When Students Don't Identify as Writers:
Fostering Basic Writers' Rhetorical Agency through Community Partnerships

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This essay presents a semester long partnership between two courses at different institutions—one in a local high school, the other at a four-year public university—as a community form of community engaged pedagogy with the potential to subvert Neoliberal assumptions about our students and their writing. Our project inspects the notions of literacy that our students have internalized about themselves and others, interrogates the "value" Neoliberalism ascribes to different forms of literacy, and seeks out ways to *center* our students' literacies that foreground the power these often institutionally dismissed literacies can have.

As I [Derrick Goss] sat on my couch Sunday evening, my phone buzzed with an e-mail from a student: "Mr. Goss, I know the deadline is tonight, but I really need more time on this video. Can I PLEASE turn it in on Tuesday?"

"Sure," I replied, "Have it done by class on Tuesday." Shortly after replying, I got an email from another student, also asking for an extension. After that, another email came, this time from a student who finished her work in class on Thursday, asking if I could please give her feedback so that she could compose a second draft before the deadline tonight. Then more emails came, eight in all, finally ending a little while after the 11:59 PM deadline. Never before had I seen my students this invested in an assignment, let alone in meeting a Sunday night deadline. I'm used to waking up on Monday morning to see a quarter of my students had totally forgotten an assignment was due, and I was thrilled to be receiving these requests for extensions and feedback.

Come to think of it, I have been noticing that they've been working much more diligently in class the last few weeks, and I must have been asked three times on Friday for the specific date when Hubrig's class would be coming over to workshop our writing. My students had told

me only a few weeks ago that they weren't writers. Now, they were exhibiting a deepening level

of investment in their writing. They were claiming authority over their work, over their identities

as writers, and as producers of valuable ideas. They were authentically engaged in creating

writing for their thinking partners from Hubrig's class.

We, Derrick Goss—a first-year high school instructor—and Adam Hubrig—a graduate

student instructor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln—begin with the narrative, above, to

center the writing experiences of basic writers in our composition courses who came to identify

as writers through collaboration in a community partnership. Our understanding of this process

through which our students claimed rhetorical agency is rooted in basic writing pedagogy. We

agree with the growing scholarship that asserts that basic writing itself is under a sustained attack

from neoliberal pressures (Bernstein 92; Sullivan "Economic Inequality" 370; Welch 136), and

turn our attention, here, to how neoliberal mandates and ideologies operating in education impact

our students, particularly as these regimes relate to students' writerly identities and perceived

rhetorical agency. We propose community partnerships as a site of intervention against this

negative impact neoliberalism has had on the writerly identities of basic writers through

neoliberalism's privileging of individual competitive consumerism and the "marketable" literacy

of "academic writing" over community and collaborative learning, which instead privileges a

variety of literacies.

While the work of basic writing is often thought of as located in two-year, open

admission institutions, Goss—who teaches at a public high school—and Hubrig—who teaches at

a land grant public university—both identify as working with basic writers. We join other

instructors and scholars of basic writing to note the arbitrariness of locating the teaching of basic

writing as happening only where students are placed by test data often incongruous with actual

literacy skills (Bartholomae 19: Fox 19). Just as Hassel and Giordano assert that "basic writing does not define or capture two-year college teaching" ("Occupy" 127), by pointing out that it is only *part* of the work of composition at two-year institutions, we work to remind our colleagues and ourselves that basic writing *is also* part of the work of high schools and four-year institutions. We agree with Hassel and Giordano that basic writing should be determined by local contexts, identifying those students who might test out of developmental coursework but still "occupy a misty netherland where they are neither basic writers nor proficient college-level writers" ("Transfer" 25) and to build an understanding of basic writing that accounts for students beyond those "who place specifically into noncredit college courses" (36). As we continue to explain more about the local contexts of our courses, we hope to illustrate how basic writing pedagogy helped us address our fundamental concern about our students: *they did not identify as writers*, finding themselves, like the basic writers studied by Hassel and Giordano, "lack[ing] experience with writing in formal academic ways" ("Occupy" 129).

While neither author teaches basic writing as it is traditionally understood, we argue that our students don't identify as writers *precisely* because of the ways in which their literacies have been devalued by their institutions, a position based on neoliberal assumptions that causes our students to not identify as writers. Bruce Horner asserts that "the field now known as 'basic writing' is part of a long and ongoing tradition in composition studies and beyond of challenging dominant beliefs about literacy, language, and students" (6). It is through this history of basic writing that we hope to challenge dominant beliefs about our students' literacies and change our students' beliefs—rooted in an adoption of these institutional logics—of themselves. Like students traditionally labeled "basic writers," we argue that through the institutional process of privileging formal, academic writing (with which our students do not have much experience),

our student's literacies have been dismissed or ignored by our institutions. Like Horner, we disagree with our institutions and assert "basic writing assumes a plural, and potentially fluid, view of languages, Englishes, and ways of writing" (12). Instead of following dominant, institutional logics which might constrain or limit our basic writers' literacies, we used our partnership to leverage (and value) those literacies. We continue this conversation as we explain our own course contexts, which serve to further elucidate how our institutional contexts—and our partnership, particularly—are better understood through the lens of basic writing pedagogy specifically rather than through a more generalized concept of composition studies.

In this writing, we explore these neoliberal pressures which we feel limit student rhetorical agency and belittle their literacy skills and identify how a community partnership—in this case between a high school composition course and a college composition course—can serve as a site of intervention and bolster the rhetorical agency of basic writers whose literacy skills are often described through deficit models. We proudly identify this work as part of the tradition of "ongoing resistance work" that basic writing "has engaged in now for many years" (Sullivan "Ideas" 74), and we hope to join two-year teacher-scholars—particularly those engaged in basic writing instruction—in "a robust activist tradition" (Sullivan "The Two-Year" 327)**.** Building on this tradition and exploring our community partnership as a site for this activist work, we first explore basic writing in our own institutional contexts as they relate to students not identifying as writers. Next, we work to identify and understand how neoliberal pressures suppress student rhetorical agency (Stenberg "Repurposing" 100-101). Presenting our community collaboration as a site of intervention, we describe our own experiences. Finally, we turn our attention to future applications for basic writing as well as lingering concerns we still share about this work.

Institutional Contexts

Our program began as part of the Husker Writers program through the Nebraska Writing Project. The program, designed by Rachael Shah (formerly Wendler) and modeled after the Wildcat Writers program at Arizona State University, works to create cross-community partnerships. This partnership program draws on a history of cross-institutional work in community literacy studies, and we concur with Christopher Minnix that "[w]hile public writing research in composition has developed significant pedagogical strategies, theoretical frameworks, and outcomes, there is little discussion of basic writing students in this literature" (22). We work, here, to extend the community-focused work in composition studies to basic writing pedagogy.

But we approached our partnership with caution. We take seriously Don Kraemer's challenge that attempts at "service learning" or community partnerships are actually *to the students' benefit* and not simply, as Kraemer underscores, "a bid for institutional currency and favor" (107). Through Husker Writers, the two of us chose to pair our classes to create a cross-community partnership during the event, feeling our student populations might complement each other nicely through their shared positionality of having their own literacies dismissed or ignored by our institutions.

Goss's High School Composition Course

Many of Goss's students didn't see themselves as college ready, even though they were less than a year from college applications. Goss's high school junior course, titled simply Composition, was a junior-level writing class at Lincoln High School, a Title 1 school and the most widely diverse high school in Nebraska. Goss's composition course represented this

diversity in racial/ethnic descent, socio-economic background, personal interests, and especially in writing skills.

In this junior class of 19 students, Goss had four seniors taking the class to make up missed/failed English credits. Two students were at risk of dropping out. Three students worked more than 30 hours a week at their jobs to help provide income to their families. Several of these students were both in composition and a remedial English class. A few were also taking remedial reading courses. Six students were English language learners.

All of this is to say that Goss's class was certainly diverse, but there were unifying factors that could be said of almost all students in the class. Almost every student expressed that they would like to attend college, but felt apprehensive, primarily, about a perceived lack of preparation for the rigor of college, making several excuses and apologizing for both the way they spoke and wrote when Hubrig came to visit their high school classroom. Many of Goss's students shared stories of having been told, during their educational experiences, that they couldn't "do" college, and most had been told that their writing was *not good enough*. Through this constellation of factors, students expressed that they did not identify as writers, although they all talked at length about places and spaces they did write, mainly on social media. But because of institutional logics, they did not see their own literacies as legitimate.

Hubrig's 200-Level Composition Course

While Hubrig's course was a 200-level course, it served as the institution's first-year writing class for a number of students, particularly those who—frequently because of anxiety about writing itself—had waited until their junior or senior year of college to enroll, as evidenced partly by an institutional review of the course which Hubrig helped research (Stenberg "The Problem"; Minter). Many of Hubrig's students, like Goss's, tended not to see themselves as

writers. Although they were composing a great deal of writing in different genres, students tended not to see *value* in their literacy practices. One student was writing a beekeeping journal, several wrote lab notes, many students engaged in extensive social media posting or blogging. "But I don't really write," one student put it, "I'm not good at it. My last teacher kept telling me I had to get my writing checked in the Writing Center before I could hand it in." Not only were they producing a *lot* of writing, but students in this course often demonstrated mastery over literacies *not* often valued in a composition course: digital film literacy, web design, computer programming. But the university as an institution rarely assigns "value" to these forms of student literacy or student writing, as Lunsford, Fishman, and Liew argue (471). In short, these were basic writers in that the *institution* did not recognize their literacies, because they lacked experience and had trouble writing in academic forms more lauded by the institution.

This devaluing of their writing seemed to have been deeply internalized: when asked why they might delay taking a writing course until they absolutely had to for the sake of institutional requirements, some referenced being told they weren't good writers or received poor grades for previous writing. While many pointed to negative evaluations or grades on their writing, as these interviews progressed they still identified literacy practices that they enjoyed and frequently engaged in. While these students didn't face the *stigmatization* often thrust on those considered basic writers through placement tests (Adler-Kassner and Harrington 14; Shivers-McNair and Inman), the ways in which they oriented themselves and distanced themselves to literacy practices seemed reminiscent of attitudes expressed by writers Hubrig had worked with while teaching developmental coursework.

As we worked to understand *why* our students did not identify as writers, interrogating neoliberal ideologies and those logics' impact on writing became useful to us in elucidating some of the root causes that were responsible for suppressing student rhetorical agency.

Neoliberal Pressures and Student Agency

Neoliberal ideology seeks to create, in part, "an acquiescent faculty that avoids politically contentious topics and pedagogies, and a curriculum that reduces literacy education to a set of discrete, measurable, and also tame skills" (Scott and Welch A7). In our early talks about our partnership, we commiserated about the ways in which we saw *exactly* this ideology taking hold in our institutions, through the heightened pressure on students to perform "academic" literacies to policies in our institutions that sought to limit political discourse—conveniently trying to make the logics that value "academic" literacies invisible while quietly making the devaluing of student literacies depoliticized. For us, this partnership was a means to draw on students' existing literacy practices and interrogate cultural logics that devalued them to begin with.

Our students were and are quite obviously producing writing and engaged in multiple literacy practices. Deborah Brandt, for instance, chronicles the rise of "mass writing," through which it "is not unusual for many American adults to spend 50 percent or more of the workday with their hands on keyboards and their minds on audiences" (3). Although students are writing more now than at any time in history (Haven), institutions rarely assign "value" to these forms of student literacy or student writing. Lunsford, Fishman, and Liew write about this devaluing of student writing and the ways in which students engage in literacy and writing, pointing out how this devaluation is directly tied to students not identifying as intellectuals: "Is it any wonder that students often fail to perceive their writing as something they or others might value, that they fail to identify themselves as builders and holders of intellectual property?" (471). This devaluing of

student literacy is directly tied to how students perceive themselves as rhetors, impacting their own notions of rhetorical agency.

This suppressing of student agency is rooted in and exacerbated by neoliberal pressures on education. Tony Scott traces how the "immediate economic and educational imperatives" function to ascribe often conflicting meanings, values, and identities to literacy (139). These hierarchical, institutional framings of what writing is valued, and, by extension, who *is a writer* have important implications for student rhetorical agency. Marcelle M. Haddix and Brandi Williams draw attention to these implications of rhetorical agency through their analysis of how Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have tied value to specific kinds of writing that are featured in state testing while devaluing students' own literacy practices (65). CCSS, as an institutional mandate, indoctrinates students "into a standards system that intentionally displays that it values one form. . . of writing, then students may believe that any writing that falls outside of this spectrum is not considered writing; and by extension, their taking on the identities of being 'writers' or 'non-writers' is determined by their success, or lack of, within this spectrum" (71).

Basic writing scholars have carefully delineated how this process applies to basic writers. Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington describe how basic writing is often convoluted with notions of "school-based writing" that focus on "discrete components of writing" like "spelling, punctuation, or grammar" (35). These components lend themselves to testing, providing the data demanded by neoliberalism's mandates for efficiency. Alder-Kassner and Harrington importantly point out that these kinds of writing are ultimately divorced from the literacy practices of basic writers and ignore a student's ability to develop ideas and be holders of

knowledge (37). In short, neoliberal practices tend not to value the intellectual labors of basic writers or their literacy practices in general.

Related to this process by which student literacy practices are undervalued by what writing is considered "academic," David Fleming explores how calls for efficiency and order-- certainly desired by neoliberal ideologies—often render contexts for student writing inauthentic "because that is the cheapest and most efficient way in a (post)industrial society to process the young masses through their immaturity" (212). He underscores the problem with a system in which it is chiefly the teacher, the sole authority figure, who values the products of student literacy efforts. Borrowing Joseph Petraglia's term "pseudotransactional," Fleming describes this hierarchical writing context where students' writing is a kind of pantomime, with only the illusion of an authentic audience (213). This pseudotransactional writing, in aiming for efficiency, works to further suppress student rhetorical agency.

These neoliberal pressures ultimately suppress rhetorical agency by limiting literacy to a set of desired behaviors to be utilized in the workforce (Brannon 224). In response, we turn to community partnerships as a site of resistance, as a site where we might interrogate the *values* neoliberalism ascribes to student writing and seek to reclaim rhetorical agency. Robert Brooke points to neoliberal pressures as limiting students' rhetorical agency by creating a disconnect between their literacy practices and their communities, causing students to be skeptical about the possibilities of their intellectual labor (255). Cori Brewster similarly identifies the importance of providing "real world projects" with an "invested," "authentic local audience" that involves students in the creation, design, and implementation of their writing ("Basic Writing Through the Backdoor"), as opposed to the pseudotransactional writing described above. Rooted in the local as a site of rhetorical intervention, we argue that these community partnerships can serve to

challenge notions of the value and importance of our students' own literacy practices and experiences.

In response to these pressures, we sought to facilitate moments through our community collaborations that would subvert these neoliberal logics, repositioning our students as experts and centering their own literacy practices as a way to inform their continued development in writing and claim agency as writers.

Facilitating the Community Partnership

Goss's writing assignments for the partnership focused on two central ideas. First, to address the perceived power and skill imbalances between college students and his high school students, all of Goss's writing assignments attempted to position the high school students as experts. Secondly, Goss wanted to address students' concerns that they could not do college-level work. To those ends, student writing in the partnership took three forms: a personal narrative, a research project, and a video essay.

The first assignment introduced as a part of the partnership was an introductory personal narrative. The assignment was designed with the primary intention of being sent to the college thinking partners in advance of the first meeting to introduce the high schoolers and to give a sense of their voices as writers. Goss chose personal narratives for the introductory piece specifically to position his high school students as the experts in their writing, to get them used to assuming confident ownership of the material. Goss's students were *certainly* the experts about the content of their writing, and Hubrig's students were supposed to attend, specifically, to the way Goss's students' writing worked to convey emotion in their narratives. Goss noted that his students were exceptionally motivated to make their writing as polished as possible before sending it to their college thinking partners, whom they had not yet met. This first project largely

served to prepare students for the collaboration itself and establish a tenable dynamic between the two classes.

The second assignment for the collaboration was a research essay through which Goss meant to ensure that his students realized their capability to write college-level papers while fostering the development of his students as writers. In order to boost engagement with the assignment, and avoid assigning pseudotransactional work, Goss worked with Hubrig to identify a local community issue that would be of high interest to high school students. As it happened, the Nebraska state legislature had scheduled an interim study on the effects of mandatory minimum sentencing laws in Nebraska, with an eye towards the possibility of reducing or eliminating these sentences for non-violent drug offences. At the same time, a lawsuit filed by the ACLU was just beginning to unfold, aiming to reduce Nebraska's dramatically overcrowded prison system (Kelly).

Goss's students were by no means experts on mandatory minimum sentencing laws or prison overcrowding, but they did almost all have personal experiences with correctional systems in Nebraska, either knowing someone who was or is incarcerated, having been arrested or incarcerated themselves at one point, having family members that work in corrections, or from driving by the large state penitentiary in the middle of town. Drawing on the National Writing Project's College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP), Goss and Hubrig worked together to plan a series of group research activities with the intention of positioning students as experts on the topic. First, students were asked to present their research and understanding of the issue orally with Hubrig's students. As they developed their ideas, students were asked to write their opinion of the matter in a letter they would workshop with their thinking partners and then deliver to their state senator. As part of this unit, and because of his work with the C3WP

program, Hubrig came to Goss's class for a few guest lectures without the college students. Hubrig was careful to point out that, in the high school students' discussions and the writing they were creating about this local issue, they were already engaged in college-level literacy activities. By the end of this 9-week unit, students had completed research ranging from national news segments concerning mandatory minimum sentencing, to the Netflix documentary *13th*, to local newspaper articles detailing conditions in prisons here in Lincoln. Students were (and most importantly *believed* they were) experts on the topic, and in the final week of the unit, students went to the state capitol building a short walk away to deliver their well-written, concise, and engaging letters to senators expressing their opinions on mandatory minimum sentencing and prison overcrowding in Nebraska.

For Goss's students, their final writing project asked them to explore popular misconceptions about a community *they* strongly identified as being a part of. The assignment positioned students as experts once again, a role they were getting used to by this point, by asking them to compose a video essay about this community and what they felt those outside the community misunderstood. Utilizing school-provided laptops, students were to compose these multimodal projects to present at a mock-Oscars party where we would shut off the lights, project their videos on the big screen, vote on different categories to win a class Oscar (like "best use of narrative" and other concepts we had learned during our time together).

This is the same writing project about which our opening narrative is written: students were actively and meaningfully engaged in the composing process, seeking to craft the best videos and representations of their communities—which included all kinds of positionalities like "being a refugee," "a listener of rap music," "Black Lives Matter activist," and "an athlete"— before they were shared with their thinking partners. Students who had already completed what

was asked for in the assignment begged for an extra few days to bring their videos through one more stage of revisions. One student remarked, "If you're going to play my video on the big screen in front of all those people, I want to make sure that it's at least *good*!"

Hubrig's assignments for the collaboration focused specifically on assigning value to the literacy practices his students were already engaged in. In the first week of the class, students were asked to write a literacy narrative assignment focused explicitly on how their reading of three specific texts (defined broadly through class discussion as coming from or growing out of the written word, including music, books, comic books, graphic novels, film, etc.) shaped how they read and engage with the world: while that in itself prompted a deeper discussion of literacy, students were ultimately asked to transpose their biographies into 3-5 minute videos they would share with our thinking partners at Lincoln High School.

The choice to make videos was based on an informal survey taken on the first day of class, in which students were asked about their own literacy practices. Though they weren't asked to *identify* these activities as literacy practices *yet*, they were asked if they had experience in a number of literacy activities. As it happened, many students indicated an understanding of making and editing videos and web-based content.

Rather than telling them how to make a video (something I don't know much about myself), we talked about what an effective introduction video might look like, how we were going to convey the same kind of ideas with images and share them with students. We talked about what we knew about our high school thinking partners as an audience, based on an introductory letter received from them, and how we would best connect with them. We decided as a class that our priority with these videos was to foster an ongoing relationship with our thinking partners whom my students had yet to meet.

The meeting with our thinking partners went well, it was useful and important for my students to get feedback from a real audience. Following our visit, the college students and I spent the class reflecting on this experience: Why did individuals make their writerly choices? How did those choices impact their readers? What did they learn about writing? These conversations were important and reverberated throughout the semester.

In conjunction with the 200-level course's research component as mandated by institutional guidelines, students were asked to research and understand a bill of their choosing being taken up by the Nebraska Legislature. Students conducted careful research of the proposed policy and wrote their state senator about the issue. First, students researched the local issue with their high school thinking partners. This work was facilitated in small groups, and for the college students, the high school students (who had usually lived in the community longer) were positioned as having more situated, local knowledge about these issues. In their small group think tanks, college students would seek out this expertise, having high school students help them co-create knowledge about the policies and complicate their understandings of the issues and how they were enacted locally.

Thanks to the proximity to the capitol building as well as the kindness of their elected official, the state senator who represents the area was able to come and speak with both classes about the importance of receiving correspondence from his constituents. The senator remarked to Hubrig, following his visit, about how impressed he was with how rigorously these high school and colleges students had researched the policies they were asking about, and his responses to the college student's letters showed a deep level of respect and consideration for their research.

Though sharing research with their senator was important, my students were even more motivated by their final project, in which they were asked to develop their research into

presentations they would deliver to their high school thinking partners. The mode of presentation was totally up to my students; however, they were asked to carefully consider what might best appeal to their audience. These took on a variety of forms, including ones I had simply failed to imagine, like a play about deforestation, a photo essay made from transphobic bathroom graffiti, and a "Life"-esque board game that represented the financial and material pressures of college. All spoke directly to policies currently being considered by the Nebraska state legislature. These projects were *intensely* audience-driven, with my students asking at every turn how they might better engage their thinking partners in these conversations, ascribing agency to my students both in design and implementation of their projects, where their literacy was valued by their thinking partners and their elected official.

Possibilities for and Concerns About Future Community Collaborations for Basic Writers

One chilly October morning, we were a few blocks away from the English building walking over to meet our high school thinking partners, when Cait (a pseudonym)*, came running after us.*

"Hey wait up, Hubrig. Sorry I was late," she said out of breath.

She began to explain to other students in the class how she had accidentally slept in, because she had stayed up quite late to revise her research writing she would share that morning with our high school thinking partners. "I mean, I can't believe I stayed up so late. I already had it done. But I thought, you know, like I could make it better. I had all of these ideas about what might work best and how the students might relate to it."

Cait paused then asked me, "How'd you trick me into actually caring about my writing?"

In our semester together, we witnessed our students move to claim identities as writers through community collaboration. In writing for each other rather than a pseudotransactional,

neoliberal process where they write for a grade, the process of writing became intrinsically meaningful.

We find three concepts helpful, here, in describing the usefulness of this partnership in fostering rhetorical agency and what it might mean for basic writing: asset-based community development, high road transfer (a.k.a mindful transfer), and attention to the political nature of writing itself. We draw on the work of community literacy scholar Rachael Shah (formerly Wendler) to describe asset-based community development, which she describes through the work of community organizers as "asset-based," "internally-focused," and "relationship-driven" (46). Our partnership tended to these ideals in centering and valuing our students' own literacy practices, finding ways to emphasize our student's expertise and local knowledge, and explicitly focusing on the development of relationships.

But this asset-based work needs to be consciously and purposefully connected to other forms of literacy. While the ongoing research into the 200-level course (Stenberg "The Problem") as well as Goss's interactions with his students indicate that our students are engaged in a variety of literacy practices, we also notice that students frequently have trouble seeing how these literacies inform other kinds of writing. Reif and Barwashi call this ability to make connections between genres of writing and the ability to consciously apply those literacy skills across those genres as "high road transfer." They write, "As knowledge and skills do not routinely transfer across dissimilar contexts (e.g., between specialized academic disciplines), high road transfer requires reflective thought, and such reflective thought requires metacognition—an ability to reflect on one's own cognitive processes—as well as the related ability to seek connections between contexts and to abstract and draw from prior skills and knowledge" (315). We assert that this community partnership functions as an important locus for

high road transfer, connecting literacies our students already possess with projects that ask students to *revise* their work, not just in the genre the work was originally produced, but to transpose that work into a new medium and/or for a new audience, like Goss's research projects about prison overcrowding and Hubrig's policy projects.

Third, we affirm the importance of recognizing basic writing *as* political writing (Alder-Kassner and Harrington 101). The writing we asked our students to engage in was deeply political and expressed their own, thoroughly researched political opinions about current, ongoing policy debates. From the videos in which high school students addressed how their communities were stigmatized to both class's research and writing to their elected officials about a range of local issues including prison overcrowding, discrimination against transgender people, deforestation, and a range of other issues students identified as important to their own lives, they were engaged in writing *that mattered*.

We contend these concepts enacted through our community partnership—an asset-based approach, "high road transfer," and powerful literacy—resist neoliberal pressures through the radical act of recognizing that basic writers *are* writers. To speak back to Cait's half-joking question *how did you trick me into caring about my writing*, the answer is we didn't. We—instructors and students—worked to establish a community that valued writing and were personally invested (as opposed to neoliberalism's forms of *value* and *investment*) in each other's literacy practices. Goss noted that, compared to his other classes where most of his teaching was informed by district-mandated binders, students in the composition course were much more likely to claim the identity of "writer." Hubrig's students—many of whom identified writing as a site of anxiety—also came to identify as writers, claiming the authority of their own literacy practices.

While we assert that the community partnership was useful in fostering student agency, we share lingering concerns, particularly about labor and material realities of both student and teacher. We address teacher labor first: the extra meeting, planning, necessary out-of-class and one-on-one time was labor intensive. As a first-year teacher, Goss not only had the workload of understanding a series of new curricula, but the planning, pitching to administrators, and other out of class time required by this partnership with which to contend. He noted, at times, a temptation to go to "auto-pilot" in teaching his other courses, which is certainly unfair to his other students. As a graduate student, Hubrig found it difficult to balance the work required of this course with his administrative, teaching, research, and service work. While we recognize effective pedagogy is frequently labor intensive and sometimes opposed to neoliberalism's mandate of efficiency, we also recognize how asking those in liminal positions to shoulder the burden of this labor only contributes to unfair conditions. Like Ann Larson, we cautiously make note of the alarming neoliberal trends in education by which the labor force responsible for writing instruction, especially basic writing, is done by underpaid contingent faculty (169-170). We recognize our approach as being extremely labor-intensive. At the same time, Goss notes he found the project somewhat pedagogically liberating.

In addition to empowering both teachers' students to claim authority over their agency as writers, the partnership also helped us claim authority over our agency as teachers. In working with Hubrig, Goss gained confidence in constructing lesson sequences that build upon district-mandated standards and surpass the "binder" lessons in engagement through authentic purposes. Goss felt as though he built strong connections at the university and proved himself proactive and capable to his administration. He also feels that, through the work we did together together,

he gained a friend. For anyone looking to initiate a partnership, we certainly recommend reaching out to early-career teachers.

While the partnership proved labor intensive for Hubrig as well, he notes the importance of this work as he continues to understand and develop his own pedagogical commitments: Though I recognize that basic writing is only *part* of the work I do, just as it is only *part* of the important work taken up by writing instruction at two-year institutions, I appreciate Sullivan's invitation for four-year instructors, like myself, to more fully and thoughtfully engage with the scholarship and activism of two-year instructors ("The Two-Year" 345). Basic writing pedagogy has given me insights into working with students who don't identify as writers that I would have otherwise missed out on. The rich collaboration with Goss helped me think through and extend my own work, building stronger community relationships and making a friend who is similarly invested in democratic education.

Closely related to teacher labor are our concerns about material realities faced by our students: while students in Hubrig's 200-level course were engaged in their writing, they also expressed concerns in course evaluations that they felt the workload was much more intensive than in other courses. Like Brewster, we worry about this increased workload for our students and wonder how we might facilitate the same kind of meaningful, engaged work without overburdening our already overworked students. And we note the important role our community connections played in establishing this partnership: because of Hubrig's volunteer and activist efforts, he already had connections within the state legislature that made some of the community work possible. But we recognize that this relationship building takes time and labor.

Despite—perhaps even *in response to*—these concerns, we remain committed to community partnerships, particularly for those we serve who might be identified as basic writers.

We see the work of education as fundamentally democratic, and, as Tom Fox points out, in what we construe to be neoliberal public discourse that "routinely laments the student's failure" there is a danger that students "will lose access to language practices and genres of the disciplines, practices that are useful for citizens as well as for students, important for participatory democracy as well as for improving education" (14). We challenge neoliberalism's suppression of students' rhetorical agency precisely because of our commitment to a more socially just, egalitarian democracy for our students and ourselves, and we believe our community partnership fosters these democratic ideals.

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