

The Impact of Critical Community-Engaged Writing on Student Understanding of Audience

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In this study, we examine the use of community-engaged writing pedagogy and the authentic, contextualized writing projects it creates to determine if students better understand the concept of audience and incorporate that foundational knowledge into their writing process. Thematic analysis of student reflections and interviews found students view academic writing as a test of skills, but view community-engaged writing as a product with a purpose in the world. We also learned students need to understand the position of their writing within a rhetorical situation to successfully incorporate the concept of audience into their writing processes. Finally, students revealed they focus most on audience during the revision process and that community-engaged writing provides students with the incentive and rhetorical situation necessary to develop a more impactful revision process. These findings will help composition instructors identify academic results in community-engaged pedagogy, while the process orientation of the study provides a better understanding of how students incorporate the concept of audience into their writing with implications beyond community-engaged writing courses.

Despite instructors' best efforts, students often struggle to understand audience. Having spent their educational lives being taught to write for a teacher, university students often experience difficulty transitioning to contextually based writing. In response, composition scholars have embraced authentic writing assignments as a way to help students better understand writing for a rhetorical situation, and yet, students can still struggle to understand audience. Given this paradox, we wanted to explore why audience rarely exists beyond the teacher or classroom for many students. We were curious if community-engaged writing projects could provide students with experience in the circulation of modern texts through a complex rhetorical ecology impacting the way they think about audience.

In this study, we examine the use of community-engaged writing and the authentic, contextualized writing projects it creates to see if community-engaged writing impacts student understanding of the concept of audience and how they incorporate such foundational knowledge into their writing process. While significant research has been conducted regarding the effectiveness of community-engaged learning on student civic and personal development,

the scholarship regarding the impact of community-engaged learning on the development of course content knowledge is growing. To build on that scholarship, we examined the writing processes of students in community-engaged and non-community-engaged sections of the same first year writing course. We used thematic analysis of student reflections and interviews to provide a holistic view of the impact of community-engaged writing on student understanding and application of audience.

The results were striking. Reflections and interviews indicate students view academic writing as a test of skills, but view community-engaged writing as a product with a purpose in the world. We also found traditional assignments did not help students understand the position of their writing within a rhetorical situation, whereas community-engaged writing did. Finally, we found students focus most on audience during the revision process and that authentic writing assignments, like community-engaged writing, provide students with the incentive and rhetorical situation necessary to develop a more authentic revision process. These findings help composition instructors identify academic results in community-engaged pedagogy, while the study's process orientation provides a better understanding of how students incorporate the concept of audience with implications beyond community-engaged courses.

Critical Community-Engaged Writing

Recent research shows that community-engaged learning, like other forms of problem-based learning, can be academically rigorous and beneficial to student learning in addition to helping students understand their community and develop a sense of social responsibility (Eppler et al.; McNenny; Rosinski and Peebles), positively impacting general academic performance, values, self-efficacy, leadership, choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin et al.; Eyer et al.; Myers–Lipton; Osborne).

When examining community engagement specifically in composition courses, it helps to look at Thomas Deans's foundational work. Deans divides community-engaged writing into three categories: writing about the community, writing for the community, and writing with the community. Our study utilized a "writing for" format, which works in conjunction with a community partner to create materials that help the partner fulfill its mission (Deans, *Writing Partnerships*). While scholarship examining the effect of community engagement on how students learn to write is emerging, existing studies have found notable improvements in student persuasive writing over traditional composition courses (Wurr), a positive and statistically significant difference between research papers written in community-engaged writing classrooms and those written in traditional classrooms (Feldman et al.), and a recognition of writing as a public and social act (Cushman; Iverson). Building

on this body of knowledge is important because understanding if and how community-engaged pedagogy impacts course-specific learning is essential to justify the continuation and/or expansion of the practice. Composition instructors, as a whole, tend to value holistic education that promotes critical thinking, leadership, and self-efficacy (all demonstrated benefits of community engagement), but in the end, we teach writing. If community engagement can provide holistic benefits *and* provide a better way to teach writing, then the field is stronger for knowing.

Audience

Audience is considered a threshold concept for first year writers, and yet, despite its foundational nature, students often struggle to understand the impact of audience on writing. Perhaps the issue lies with the ever-evolving view of audience by scholars and, thus, the ever-evolving presentation of audience in the classroom. A look back at the scholarship demonstrates how this fairly innocuous term belies a deeply complex concept. Audience is a fiction (Ong) or a shifting set of roles for writer and reader (Reiff). Audience can be addressed or invoked (Ede and Lunsford), a set of contexts (Park, “The Meanings of ‘Audience’”), or the constantly changing ecology in which students write (Cooper 368). It’s vital for students to understand the rhetorical elements of purpose, audience, and context, but seeing those elements as separate is simply not plausible in our globally connected world (Chaput; Edbauer) and attempting to separate them masks fluidity of texts (Edbauer 20). The question isn’t really one of audience, but of circulation. It’s not enough to analyze or understand delivery to an audience; production must be understood because that is where a “hierarchy of knowledge” is created (Trimbur 210). As a text circulates through production and delivery, it is not in search of an audience, but rather produces a series of identities and relationships which can be seen in retrospect as audiences (Biesecker). It is only through interaction with a text that a public emerges; it is impossible to create a text for a specific audience, because the audience doesn’t exist in the abstract (Warner).

No wonder students struggle.

The academic environment in which students write only adds to the challenge, since the very nature of academic writing separates authors from environment (Reid and Kroll 17). Academic writing can be seen less as a form of writing and more as a form of testing, requiring students to demonstrate mastery of course objectives. Students, masters of the writing-as-test format, understand that the audience is always the instructor, no matter what the assignment may say, and they write accordingly (Britton; Reid and Kroll). The classroom removes the concept of audience from the writing process because assignment design makes audience extraneous (Park, “Analyzing Audiences”

479). This has led to a push for courses to feature a variety of authentic, contextualized writing assignments to help students break out of the writing-as-test mentality (Bacon; Reid and Kroll). Community-engaged writing, particularly projects that follow Deans's "writing for" model, can provide precisely the type of contextually-based, authentic writing assignments.

Study Design

Participants for this study were drawn from four sections of a first year, integrated communication course at a mid-sized, midwestern university. Cornerstone is a one-year, first year cohort class combining content of the oral communication and composition courses required by the university. There were twenty-six sections of Cornerstone in the 2018-19 academic year, and the four sections we taught became our pool of potential participants. We each taught one section using critical community-engaged writing pedagogy and one section without the community component. We partnered with two community-service organizations to collaboratively create a narrative writing assignment that met course goals and served an important need for our organizational partners, keeping with the core tenets of critical service-learning to equalize the needs of the community organization and the needs of students. Other than the involvement of a community partner, each instructor designed her two sections to be identical in structure and assignments. While there were differences between the sections presented by the two instructors, we worked collaboratively to minimize differences. To ensure we met ethical standards, all interaction between instructor and student, including consent and interviews, were conducted by the opposite instructor, and we did not know which students in our classes were participating until after grades for the studied assignment were submitted.

There were forty-one students in the two non-community-engaged, or control, sections, and of those, twenty-one students consented to participate. There were forty-two students in the community-engaged sections, and eighteen consented to participate. Four students left the university mid-study, leaving nineteen control and sixteen community-engaged participants. Students did not receive extra credit or other benefits from participating in the study. At the time of the study, community-engaged courses were not specially identified by the university during registration, so the students did not know they would be participating in a community-engaged course until the first day of class, alleviating a common concern with community-engaged studies—that students who select community-engaged courses are somehow different from students who choose more traditional course structures.

Because Cornerstone is an integrated communication class, it features a rhetoric-heavy curriculum not always found in composition classes. Throughout

the course, we teach foundational concepts of classical rhetoric including the rhetorical triangle, elements of persuasion, and logical fallacies. We present writing as a “social and rhetorical activity” with interconnecting elements of audience, purpose, and context (Roozen 17). In addition to teaching the fundamentals of rhetoric, the course also focuses on different genres. Leading up to the narrative assignment studied, all sections discussed the parts of a story, read model examples of narrative, and analyzed the ways those models did or did not conform to the genre. The genre content tied back to the discussion of rhetorical situation, as part of the analysis focused on the differing purpose, audience, and context for the narratives being discussed. All sections of Cornerstone studied featured the same core curriculum, so all students, community-engaged and control, received the same course content. While all sections read model autobiographical narratives, the control sections also read oral histories, and the community-engaged sections read model narratives from their community partner and other local nonprofit agencies.

Students in the control sections were asked to interview a person of their choice, learn stories from their lives, and write a narrative incorporating one or more of those stories. This assignment mirrors a standard narrative assignment given in countless composition classes. To help students think about the rhetorical situation for their writing, they were led through exercises to define an audience and purpose for the narrative prior to writing.

The students in the community-engaged sections participated in a common “writing for the community” assignment. Each section was paired with a different community partner. One partner provided housing assistance in the community, and the other provided a variety of services to low-income and homeless members of the community. The two partner organizations requested help writing narratives of their volunteers, clients, and staff to use for publicity purposes in newsletters, fundraising materials, and/or websites. Students had already been exposed to the larger issues facing their interview subjects in a previous research assignment focused on the problems of homelessness, income inequality, and food instability to establish context for the community partner.¹ At the beginning of the narrative assignment, a member of the partner organization spoke to the two community-engaged classes to provide organizational background and information. The partners told students some narratives could be chosen for use in organizational publicity materials and provided the instructors with a list of interview subjects and their availability, from which students selected their subject and arranged an interview. Just as with the control class, the students in the community-engaged sections interviewed their subject, attempting to elicit stories of their life, volunteer, or work experiences, and wrote the narratives. The students in the community-engaged

sections also worked through the same rhetorical situation exercises as the control classes to establish the audience, purpose, and context for their writing.

When the narrative assignment was submitted, the students in all four sections completed a written reflection. Students in both groups were asked to reflect on their understanding of audience and how they applied this understanding to their writing process. Across all four sections, students were required to complete all aspects of the assignment, including the reflection, regardless of participation in the study.

Once the assignment concluded and grades were recorded, we coded the reflections using theme analysis to develop interview questions (Braun and Clarke; Tracy; van Manen). We observed repetition after very few interviews but continued to interview students until theoretical saturation was realized (Tracy). In total, we interviewed seven students from the control group and seven students from the community-engaged group. At the conclusion of the interview process, we coded the transcripts through a detailed thematic analysis process, looking for commonalities in responses that could be developed into themes.

Results and Implications

Speaking with students and reading their reflections, it rapidly became clear that all students understood the textbook definition of *audience*. Students were able to articulate the concept well, some almost quoting the textbook. As we reviewed the transcripts, reflections, code book, and analytical memos, differences between community-engaged and control students became clear, and three themes emerged from the data: the difference between what Joy Reid and Barbara Kroll call “writing-as-test” and what we call “writing-as-product,” the need to see the rhetorical situation as a whole, and the timing of audience consideration within the students’ writing processes. In this section, we will explore these three themes in depth, concluding with the implications emerging from this data.

Theme 1: “Writing-as-test” vs. “Writing-as-product”

A myriad of writing scholars have argued that academic writing should be contextualized. Reid and Kroll argue that students writing without context struggle to see writing as a rhetorical situation, since, “(Students) realized that despite whatever ‘audience’ may be assigned . . . the specter of the teacher-evaluator remains the ‘real’ and most important audience, and the purpose of their writing is to demonstrate their ability to produce what the teacher expects for a certain grade” (Reid and Kroll 19). Lisa Mastrangelo and Victoria Tischio found similar results as interviews indicated their students “had become habituated to seeing writing as an empty, rule-driven activity, especially

in educational settings” (Mastrangelo and Tischio 39). Our research supports both findings and offers a potential solution in the form of community-engaged writing.

Students in the control sections clearly saw the narrative assignment as a test of skills and talked about how their instructor and classmates would read their narratives for grading or peer review, but would go on, in the same breath, to say their narratives had no audience. Even if they said the instructor was the audience, they didn’t see her as a “real” audience. Ethan wrote about this issue in his reflection:

I had to understand that my main audience was just gonna [sic] be my professor, so it kinda [sic] went against what we learned in class a little bit because your audience is usually a certain group of people and not just one specific person, and you aren’t just trying to meet the requirements. . . . In general, we didn’t have to worry about our audience a whole lot because the only people that were going to read the paper would be the professor and maybe one or two other people.

Overall, students argued instructors aren’t “real” audiences because they read primarily to grade. Without knowing it, these students echoed Reid and Kroll’s concept of writing-as-test. As Jasper said in his interview, “If I was writing for a campus newspaper, I guess I’d have to cover quite a variety of students and even teachers, professors. If I’m just writing for the class, then I really just have to do it for the grade and for the professor.” The students understood the concept of audience and knew audience impacts writing choices, but they simply didn’t apply audience to the writing for class.

From the control group, there were two notable exceptions to this finding; Eliza and Cora spoke eloquently about the intended audience for their writing. Both of these students chose to interview people important to them and whose stories they had strong motivation to document. Eliza wrote about her grandmother, a woman she clearly idolized. Cora wrote about a traumatic incident that happened to a dear friend. Both women spoke about how writing for their specific audiences impacted word choices, organizational structure, and motivation, clearly articulating a difference between the writing they did for this project and the writing they typically did for class. For example, Cora stated the assignment was different because she wanted to document an important moment for her friend when, “in the past I’ve only written just to get a grade or for myself.” From their responses, it seemed both Cora and Eliza applied the concept of audience to their writing because they found a way to separate this writing from the standard writing-as-test assignment.

The community-engaged students echoed the control students when we asked about their “typical” classroom writing experiences. Both groups spoke and wrote about how classroom writing usually fits the writing-as-test model. Charlotte articulated the thoughts of many, “Whenever I’ve written, it was always just for the teacher, and so I was just, like, what can I do to get the best grade?” While community engagement didn’t change the students’ view of academic writing as a form of testing, it did provide them with a new paradigm to see writing as a product that can be used for a purpose beyond getting a grade.

Time and again, the community-engaged students differentiated classroom writing from their community-engaged writing experience. The first distinction most students noted was the clarity of audience. Thea felt writing for such a well-defined audience helped by, “...taking that big abstract idea of audience and narrowing it down to ‘this is who we want to address and how we want to do that,’” bringing the concept of audience out of the textbook and into her writing. Understanding the characteristics of a specific group of people to target with their writing resonated with students, but not as much as understanding how the piece could impact the partner organization. Most students visited their partner site, and all spoke extensively with someone directly impacted by the organization, so they knew the value of the organization. Laura said, while she is a dedicated student, the project gave her incentive to try even harder: “Someone else is going to read this, and it’s going to impact their thoughts of the organization, so I wanted to give them a good paper.”

The contextual nature of the writing seems to take the assignment out of writing-as-test and into what we call writing-as-product. To be clear, we are using the term “product” to indicate an item that has a use beyond the classroom, not an assignment focused solely on the end result at the expense of process. As many community-engaged writing scholars have found, our students began to see writing as a social action that exists and has the potential to impact the world (Cushman; Heilker; Mathieu and George). This change helped students shift their view of writing away from a test good only for a grade and toward a product with an actual purpose in the world.

Theme 2: The Rhetorical Situation Should Be Considered as a Whole

Our students thought of academic writing as a test rather than a product due to what they saw as the lack of authentic audience but also because of the lack of a purpose or context. While a classroom assignment is a rhetorical situation of sorts, students didn’t perceive it as one, causing the writing assignment to reinforce the “writing-as-test” model. Students simply saw academic writing as “spitting out what I learned in class,” making it extraordinarily difficult for students to apply the concept of audience to their writing.

The community-engaged writing students, however, saw writing for their partner organization as writing for an “actual” audience, purpose, and context, so they were better able to articulate how they incorporated audience. They could not, however, separate audience from purpose and context very well. Community-engaged writing students wrote and spoke frequently about how their work was for “more than a grade” or how their writing would help their partner organization and community, demonstrating a focus on purpose. Students also spoke of specific choices they made to ensure they were being respectful to their subject or to focus on one important aspect of a subject’s story that made their writing more appealing to their audience and ultimately help their partner organization achieve its purpose. For example, Rose defined her audience as potential volunteers and the purpose of her communication as recruitment. She unknowingly echoed Park in her interview when she explained how the audience informed her purpose and vice versa. Rose attempted to center her subject and her subject’s experiences with the partner organization as a way to show the benefits of volunteering for the organization, choosing to focus on her subject’s Christian faith because she thought “that can connect a lot of Christian-oriented people who want to (volunteer) as well.” The contextual writing situation helped the community-engaged students consider all elements of the rhetorical situation when shaping their writing.

We believe an important finding for non-community-engaged instructors can be found in the exceptions within the control group. As we stated previously, two control students, Cora and Eliza, reported having a defined audience for their writing and using that audience to drive their writing choices. Cora defined her audience as her friend and wrote with the purpose of documenting a traumatic event so her friend could have a record of events over which she had triumphed. With this clear and very well-defined audience and purpose in mind, Cora approached her writing differently than she would in a typical academic setting because, “This is not my story; it’s someone else’s story, too.” As she wrote, Cora found that her extremely close relationship with her subject actually made writing challenging, because she kept reverting to writing the story from her own perspective as a witness: “I was more of like a second hand. Like, I was witnessing and helping her go through it, so I had my own things I wanted to add in, but I was, like, it’s not my story. It’s her story.” Throughout the revision process, Cora reported returning to the story to ensure it remained from her friend’s viewpoint. She also reported selecting details and words carefully to ensure her friend could remember all she wanted to recall without being triggered by unnecessary but harmful information.

Our community-engaged students could successfully incorporate the concept of audience in part because their communication existed within a defined rhetorical situation, but Cora and Eliza worked to establish a com-

plete rhetorical situation for themselves. This clarity of audience, purpose, and context helped the community-engaged students, Eliza, and Cora all become “engaged in purposeful communication” by making specific choices during their writing process (Park, “Analyzing Audiences” 483–84).

Theme 3: Students Think About Audience When They Revise

Reading the reflections, we were struck by how many students, both community-engaged and control, claimed to consider audience throughout the writing process. We thought it was important to explore this early finding in the interviews, so we asked students to think about audience and what choices were impacted by that consideration. We found that while many students claimed to think about audience throughout the process, only a few of the community-engaged writing students could actually articulate specific examples from early in their writing process. Those students spoke of using their rhetorical situation to shape interview questions rather than using it in the early stages of writing, making audience consideration more of a pre-writing activity than a drafting activity. The vast majority of community-engaged and control students described using their audience to make specific writing decisions during the revision process, supporting findings that most writers, novice and experienced, don’t consider audience until revision (Rafoth). While this finding is useful, a closer examination of interview responses provides more nuance to the data.

Students in the control group described using audience as a way to appeal to the instructor and earn a higher grade. Most control students spoke of creating a first draft by dumping all the information they had from their interviews into some written form and then returning for a single pass of revision where they considered word choice and generally tried to make their narratives appealing. Liam summed up the thoughts of many students when he said consideration for his instructor led him to, “...try to use a larger vocabulary, not much humor, and use the rubric as my outline to maximize points earned.” In other words, the students did not describe considering an audience, so much as a rubric, following the rules of writing-as-test. Still, consideration for the rubric did lead most control students to make specific decisions during a brief revision or editing process.

An examination of the community-engaged writing group plus Cora and Eliza, highlighted a different approach to incorporating audience. Since these students had a complete rhetorical situation to consider, a few utilized that information during their pre-writing process and shaped their interview questions based on the narrative they knew they needed to write. Those students spoke of asking their subjects for particular types of stories or for descriptions of emotions because they knew that type of information would help them

appeal to their audience and achieve their purpose. Like the control students, the community-engaged writing students did an initial dump of information for the first draft, but unlike the control students, the community-engaged students described an extensive revision process where they made multiple passes, specifically thinking about their audience and purpose as they changed perspective, organized stories, and selected language they felt would appeal to their audience. Rose described her initial draft as “word vomit” because she “wasn’t thinking in that right mindset” of her rhetorical situation. As she began to revise, Rose described a continuous conversation with herself:

I had to kind of step back and reword some things that I originally wrote and stuff like that. I needed to say, “Go back to (partner organization). Go back to (partner organization).” ... Just go back to, “This is for (partner organization), this is because of (partner organization).” Instead of being, “This is really great. The end,” I’d have to delete a sentence and be like, “Okay, what was I trying to say?” and rephrase it so that it made sense with my purpose and with who I was writing to, rather than what I wanted to write about or what I felt more ... I think the revising part was very crucial to help me to stay on task and keep [the writing] for its purpose.

Multiple community-engaged writing students described a similar internal conversation as a way to revise their writing with focus on audience and purpose. Many described an increased motivation to rework their writing so it could be of use to their partner organization and that motivation helped them focus through multiple revisions. For the community-engaged students in this study, seeing their writing as a part of a larger rhetorical context, as something that could help their partners do good in the world, provided them with motivation to revise.

Implications

The three themes found in this research provide a number of important implications for composition instructors. Not surprisingly, these findings reinforce the call for authentic, contextual writing situations. The writing-as-test mentality is extraordinarily hard to break because it is so ingrained in students from their earliest education. Even the community-engaged writing students, who were working within an actual rhetorical situation, reported a difficult time breaking free from thinking of writing as a test of skills.

We must acknowledge that one reason the writing-as-test mentality is difficult for students to shake is because it is always, at least partially, true. Even contextualized writing is used for assessment purposes, and students know

that. In our classes, we followed Deans's recommendation and worked with our partners to ensure our assessment criteria was based on their needs, so students in the community-engaged sections knew meeting the needs of their partner was key to their success, but that still frames writing as a test of skills.

Our first theme suggests that while community-engaged writing doesn't eradicate the student narrative that writing is only for a teacher, it does seem to disrupt that narrative by helping students incorporate a writing-as-product mindset in a way most control students couldn't. To use Deans's activity theory terminology, our community-engaged writing students were able to place their work in multiple activity systems simultaneously, while the control students remained in the academic system alone (Deans, "Shifting Locations, Genres, and Motives: An Activity Theory Analysis of Service-Learning Writing Pedagogies"). This finding echoes recent work indicating community-engaged writing helps students develop a flexibility of mind that increases their willingness to adapt to different writing situations (Pinkert and Leon). If we want students to see writing as a life skill and not a form of testing, we need to create authentic, contextually-based writing opportunities that allow students to develop writing skills in multiple activity systems. Community-engaged writing assignments that follow the "writing for" model clearly provide that opportunity, but Cora and Eliza demonstrate even traditional assignments can be shaped to provide context. The fact that all control students completed exercises designed to identify an authentic rhetorical situation for their writing and only two of the participants managed to do so indicates the difficulty of breaking the writing-as-test mentality.

Perhaps the difference is that Cora and Eliza found an audience, purpose, and context for their writing, which other control students reported struggling to do. Thus, our second theme shows that students need to understand their place within a complete rhetorical ecology, not just define a specific audience. The community-engaged writing students, Cora, and Eliza spoke of audience, purpose, and context as intertwined elements that impacted their writing process. Community-engaged writing students who initially identified an audience but not a purpose reported struggling until they figured out how and where their writing could be used. A few control students initially reported wanting to write for a specific audience, but they couldn't identify a purpose or context and soon shifted back into writing for the instructor and rubric. There is a great opportunity for future research to understand why some students are able to make this shift with traditional assignments while others struggle.

And finally, our last theme, understanding how and when students incorporate the rhetorical situation into their writing process could have great impact on composition pedagogy. While all the students reported revising their work, what the control students described was really the half-hearted revision

and editing frequently found in composition classrooms: looking over the work one or two times, changing a few words, and fixing the commas. The community-engaged writing students reported splitting the final stages of their writing process into a true revision process followed by editing. They reported changing the perspective of their writing to reflect their subject's viewpoint, reorganizing sections of the writing in order to best appeal to their readers, and making specific vocabulary and tone choices to reflect the needs of their partners, often over multiple drafts. Composition instructors frequently note the lack of revision in student writing, especially with first year students, so this finding is substantial.

The community-engaged writing students cited the need to help their partner organization rather than “just writing for a grade” as the motivation behind their revision, but the fact that Cora and Eliza also developed a revision process indicates this finding isn't limited to community-engaged writing assignments and the motivation might not be exclusively tied to the rhetorical situation. We considered whether our partnership with a community organization impacted the way we shaped the revision process for our students, thus resulting in a different revision outcome. Our approach to revision is very dynamic. As writing instructors, both of us teach revision as conversation, much like the situated workplace writing described by Aviva Freedman and Christine Adam as “attenuated authentic participation” (45). All students received feedback from peers, peer mentors,² and instructors as they worked through their drafting process. The only difference in the revision process for the community-engaged and the control students occurred in Deb's community-engaged section when her partner came to class to answer questions and provide feedback, giving those students one more voice in their revision process. Since all students were guided through the same dynamic, conversational approach to revision, the process seems unlikely to have impacted the outcome.

Deans argues that community-engaged writing students often become deeply attached to their partner organization and the staff they work with, and that connection provides a great deal of motivation for their work (Deans, *Writing Partnerships*). That connection to subject could certainly explain why Cora and Eliza acted more like the community-engaged writing students than the control students, as both women expressed a deep connection with their interview subjects. Still, there are reasons to think that connection is not the main source of motivation our revision findings. First, all students, control and community-engaged, expressed a desire to be respectful of their interview subject and to be true to their story. Since the control students were able to select their subjects, most chose to speak to people who were important to them. Many students spoke of using the assignment as a way to learn more about family history that was not openly discussed. These students had deep

connections to their subjects and yet they still functioned in a writing-as-test mentality with minimal revision based on the rubric.

The community-engaged students, on the other hand, only met with their interview subjects one or twice in order to conduct the interview and therefore did not develop an ongoing relationship. While the students met with an organizational representative, contact was fairly limited. In fact, Deb's representative announced she was making a career change and leaving the organization after meeting with students to provide feedback, so the students knew she wouldn't be the person reading their final work. While students likely found inspiration in their partner organization and interview subject, they didn't work with either enough to develop the types of deep relationships Deans and others describe in direct-service community projects. Such inspiration may have provided additional motivation for students to revise; however, it wasn't a reason they articulated in our interviews.

Instead, our community-engaged students frequently spoke of the pride they felt in helping their partner organization address community issues. This is part of what we have described as seeing their writing as more than a test of skills, but as a product that has the ability to make change. It was, in part, this frequent expression of pride that drew our conclusions back to the impact rhetorical situation and audience have on the revision process. Many of our control students felt a deep connection to their interview subjects, but other than Cora and Eliza, they struggled to find a purpose, context, or audience for their writing outside the classroom. As such, their revision process was attuned to the audience they felt most important: the rubric. Our community-engaged writing students may have felt a connection to their subjects, but they definitely felt pride in the fact that their writing was going to impact the world beyond the classroom. They saw how their writing helped to reach an audience, achieve a purpose, and fit within a context, and that helped them find the motivation to engage in a dynamic revision process. Connection may have been a factor in that motivation, but without a clear understanding of rhetorical situation and audience, it wasn't enough to move students to revise.

The fact that community-engaged writing students reported considering their audience in their writing process during prewriting and revision is also important for composition instructors to understand because these students used their rhetorical situation to shape their interview process, indicating the initial focus on the rhetorical situation paid off. However, finding that all the students dropped their knowledge of their rhetorical situation during their initial draft and picked it back up in revision indicates the need to draw students back to the rhetorical situation as they write. This finding is not surprising; it fits both the research (Rafoth) and the more colloquial call for writers to embrace the "shitty first draft" (Lamott). It does, however, call instructors to

make the rhetorical situation explicit during the revision process, as it appears to both shape and motivate revision.

Conclusion

There is a great deal more to learn about the impact of community-engaged pedagogy on student writing. This was a small study at a single university, so to truly understand the impact of community-engaged pedagogy, additional data should be collected and examined. It would also be useful to learn if the results of this study are specifically attributable to community-engaged writing or if other authentic, contextual writing pedagogies would lead to similar results.

Even with these limitations, the findings are significant, suggesting that community-engaged writing pedagogy helps students better understand and apply the threshold rhetorical principal of audience. Community-engaged “writing for” assignments help students break out of a writing-as-test mentality by providing them with the authentic rhetorical situation they need to apply the concept of audience to their writing in a way that helps them develop writing that has more audience relevance and clarity of purpose. Working with a community partner to create a writing product that helps the partner achieve their goals provided enough motivation to push students to develop a true revision process, changing tone, perspective, and structure of their writing. Finally, understanding that students use the concept of audience most during their revision process has implications for all composition instructors. Critical community-engaged writing pedagogy has demonstrated a powerful ability to develop community-engaged students, and our findings indicate community-engaged writing pedagogy also helps students understand core rhetorical writing concepts and develop stronger revision practices as well.

Notes

1. The control students also did a research-based informative speech, but their topics were related to other readings we were using in class.
2. A unique aspect of the Cornerstone course is that an upper-class student participates in the course as a Peer Mentor, providing social, emotional, and academic support to the students in the class.

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