The realignment of rhetorical pedagogy to the public I advocate is not, therefore, a prescription or proscription of a genre of writing. Personal essays are not intrinsically “private”; technical discourse is not necessarily “public.” Rather, publicity is constructed as a relation of readers to writers, including notions of rationality and accountability that are continually open to contest. (335)

Reform is less about assigning a variety of writing modes than about a particular vision of language, a particular enactment of language politics. Clearly, such an undertaking will take significant work and hard conversations. Yet if we want to ensure that the production of value within an academic program is not seen as simply the circulation of texts, but the creation of venues through which all participants begin to recognize and regard the ownership of such texts and the education of students as a communal responsibility, it is just this set of hard conversations that we must undertake. The story of the Glassville project is not that our institute or department succeeded in permanently socializing the aesthetic means of production. Glassville did not lead to a moment of epiphany, but to a contentious and difficult process. As I once heard a university president state, “One of the great contributions of higher education is to show people how to deliberate over contentious issues together.” By taking on use-value as a guiding principle of our work, I believe that we can contribute to that great tradition.

NOTES

1. As is common practice, I have altered the actual name of the neighborhood, subsequent publications, and participants involved in this project.

2. See Bissinger 89–95.

3. See Adams et al.

4. See Sullivan et al.

5. By saying this, I am not diminishing any power that the neighborhood association might have used to alter the development of the book. Instead, these moments highlight the difficulty of one small community organization having an impact on the bureaucracy of a major university.

6. In *Cultural Capital*, Guillory states, “What is excluded from the syllabus is not excluded in the same way that an individual is excluded or marginalized as the member of a social minority, socially disenfranchised” (33).

7. In this regard, a general conservative restructuring of the liberal welfare state, which produced a need for greater partnerships among public institutions such as universities and schools, had a greater impact on forming such partnerships than “radical” theory. The question becomes how cultural studies can work within these new (and unfortunate) possibilities.

8. Here I am referring to Deborah Brandt’s development of “sponsorship” in *Literacy in American Lives*.

9. As stated earlier, the Glassville project did attempt to negotiate the question of value. In recognition of the fact that profit might be made from the book, a portion of the profit was to be returned to the community organization as payment for its residents’ contributions. In that sense, we did work within a model that imagined the labor power of the community being invested in the book, and, in a quasi-Marxist gesture, we attempted to refund the community for its residents’ labor.

10. As the work of Bruce Horner indicates, such a focus on the local commodifies “the community” and “the classroom” into static objects and fails to demonstrate to students how their interaction and work necessarily alters the community and the university space (31–72).

11. In *History, Labour, and Freedom*, G. A. Cohen has pointed out that Marx’s value theory is structured around the shuttling of two different versions of “labor”: the simple version—actual labor-time, spent producing an object—and the strict version, socially necessary time, required to produce an object. Cohen argues that the simple version is unable to explain why labor-intensive objects from the past are valued by the time that is required to produce them today. An example of this might be a shovel produced by a blacksmith versus one produced with current industrial technology. The logic of Marx’s argument seems to imply that, because the production of the blacksmith’s shovel was more labor-intensive, that shovel should be worth more than the factory-produced shovel. Yet this is often not the case. Marx deflects this argument by stating that what gives an object value is actually the socially necessary labor-time that society typically allots to its production. At this point, however, the actual labor of the worker is no longer expressed in the commodity; instead, the expression of an object’s value becomes its relationship to a preexisting standard of labor-time. Here, Marx’s theory is contradicted, because now the worker’s actual labor does not provide *any* value to the commodity. Furthermore, if past labor-time is the best indicator of the socially necessary labor-time used to produce a commodity but past labor cannot be used as a category if the simple concept of the labor theory of value is true, then actual past labor cannot be used as a ground for the concept of “required time.” According to Cohen, Marx does not succeed in proving that labor is what gives value to a commodity: “We may therefore conclude that labour does not create value, whether or not the labour theory of value is true” (233).

12. I recognize that this argument goes against the current restructuring of the university as a private for-profit institution. See Soley and White.

13. Paddy Maguire et al. detail an important effort at such work with working-class writers by the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in *Republic of Letters*.

14. See Ohmann.

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