ESSAYS

A Service-Learning and Transfer-Oriented
Approach to Teaching Developmental Reading and Writing Students

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In this essay, Branstad discusses how he used service-learning informed by the scholarship on transfer to reimagine current-traditional assumptions common in composition and to create rhetorically-oriented pathways for student success. The evidence of student learning demonstrates the value of implementing service-learning techniques informed by the theory on transfer within the basic writing classroom.

The American Association of Community Colleges reports that the majority of two-year colleges now offer service-learning as a curricular option (Patton). Yet because successful implementations of service-learning often rely on rhetorical foundations that emphasize the social and communicative aspects of literacy, they could be uneasily situated in some developmental classrooms. Rhetorical understandings of literacy can work against the grain of current-traditional curricula, including skill and drill textbooks, standardized exams, and prescribed types of writing. Current-traditional curricula posit that students can learn writing acontextually and that literacy performances are comprised largely of skills that are applied similarly regardless of social context. Though these assumptions are arguably less influential than they once were, the curricular materials that support them remain surprisingly common. Because vulnerable student populations often experience limited success and alienation in environments that rely on traditional or dogmatic approaches to learning, there is a need to continue developing innovative methods that give students the opportunity to experience English studies in the richest and most meaningful ways.

North Shore Community College (NSCC) is an open-access two-year institution, serving students who might otherwise find themselves in pre-developmental or community-supported

literacy and language programs. The department and administration encourage instructional innovation, so I recently set out to build upon this strength and explore how I could use service-learning to help students develop foundational abilities while also more explicitly encouraging their transfer of knowledge and a problem-exploring approach to literacy. Using Anne Beaufort's innovative work on transfer as a theoretical frame, I discuss how I use service-learning to reimagine current-traditional approaches. Below, I detail the theory informing my pedagogy and how I implement transfer-oriented concepts as I have students work on projects for public display in their community. I also share student reflections to show evidence of their learning. Because my students are often considered less prepared than most, I argue that their successes engaging with a service-learning based curriculum informed by theories of transfer has implications for efforts to create new developmental curricula elsewhere.

Critical-Democratic and Pragmatic Course Outcomes: Mutually Reinforcing Objectives

In "*College Writing and Beyond:* Five Years Later," Beaufort stresses the importance of clarifying the interests and values one's curricular objectives are meant to reinforce. Like many professors of developmental reading and writing, I often feel challenged to satisfy the priorities of many different stakeholders. At my own institution, some administrators and faculty are very cautious in their approach to non-traditional, under-prepared or marginalized student populations. In Massachusetts, community colleges are the only institutions that consistently serve under-prepared students. When students fail out of our developmental programs, they are left with very few good options for training or receiving additional help. Historically, this has caused some programs to reinforce practices associated with current-traditional curricula (for instance, mandating the use of specific developmental textbooks or standardized examinations) in an attempt to ensure instructional consistency.

This challenge isn't unique to NSCC; at a recent national conference focused on condensing the developmental sequence, I met others from around the country who work in systems that have similar mandates. At the same time, instructors in credit-bearing classes often envision developmental programs as addressing surface-level deficits of student writing without necessarily understanding how skills-based instruction has been problematized from the perspective not just of transfer (which I describe in more detail in the following section) but of composition studies more generally. Developmental programs can be misunderstood as focusing on a limited skillset—grammar and a narrow form of reading comprehension—in ways that underestimate the possibilities of a richly-conceived curriculum. Students themselves often come to our programs from environments that emphasize testing and prescribed solutions—coursework that is familiar to students and which, regardless of whether they find it desirable, they tend to expect. My priorities, however, are quite different. Like many faculty at my own and other institutions, I have a deep desire to help students succeed and also to better experience and understand for themselves what attracted me to English studies: the power of communication, of grappling with ideas, and of constantly trying to understand the world in richer ways. Rather than simply teach a narrowly defined set of skills, I want my classrooms to remain sites of inquiry.

In light of these different priorities, it's been important in my own context to think through how service-learning can satisfy objectives both pragmatic and critical-democratic in scope. In my interactions with stakeholders who don't work closely with developmental students, I attempt to reframe conversations that focus solely on the surface-level features of their writing or their mechanical skills. Rather than advocate for a skills-based approach to teaching developmental students, I explicitly rely on pragmatic traditions that involve teaching rhetorical and process-based strategies to help students communicate effectively in various contexts. Linda

Adler-Kassner is representative of the tradition in that she emphasizes "helping [students] frame their ideas in a form that is more acceptable to the academy" through having them engage in authentic and meaningful coursework (554). Critical-democratic approaches, which are often associated with the movement initiated by Paulo Freire and involve the interrogation of social structures as part of an ongoing process of *conscientization,* are another valuable tool that informs my curricula. In the critical-democratic classroom, emphasis is placed on engaging students as they examine or critique existing social structures and imagine possibilities for reform (see Herzberg). These two goals—pragmatic and critical-democratic—can easily complement one another. Service-learning is one particularly effective way to connect students with their communities, which become sites for critical inquiry and communication and thus provide a meaningful context. At the same time, when students are given the chance to practice literacy within a meaningful context, they also develop strategies to communicate more effectively.

In stressing mutually-reinforcing pragmatic and critical-democratic objectives, I have been working to reimagine current-traditional curricula that conceptualize literacy as something that can be learned acontextually—that is, as a basket of discrete sub-skills that can be acquired and practiced via exercises. By giving developmental students an opportunity to communicate with others, I've found it possible to credibly satisfy the values of helping them assume justified authority as writers and more critical thinkers while also giving them the chance to transform their lives and communities—sometimes in small, but always in meaningful and impactful ways. Initiating this process of learning and transformation, of helping students join a larger conversation and creatively revise their broader world, is an integral part of what I seek to accomplish in my developmental reading and writing classrooms.

Social Justice, Transfer, and Basic Writing

In her discussion of the current state of composition research on transfer, Elizabeth Wardle suggests that transfer-oriented pedagogies intersect with both pragmatic and critical-democratic objectives ("Creative Repurposing for Expansive Learning").[1] This research in writing studies often seeks to address what we can "do as teachers to help students bring what they already know to bear in our classrooms and to take what they have learned to other classrooms and varied rhetorical situations." Wardle uses Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "fields," "habitus," and "doxa" to conceptualize how students might be conditioned to develop either "answer-getting" or "problem-exploring" dispositions by their educational experiences. According to Wardle, individuals with answer-getting dispositions tend not to transfer their knowledge from one domain to another: they are "averse to open consideration of multiple possibilities." In contrast, those with problem-exploring dispositions tend to apply insights learned in one class to new contexts: they are inclined "toward curiosity, reflection, consideration of multiple possibilities, a willingness to engage in a recursive process of trial and error, and toward a recognition that more than one solution can 'work.'" Most composition instructors would prefer students with a problem-exploring rather than answer-getting disposition, but Wardle states that an increasing and often legislatively-driven emphasis on "simple, formulaic tests" and efficiency in the field of higher-education "seems intended to reproduce in its student participants passive thinking and acceptance without question whenever it is presented." Wardle argues against such models and in favor of those that inculcate curiosity and a disposition toward complexity. For me, her insights are reminiscent of Freire's work; both scholars promote pedagogies that lead toward critical questioning and more active habits of mind.

In light of Wardle's concerns about skills-based curricula that promote answer-getting dispositions, Beaufort offers a pragmatic scaffold upon which instructors can begin to develop syllabi to encourage problem-solving approaches, even at the level of basic writing.[2] Though I discuss Beaufort's framework and her concept of five knowledge domains in more detail later in this essay, I will provide a brief summary of her work here. In her work, Beaufort interrogates the types of composition knowledge students are likely to transfer from one setting to another. She bases her conclusions on a longitudinal study of a student writer named Tim. This student struggled with transferring the expressivist lessons of his first-year writing class, which emphasized creativity and play with language, into more traditional academic contexts (*Framework* 8). Due to a lack of scaffolding, Tim was also frustrated by a service-learning project in which he was asked to write for a local nonprofit (154). Based on her study of Tim, Beaufort argues that we should reimagine college writing instruction so as to better facilitate students' transfer of learning. In Beaufort's view, composition courses should be organized around three general principles. First, she states that students' transfer of learning is more likely to occur if they are taught to "frame specific problems and learnings into more abstract principles that can be applied to new situations" (177). These abstract principles include the five knowledge domains that writers regularly rely upon: "discourse community knowledge, subject matter knowledge, genre knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, and writing process knowledge" ("Five Years Later"). Second and third, Beaufort states that student writers should be given the opportunity "to apply abstract concepts in different social contexts" and be taught "the practice of mindfulness, or meta-cognition" (*Framework* 181-182). Beaufort conceptualizes writing as something that is situated within communities of practice—as something that is enacted

differently in different social contexts—and therefore prioritizes teaching students strategies for the negotiation of different academic and other rhetorical situations.[3]

Because service-learning can require students to both consider and enact language in different settings, it gives them the valuable experience of a transfer-oriented framework. As Thomas Deans states:

> Most service-learning writing teachers, like composition instructors who are committed to critical literacy or cultural studies approaches, underscore the imperative to *read* the complex social forces that constitute one's cultural context—what Freire calls "reading the word and the world" (Freire and Macedo). But service-learning instructors also ask students to *write* purpose-driven documents for audiences beyond the classroom. Thus, in addition to inviting abstract critical *interpretation* of cultural phenomena, service-learning initiatives demand the logical corollary, that is, grounded, active *intervention* in the very cultural context we inhabit. ("English Studies and Public Service" 102-3)

When students are invited to explore communication as a social practice through service-learning, they are also invited to inhabit more problem-exploring dispositions. Students gain valuable experience considering, performing, *and* critiquing literacy in different contexts. In my own classrooms, the democratic goal of facilitating critical consciousness dovetails with the pragmatic goal of encouraging transfer.

Rethinking Developmental Courses, One Classroom at a Time: One Possible Implementation of Service-Learning

In this section, I address both the implementation and effects of service-learning in my classroom. I also briefly discuss the student body, institution, and program of which I am a part.

The student body at the North Shore Community College's Lynn, Massachusetts campus reflects the diversity of its surrounding community. While basic writing students come from a variety of backgrounds, including both historically marginalized and advantaged, immigrant and established, the majority of these students are socioeconomically disadvantaged. Developmental students can test into one of two course levels; the first leads into the second. In the first level, students take three non-credit course hours of reading, three of writing, and three of study skills. In the second level, students take three non-credit course hours of reading and three of writing.[4] Students are grouped into cohorts and share the same classmates and often the same professor for all of their developmental classes. Having the same students for both reading and writing has helped me take an integrated approach to these subjects. In part due to the learning communities students form—and despite challenges that can include lack of funds, insufficient access to technology, hectic schedules, and institutional barriers—developmental students at NSCC are persistent. The majority complete their classes each semester, and many earn honors-level grades of B or above. Students who do well in their level one courses can move directly into regular composition sections the following semester. The opportunity for high-performing students to skip their level two courses improves student completion rates for the developmental sequence.

The Service-Learning Project

In *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition,* Deans distinguishes between projects that ask students to write *about* the community, to write *with* the community, and to write *for* the community (15-19).[5] The categories sometimes overlap, and each can be used effectively in some contexts and for some purposes. In "writing about" projects, students are asked to reflect on volunteer experiences in light of course readings and discussions. These projects usually emphasize helping students gain experience with academic discourse and habits of mind.

Assignments that ask students to collaborate with community members in the production of written material are "writing with" projects. These assignments "tend to value many different literacies (academic, community, and even hybrid literacies) and often devote significant attention to intercultural communication" (19). Finally, "writing for" projects ask students to prepare materials such as Web sites, brochures, and newsletters for use by their agencies. These projects are often intended to help students gain experience communicating with audiences outside the classroom (18).

In the spring semesters of 2013 and 2014, I asked my level two reading and writing students to complete projects that involve writing for the community. Their community partner was the Lynn Museum and in both semesters the students' essays have responded to the needs of the museum. In 2013, the community partner asked students to produce a multimodal exhibition on the subject of civil rights. In 2014, they were asked to produce an exhibit in which they reflected on how place or a sense of place has influenced their communities and identities. Both classes were structured similarly, so for clarity I focus here on the spring 2013 semester. In my spring 2013 reading class, I asked students to work through themes related to civil rights by visiting the Lynn Museum, completing assigned reading, and conducting independent research on a related inquiry question of their choice. To help students gain experience working within an academic discourse community, I had them write in response to texts and integrate sources in their writing throughout the semester. I had the same students complete their "writing for" projects in the writing course. Partway through the term, they had written essays—loosely modeled on NPR's "This I Believe" series[6]—in which they reflected on civil rights movements or their themes. For their final portfolios, students simultaneously re-genred these essays into optional submissions for the "This I Believe" Web site and into visual presentations for the Lynn Museum (see Figures 1 and 2 on pp. 15 and 16). These presentations were featured prominently

alongside historical exhibits that highlighted the lives and contributions of more famous figures in Lynn's history, including Frederick Douglas.

Preparation and scaffolding helped my students enjoy meaningful learning experiences in these courses. For both classes, this preparation began with how the partnerships between myself, the community partner, and my students were envisioned. As Ellen Cushman argues, service-learning partnerships should be structured so they're reciprocal (43). Though Cushman focuses primarily on the professor's role and how he or she relates to the community, the principle of reciprocity can inform relationships between all agents involved (for a discussion of how less than reciprocal relationships can damage learning outcomes, see Kraemer). My class project, designed so that the museum director would benefit from the students' work, put Cushman's ideas into practice. The director had been eager to reach out to a younger, more socioeconomically diverse constituency and she felt that highlighting their perspectives in her collection would help. My students were enthusiastic participants; they tweeted, instagrammed, and told their friends and families about what they were doing. Additionally, I benefited from the chance to interact with my students in less formal settings and hear their stories. At the time, I had just moved to Massachusetts and wanted to better understand my students' lives and experiences. Service-learning also gives me increased exposure to communication practices in the community. Because I want my students to communicate well both in their higher-level courses and careers, my exposure to museum and other non-profit communication practices informs the lessons I teach. My students benefited from the project both because it gave them an experience to apply new skills and because they were given an opportunity to express their views publicly and thus contribute to a broader conversation. To ensure that students would retain a reasonable level of control over their publicly-displayed projects, we defined the requirements for their work rhetorically in terms of their audience, purpose, context, and possible genres,

rather than prescriptively. Students' work was diverse in terms of both their concepts and their final products. Inspired by the work of others, including Rosemary Arca and Catherine Gabor, the museum project was envisioned as a challenging yet realistic route to authority for basic writers. It was also a project that addressed the needs of everyone involved.

Both democratic and pragmatic learning objectives are important to me and arguably to my students, so I embedded these objectives in both of my classes. In their reading course, students were encouraged to interrogate existing social structures, acquire academic habits of mind, and learn rhetorical moves common in researched writing. Students began by reading and responding to texts including *Martin Luther King, Jr.: Warrior for Peace* (Savory), Howard Zinn's "Stories Hollywood Never Tells," and Maureen Dowd's "For Victims of AIDS, Support in a Lonely Siege," among others. Students explored thematic connections between movements concerned with black liberation, peace, gay equality, immigrant rights, and other civil rights movements. In discussions, students alternated between electing to share their personal experiences and assuming perspectives informed by critical distance. The points they made often possessed substantial depth and therefore pointed toward their emerging authority as active contributors within an academic context. For example, one student articulated both how the events of 9/11 had caused discrimination against Islam and how freedom from oppression was nonetheless more prevalent in the United States than it was in his parents' home country of Syria. He was angry to have experienced racial and religious discrimination, but he also explored his subject from multiple perspectives and with some measure of nuance. These are key preconditions for academic inquiry. Other students expanded their awareness of their social contexts in nuanced ways through completing I-search papers on subjects that were important to them.[7] These subjects included potential benefits of the Dream Act, some complications inherent

to community policing, and a discussion of gun control in post-Newtown America. Through completing these papers, students came to better understand some of the specific ways civil rights themes continue to reverberate while also learning strategies—synthesizing and acknowledging others' ideas—privileged in academic genres.

Though there was significant overlap between my two courses, the reading class was designed to more explicitly address two of Beaufort's five knowledge domains. First, Beaufort describes the overarching concept of her framework as discourse community knowledge. She defines discourse communities as those that are engaged in "dialogue across texts" and that share common goals, values, communication channels, genres, and norms (*Framework* 18-19).[8] Beaufort stresses the importance of teaching discourse community knowledge to help students recognize the social contexts they inhabit and how communication practices differ between them. She also describes this type of knowledge as the overarching concept, essentially the keystone, for the rest of her framework (*Framework* 18-19). In my classes, I translated Beaufort's idea by presenting reading and writing to my students as a conversation that involves participants with different backgrounds, values, and priorities. This model provided a frame through which my students and I were able to discuss the social contexts that informed the texts we read, saw, listened to, and sometimes watched. As importantly, this model provided a frame through which we were able to discuss not just the surface-level features of academic writing such as distinguishing between different people's ideas or writing a summary, but also how these conventions reflected habits of mind considered valuable in academic discourse communities: particularly, the ability to sustain questions, entertain multiple perspectives, and engage with reading. My students were also able to develop strategies for acquiring what Beaufort defines as subject matter knowledge. As Beaufort notes, this type of knowledge includes both a received understanding of the world and critical thinking skills such as "knowing how to frame the inquiry . .

. or inscribe documents with new meanings" (*Framework* 19). Students acquired subject matter

knowledge in the context of civil rights movements through engaging in consistent dialogue with

texts and completing their I-search papers. Students found this work highly productive and reported

at the end of the semester that the projects "helped me grow as a reader, writer, and thinker because

they taught me what tools to use to understand and be understood" and that "with the interesting

work you feel that you are in college."

The writing course was scaffolded to provide students with experiences in Beaufort's

other three domains: genre, rhetorical, and writing process knowledge. Students' service-learning

projects were used as an experiential anchor for these abstract concepts. I presented the concept

of genre to my students not just as a collection of generalized forms or features, but rather as a

device to be experienced and also used through their service-learning projects for specific

rhetorical purposes (for a discussion of genre theory, see Devitt). In a similarly enriched way,

students were able to experience an immediate, concrete, and meaningful consideration of

substantive rhetorical principles including audience, purpose, message, and context. They

considered these points while using a writing process that involved audience, genre, and content-

based revision

Figure 1. A Project Supporting DOMA's Repeal and Gay Equality.

Before continuing to a discussion of student reflections and to illustrate the work students completed, I discuss the process behind two specific projects. The student whose work is depicted in Figure 1 had written about how having been raised by a gay father had helped her appreciate the need to love and treat everyone equally. Her writing was heartfelt—"This project is a way to honor my dad, to show him and the world that I believe homosexuals should be treated fairly"—and informed by an awareness of a larger context. Elsewhere, she had situated her experience through considering the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) case that was being heard by the Supreme Court at the time. Despite the strength of her written discourse, this student was unsure of how to communicate her ideas visually for museum visitors. She wanted to take advantage of the visual genre's immediacy, yet she also struggled with the idea of reaching a potential audience that included people from diverse backgrounds. We discussed how many of her audience members—who were young and old, recently immigrated and established—might not understand the symbols of gay equality. This student grappled with whether or not she should combine her representations with a paragraph or two of explanatory text. Other students were working through similar challenges, so the museum director and I adopted her idea as something that would benefit the class as a whole. This student began to discover how to combine different genres in light of rhetorical considerations. Rhetorical considerations would later show up in this student's reflections: "I learned how to be a better writer and attract my audience. When I thought of the audience it made me realize that my essay might be too big for a kid of 8 years old." As importantly, her contributions and ideas improved the museum project parameters for everybody.

Figure 2. A Project Honoring a Friend Who Was Killed in Iraq.
The caption reads: "'To fight as an American, only to die
an immigrant of America.' RIP Corporal..."

A second example demonstrates how students experienced a service-learning based curriculum informed by theories on transfer. Given the open-ended nature of the assignment, the student whose project is shown in Figure 2 struggled with how to choose appropriate subject matter and how to narrow it down. His first ideas were valid but very general—along the lines of "we should respect everybody"—so I expressed concern that he would have trouble articulating them in interesting, innovative, or specific ways for his project. During workshops, the student explored and discarded his first ideas by thinking through and discussing whether they made sense as part of a museum display on civil rights or whether others would find them interesting. When the student eventually settled on an idea, he did so through considering his audience, message, and purpose. The student had lost a close friend who had enlisted in the Army and died in Iraq. The Army had offered this friend an opportunity to gain American citizenship, but he was killed before receiving it. This student was eager to honor the friend he had lost. He intentionally chose elements including a burial flag and Army insignia to shock viewers. He wrote, "Even though he died during his 5th year of service, he never received his citizenship. I now want to commemorate his memory. . . . He wanted to be an American, and he died doing so!" At the same time that this student worked to connect with his audience, he also gained

practical knowledge about genre, rhetorical considerations, and his writing process. He stated, "when thinking of audience, there was no better moment to put into play what I had learned." He took advantage of the opportunity to communicate with an outside audience. He decided on a subject that was meaningful to him, and his project was thoughtfully composed to influence others.

As the final important step in their learning process, students were invited to participate in the meta-cognitive activities that both Beaufort and other service-learning practitioners identify as important. Students need an opportunity to connect their experiences to course content if that content is going to be fully meaningful. Through group and whole class discussions, students articulated their learning in ways that connected with Beaufort's five knowledge domains. It was through these discussions, and also their reflective letters, that students shared their insights and experiences.

Student reflections from the spring 2013 and 2014 semesters have helped me think through the impact a transfer-oriented curriculum can have. Students often come to my classroom after experiences in current-traditional courses that present literacy in highly acontextual ways. Given this, many of them reported experiencing a service-learning curriculum that embeds concepts related to transfer as particularly transformative. One student reported his intellectual growth in the reading course: "Each week I spent 6 hours reading. . . . Now when I am reading an article or a book, I know how to intercept the authors thinking versus mine." Students also processed their experiences in ways that demonstrate significant personal growth:

> Learning and thinking outside the box, is not an easy skill to learn. . . . You have
>
> taught me that this skill has always been a part of me. All I had to do is embrace

my skill, and enhance the style. But I am not perfect. My flaw was not that I think

too much outside the box. It's good to think like that but sometimes you just need to

stay in the box. What I mean is that, I have to be mindful of the people around me

and their ideas. Let them speak. . . .

All of these lessons, Unit Projects, workshops, made me a better person and a better

writer. They allowed me to overcome my fears. I was afraid of being heard. Now I

want to be heard.

By working through a transfer-oriented framework, my developmental students began to better

articulate what is valuable, meaningful, and rewarding about being part of both an academic and

a broader discourse community.

Students also reported feeling engaged with their writing course, at times using some of

the specialized vocabulary or meta-language about literacy that I had taught them:

I learned that by understanding the type of genre that you are writing you can better

understand who most likely will be reading it when you turn it in. . . . For most

students, including myself when we write a paper for school we always write it

with the knowledge that our teacher is going to be looking at it and that they will be

making a judgment call on whether to give us a passing grade or not. But when you

exposed us to the idea of audience, purpose, and tone it really made me start to

think about just what type of people are going to read my writing. The purpose of

the writing, why was I writing it in the first place, was it just for the grade? Or was

it to get a point or idea across to wider audience? . . . How would my writing come

off to the person that was reading? Would it be argumentative? Persuasive? Or just

informal?

For most of my school life I was only taught the five paragraph and none of these

topics were ever shown to me. . . . I just knew I had to write or run the risk of

getting a bad grade on the assignment, but with the introduction of audience

purpose and tone I had to really think about how I was going to approach writing in

the future.

A concern for audience appeared in all of my students' reflections and was often connected to

the development of their ideas and a writing process:

I learned that the first draft of a story, project or essay doesn't have to be perfect the

first time, that the professional writer makes mistake too when they write. One

thing that helped me a lot in writing class was when we did workshop and the

feedback that you and the students gave me even when I don't like other people to

read my project. Workshops help me to improve my writing and gave me new idea

to continue writing in my project...

While I was writing my service-learning project I was thinking a lot. . . . I have to

write it clear so audience can understand my message.

Or:

Audience is very important to think about when you are writing a paper or an

article. What I mean is that if you are writing for a company article, your writing is

not going to sound like it was meant for a children's book. . . . The project was a

challenge for me. I was used to writing papers that only the teacher was going to

read, but now I have to think about grammar, flowness of my words, and make sure it is clear to understand.

Finally:

> I would argue for the use of service learning in classes like ours. That is because this is a great idea to connect a student to real world of writing. It can get them more prepared to write a future essay for themselves. Like for example a cover letter, which is something that will have many different types of audiences. . . . Like I said before this project got me the sense of becoming a better writer. With this project I learned to put more time and thought to make a paper more developed and approachable.

Though embracing a transfer-oriented framework can sound daunting for some instructors at the level of practice, my students' reflections show that successful implementations have a positive impact. My students strove to connect with others and they successfully used sophisticated rhetorical, writing process, and genre knowledge in order to accomplish this task.

Implications

My students' projects and reflections demonstrate how service-learning can help developmental students experience literacy in rich ways. I translated Beaufort's idea of discourse community knowledge to help students understand reading and writing as a form of dialogue, that is, as involving conversations between participants with different backgrounds, values, and norms. This conversational model informed many of our in-class discussions. It also showed up in the reading class—"I have to be mindful of the people around me and their ideas. Let them speak."—in ways likely to aid students' comprehension and development of subject matter

knowledge in other contexts. The influence of this model was similarly apparent in the writing course. Considering that developmental students often come from backgrounds where writing is taught more prescriptively, it is important for them to develop writing process, genre, and rhetorical knowledge. By developing this knowledge, students are far better equipped to grapple with ambiguity when they encounter it elsewhere in academia and their careers. My students' references to other rhetorical situations in their reflections—"I had to really think about how I was going to approach writing in the future"—show that a framework for their transfer of learning was successfully planted.

There are implications to the transfer-oriented practices outlined in this article. Because developmental instructors often function in an intermediary capacity—between high school and first-year courses, or between students' success in vocational programs and their careers— transfer is a particularly productive frame through which to think about curriculum. The projects and reflections included in this article demonstrate that developmental students are highly capable of grappling with challenging coursework; in many cases, they not only succeeded at but also appeared to enjoy service-learning assignments inspired by the theory on transfer. It's also important to consider how service-learning can reinforce curricular objectives in ways that are meaningful for students. As is likely apparent from the projects I shared, my students often have an intuitive sense for the how the politics of exclusion can affect their communities. Too many have found themselves segregated into particular neighborhoods, institutions, and developmental programs. Through service-learning, students have an opportunity to grapple with these issues in ways that help motivate their growth as readers and writers.

Given the volume of current-traditional curricular materials and textbooks being used at institutions, I suspect there may be lingering questions about whether those who advocate for

enriched methodologies offer advice that's appropriate for developmental students. Thus, I feel it's important to clarify that while I recognize how best practices should be adapted to suit one's student population and context, I also emphatically feel that the distinctions made between developmental and first-year composition students—or, for that matter, between the abilities of students at four- and two-year institutions—are overstated. My students needed more scaffolding (they took six credits, rather than three) to engage with transfer-oriented coursework that's conceptually similar to what I might use in non-developmental sections. Robust learning objectives were nonetheless achievable for them. Similar learning outcomes could likely be expected in other contexts so long as students are provided with an appropriately adapted and carefully structured curriculum.

Developmental students should have opportunities to positively impact their communities and experience literacy as relevant, conversational, and meaningful. My students' experiences and reflections show that theories on transfer provide a valuable lens for considering a curriculum in which students are asked to work within a meaningful context. When basic writing students are given effective support and scaffolding to consider, troubleshoot, and use discourse in different settings, they can be expected to take advantage of these opportunities and become more effective thinkers and users of language. The process of transformation I have described can help us imagine, or in some cases reimagine, possibilities for developmental reading and writing in productive and hopeful ways.

Notes

1. Wardle questions the use of the term "transfer" and prefers "creative repurposing for expansive learning," or "repurposing." For the sake of consistency and of communicating with an audience that may be unfamiliar with the scholarship on transfer, I use the more common term here.

2. Beaufort originally developed her framework for first-year writing courses, but her work is applicable to developmental programs as well. It's important not to overstate the differences between basic writers and college-level students. All students, regardless of placement, benefit from a curriculum that's informed by current best practices. Because developmental programs are intended to help basic writers transition into college level courses, the scholarship on transfer is a particularly productive frame through which to consider curricular objectives.

3. There is a very productive overlap between the curricular suggestions of Beaufort and Shannon Carter. For the latter's discussion of what she terms "rhetorical dexterity," see "Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice."

4. Students are placed by an electronically scored and timed reading and writing exam. Due to concerns about placement and the length of the developmental sequence, NSCC is piloting Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) sections in the near future, and we are discussing whether it might make sense to condense the number of courses students are required to take. For more information about ALP, see Adams et al.'s "The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates."

5. In addition to sharing their work publicly at the Lynn Museum, students gave me permission to use their projects and reflections for professional purposes. We discussed how teachers keep professional portfolios, engage in research, and also share their ideas in local and national forums.

6. The "This I Believe" series was chosen as a model, primarily, because it is a radio program that allows students to hear and explore the connections between oral and written discourse.

7. I-Search papers differ from research papers in that students are allowed to narrate their research process and reflections in a less-than-formal way. For example, a student might talk about how they had trouble narrowing down or deciding upon a topic using the pronoun "I" at the beginning of their paper, talk about what they found using summary in the middle of their paper, and then reflect on their thoughts—both about their subject and their process—toward the

end. There are several excellent resources for I-Search papers, including Ken Macrorie's *The I-Search Paper: Revised Edition of Searching Writing.*

8. While Beaufort acknowledges that the concept of discourse community has been critiqued, like her, I also find that it has "great heuristic value"(*Framework* 18).

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