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The scholarship and practice surrounding community literacy endeavors are rife with discussions of reciprocity, and by and large, the notion that all parties that comprise the communities formed by such literacy endeavors need to gain skills, concepts, and experiences that are valued in other communities in which they reside. [1] Despite this relative consensus on the theory of reciprocity, the act of developing reciprocal relationships isn't as straightforward as accepting the theory thereof. To that end, this keyword essay traces reciprocity's trajectory in our field by beginning with a brief look at the genealogy of the term and the development of its canonical roots. From there, we move into an overview of case studies and instances where, despite the best intentions of th.organizers, reciprocity was replaced by notions of altruism or of otherizing participants. These problematic cases are then juxtaposed with instances where researchers and community members alike self-consciously harnessed the theories of reciprocity and were able to develop mutually beneficial relationships, both small and large-scale. As this essay will show, achieving truly reciprocal relationships while building community/university relationships is not easy, but it is vital.

The term "reciprocity" is a concern that permeates the boundaries of various disciplines. In 1986, Martin Nystrand brought the term to composition and rhetoric from sociology, explaining that "the reciprocity principle is the foundation of all social acts" (48). For Nystrand, reciprocity is not simply being aware of other knowledge as it is with mutual knowledge (54).

While Nystrand was working with reciprocity in terms of reading and writing in general, the concept has become vital to community literacy, specifically academic engagement with community literacy. In 1999, the Kellogg Commission published a report called *Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution* in which they defined reciprocity as being central to academic institutions' engagement with other communities: "Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity. By engagement, the Commission envisions partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table" (9). Since then, and through the work of Linda Flower, Ellen Cushman, Thomas Deans, and countless other scholars—both published and unpublished, working with various community literacy and service-learning

partnerships—it has become clear that the canonical thinking regarding the need for reciprocity is ubiquitous: all community literacy scholarship either implicitly or explicitly asserts the vitality of reciprocity. However, each take on reciprocity raises unique challenges and benefits of this vital component of community literacy. An examination of reciprocity as a key concept in community literacy requires that we start with the contributions of Flower and Cushman, whose projects and their subsequent scholarship about those projects have inspired "best practices" for community literacy scholarship and partnerships when it comes to reciprocity. Each scholar works with reciprocity on a balance of give and take between the academic partner and the "community" partner, so that both benefit equally from the partnership. Flower generally considers reciprocity in community literacy practices, and Cushman works primarily in activist research and service learning, and these three sites of reciprocity—community literacy research, community literacy practice, and service-learning—are the three main sites for application of reciprocity in our field's scholarship.

Flower's work with Pittsburgh Community House emphasizes an approach that begins with community needs. Writing with Shirley Brice Heath, Flower notes the centrality of a community/university partnership that "transforms service into a collaboration with communities and learning into a problem-driven practice of mutual inquiry and literate action" (43). And, with Wayne Campbell Peck and Lorraine Higgins, she advocates for "hybrid discourse communities" that account for the literacy and language practices of all participants (213). Flower's work consistently emphasizes the fact that community/university partnerships need to be developed based on mutual articulations of need and suggests that neither party can bring a fixed agenda or objective to the table.

Cushman has also developed these theories of reciprocity and—throughout her scholarship—offers specific practices for what she calls give-and-take between academia and the community. In her germinal article on the role of the activist researcher in the community, she explains that this give-and-take requires flexibility based on open negotiation with the community. She states, "the terms governing the give-and-take (reciprocity) of involvement in the community need to be openly and consciously negotiated by everyone participating in activist research" ("Agent of Social Change" 16). In later work, Cushman advocates for "public intellectuals [who] combine their research, teaching, and service efforts" ("Public Intellectual" 329) along with this openness to community needs to achieve a transparency, in terms of what each party is giving and what they stand to gain from the partnership. She goes on to assert the importance of fully considering and integrating the various aspects of a reciprocal partnership: "Dovetailing the traditionally separate duties of research, teaching, and service, public intellectuals can use the privilege of their positions to

forward the goals of both students and local community members" ("Public Intellectual" 330).

Perhaps the clearest way to see the importance of reciprocity that Flower, Cushman, and others address is in scholarship that deals with the consequences of a lack of reciprocity. Stephen Ball and Amy Goodburn describe a service learning course where the graduate students volunteering at a community center failed to engage in dialogue with the community members, and this failure to develop a reciprocal relationship led to not only their own disillusionment with the community center, but also the work they were doing for the class. Because of their expectations for being engaged in a philanthropic endeavor, rather than a reciprocal one, their final product for the class took the form of an angry letter addressed to the director of the center, which critiqued the community staff. The lack of reciprocity here led to a problematic and non-productive relationship between the partners and scholarship on behalf of the students. Normally when we think about give and take, we assume that the academics, because of their particular position of privilege, ought to be giving the partner more than they take. However, this instance points to the way that the principle of reciprocity doesn't just serve as a protective measure—that is to say, to make sure the community is not exploited—it also serves as an assurance that researchers are gaining new knowledge with value that transfers to the community. The students failed to take from their community, and as a result, their scholarship suffered. Ball and Goodburn tangentially point, therefore, to the concerns that arise when altruism is the motivation for community literacy work or service learning.

The stance of altruism may well be what motivated Laura Alkidas' 1997 critique of Cushman's theories of reciprocity. She claimed, "True reciprocity does not mean that your experience in the classroom or community will be used by me, the educator, to stake out my position in academia or to permit me the position of power-giver. In the end, the liberatory power of rhetoric may not give voices, only offer the space so that they may be heard" (106). Alkidas sees a binary between work for research and helping people, and she does not agree with Cushman's argument that they can actually come together to create reciprocity. Yet it is clear that, here, altruism implies only "give" on the part of the academic partner and stands in contrast to reciprocity. Margaret Himley offers a more nuanced version of similar concerns. She invokes the figure of "the stranger," as it is taken up by feminist post-colonial theory, and writes:

This figure reveals the power asymmetries, social antagonisms, and historical determinants that are all too often concealed by discourses of volunteerism or civic literacy or active citizenship or experiential learning or rhetorical training—or, now, patriotism—and that are 'managed' (or not) by methodology or curriculum. (417)

In other words, Himley doesn't buy the idealism behind reciprocity and argues that the social structures we are going up against are far more culturally embedded and problematic than a meta-discursive research project and community practice accounts for. While, unlike Alkidas, she does not outwardly reject reciprocity, she is keenly aware of the complications therein. Thomas Deans brings another complication into the tangled web of reciprocity in his theories of best practices for service learning. He examines reciprocity as a question essential to the ethics of service, posing a series of questions with the aim of "designing programs for mutuality with community constituencies, and problematizing the 'do-gooder' mentality entrenched in our culture and our students" (23). Such questions include, "How does service learning structure a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between 'service' and 'learning'?" and "When are community partners really benefiting from service-learning? And when are they not?" (20). Answering these questions for individual partnerships is the first step in establishing reciprocity.

Some answers, albeit discouraging ones, may be found in Randy Stoecker's and Elizabeth Tryon's extensive examination of the outcomes of service learning from the point of view of community partners. They determine that, by and large, the partners feel that they are giving more to the university than they are receiving. These partners assert that their purposes for participation in such initiatives have more to do with long-term hopes that they will receive greater benefits from universities in exchange for their allowing students the opportunity to "serve" them. Interestingly, Stoecker's and Tryon's findings point to a potential altruistic tendency on the side of the community partner. The tension between Deans' questions and Stoecker's and Tryon's findings speak to the need for more constant awareness of how reciprocal our partnerships actually are. Clearly, it is crucial that both parties must be transparent regarding the give and take of the relationship.

Despite these complications, much of the scholarship concerning community partnerships is still optimistic about the potential for developing reciprocal relationships. Beth Godbee takes a micro approach to examining the benefits of a reciprocal relationship. She recounts her ongoing relationship with Mai Zong, a Hmong refugee whom she tutored for several years, and provides a compelling narrative of the development of a reciprocal relationship with Zong that resulted in practical gains for both parties, as well as personal ones. Godbee benefited practically in that her work with Zong evolved into the quantitative research for her article, and Zong gained practical English language literacy skills that she was able to pass onto her children. For both women, the personal gain took the form of the deep friendship that they developed.

In addition to small-scale examples such as Godbee's and Zong's, the recent collection *Going Public: What Writing Programs Learn from Engagement* (reviewed in this issue) offers examples of the variety of ways academic institutions like writing programs and writing centers can both contribute to their broader communities and gain from these partnerships. This scholarship points to the macro level insomuch as it is concerned with the way institutions, in addition to individuals, experience reciprocity. Academic institutions learn much from engagement, "from how we understand the writing program's role in the institution and community to learning from specific literacy communities, to understanding an institutional culture, to maintaining the core functions of our programs while finding ways to extend our reach, to viewing engagement as both a way of teaching and a way of conducting research" (6). The notable correlation between this large-scale take on reciprocity and Godbee's small-scale take is that the participants who are writing about the partnerships, in these cases both of whom represent the academic side of the equation, are self-consciously aware of and frequently cite theoretical work pertaining to the best practices of reciprocity.

Ultimately, reciprocity can be the impetus for community literacy work that answers Cushman's 1996 call for partnerships to serve as "agents for social change." Through reciprocal "civic participation," Cushman suggests "ways we can empower people in our communities, establish networks of reciprocity with them, and create solidarity with them" ("The Rhetorician as an Agent" 7). As agents for social change, community literacy scholars and workers can take advantage of the circular work of reciprocity. When communities work with academic institutions, they can take expertise and resources, and they can give research, knowledge, and experience. Yet the reciprocity need not end there, as Linda Adler-Kassner points out. Academic institutions, she demonstrates, can then give again back to the community through renewed understandings of writing. She "emphasizes that the intellectual work of writing program administration should be understood to include efforts to change perceptions about the role of writing in society" (Rose and Weiser 13). Considering that service learning and university/community relationships should bring knowledge and information back to writing programs, then it stands to reason that the institutions will harness their power in order to create a perception of "writing in society" that brings in community contributions. This simple and self-perpetuating model ensures, and explodes, the productive possibilities of reciprocity.

Endnotes

1. While we take seriously the issues that arise with perpetuating the university/non-university binary that tends to permeate discussions of reciprocity (a kind of "they" versus "we"), we have yet to find a suitable term to serve as a shorthand to represent the complex relationship that is developed when groups of people from different facets of a geographical area get together to do some work. We therefore have resigned ourselves to the term "community" to refer to para-university communities.

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