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The Courage of Community Members: Community Perspectives of Engaged Pedagogies

The emotional dynamics for community members involved in university-community partnerships remain untheorized and often unrecognized. This article explores the fear minoritized high school students expressed about working with college composition students, offering suggestions for how composition teachers can use the strategies of *personalismo*, affirmation, rigor, and role fluidity to create more responsive community partnerships. Grounded in insights from community partners, the study suggests that knowledge making might change in community-based pedagogies if dominant epistemologies can shift to understand community members as producers of knowledge.

One muggy night in Chicago, a homeless woman spat at my feet and told me, "I won't be your service project!" This woman's voice has followed me as the community engagement movement continues to expand in rhetoric and composition: 2017 marked the second national Conference on Community Writing; writing programs are integrating community engagement at the structural level (Holmes; House; Rose and Weiser); the

most recent *Rhetoric Review* survey of core graduate curricula reveals that "Community Literacy" and "Civic Engagement" were both among the ten most common new courses (Carlo and Enos); and the field supports two dynamic journals committed to public and engaged writing, *Community Literacy Journal* and *Reflections*. In other words, the engagement strand of the "public turn" remains vibrant (Mathieu). The field has continued to innovate within Thomas Deans's classic model of writing *for, about,* and *with* communities, by creating projects *for* nonprofits through local collaborations or digital partnerships (Bacon; Youngblood and Mackiewicz), *about* communities in reflective papers about volunteering or action research (Herzberg; Juergensmeyer), and *with* communities in collaborative youth writing programs and wikis (Flower et al.; Walsh). At the same time, scholars are exploring additional approaches such as community organizing, community publishing, and community writing centers (Parks, "Sinners," *Gravyland*; Rousculp).

Throughout these developments, compositionists have retained a steady interest in projects that involve students in working directly with community residents, such as adult literacy learners or youth.[1] Scholars have celebrated the potential of tutoring youth to solve the "empty assignment syndrome" (Brack and Hall 143), raised criticisms of how individual interactions with community members can deemphasize structural inequalities (Herzberg; Shutz and Gere), questioned cultural assumptions in face-to-face interactions (Himley), and argued that direct partnerships can teach students and community members to understand the logics behind different perspectives (Flower et al.).

Yet little research exists on partnerships *from the perspective* of community members. There are a few studies that examine the nonprofit staff member's perspective (Stoecker and Tryon; Goldblatt, "Story"), especially in technical communication partnerships (Kimme Hea and Shah; Smith Taylor). However, students often work with the clients of nonprofits, from nursing home residents to English language learners, and community resident perspectives are different from the viewpoints of nonprofit staff (Kissane and Gingerich). Amy Martin, Kristy SeBlonka, and Elizabeth Tryon write that to their knowledge, "there are no studies of client experiences with short term service learning" (Stoecker and Tryon 62). I was able to unearth a handful of studies, most outside the field of composition, that focus on the perspectives of community residents rather than staff (d'Arlach

et al.; Jorge; Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin; Wetzel and "Wes"), but the fact that these studies can be counted on one hand is troubling. Clearly, in the discussion of engagement in composition and rhetoric, important community partner voices are not represented.

This article addresses this gap by reporting on interviews with fifteen high school students who worked with college composition students through a secondary-university partnership program. The high school students revealed emotional dynamics involved in community engagement—such as community members' fear—not often featured in scholarship. In light of Alison M. Jagger's theory of "outlaw emotions," which offers a political lens on emotions that do not align with dominant expectations, the high school students' fear draws attention to the need for inquiry into challenges community members encounter in university partnerships. The secondary students offer concrete suggestions for how composition teachers can respond to community members' fear and create more generative partnerships through four strategies: *personalismo,* affirmation, rigor, and role fluidity. In contributing to the study in this way, the high schoolers demonstrate how knowledge making might change in campus-community partnerships if academic epistemologies can shift to understand community members as producers of knowledge.

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Study Background

The secondary students interviewed in this study worked with college students through a program called Wildcat Writers, a collaboration between the University of Arizona Writing Program and high schools that connects secondary and college classes for writing exchanges, joint class sessions, and field trips. Individual high school and college teachers are paired in the fall semester, and in the spring semester they link their curricula. Common Wildcat Writers curriculum activities include poetry slams, debate tournaments, local issue panels with politicians, community action research projects, and zine exchanges. The program is one of several similar school-university writing collaboration initiatives—including programs that currently run or have run at Chapman University, Emerson College, Indiana University East, North Carolina Central University, Oregon State University,

Texas Christian University, University of Texas–Austin, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, and University of Maryland–College Park.[2]

Wildcat Writers is now in its thirteenth year, and over six hundred students participate each year. Responding to calls for the field to smooth the transition between high school and college writing and promote college access for minoritized students (Goldblatt, *Because*; Ruecker), Wildcat Writers engages high schools with demographics historically underrepresented in higher education.[3] For example, Desert View High School, the birthplace of Wildcat Writers, is 91 percent Latinx, African American, and Native American, and 74 percent eligible for free and reduced lunch. I worked extensively with Wildcat Writers high schools for six years as coordinator of the program, and I was continually impressed by the creativity, warmth, and commitment of their students and staff. Among the accomplishments of these schools are standout Mariachi bands and Folklorico dance groups, student-coordinated TEDx events, and innovative literacy nights.

The fifteen students in this study were interviewed with IRB approval shortly after their participation in Wildcat Writers, and they represent three schools and six teacher partnerships, including collaborations with upper-division writing classes and standard, honors, and international first-year composition. The high school teachers announced the interview possibility, and I followed up with two to five students from each class who responded first. The students come from all grade levels and many social locations, including an undocumented high school valedictorian, a teen mother passionate about college access, a young slam poet, an aspiring veterinarian who owns sheep and peacocks, and a recent military recruit. Almost all interviewees identified as Latinx or Native American, and several identified as LGBTQ.

The semi-structured interviews followed a reflective, storytelling methodology that invited high school students to share stories about interacting with college students and reflect on the implications of these stories. I drew from indigenous research traditions of reciprocity, relationality, action, and "conversational storytelling" interviews (Besssarab and Ng'andu; Kovach; Tuhiwai Smith). While I am white, I sought direction from indigenous research methodologies out of respect for the history of Tucson as a research site: I recognize that this land was previously held by and is still understood by many to belong to the Tohono O'odham Nation. Indigenous methodologies are informed by a raw awareness of the long history

of exploitation of native peoples in research, and given this intensive focus on making research ethical for a community group, I believe researchers working in a variety of community contexts may be able to foster more responsible research through this conceptual heritage.

To provide a framework for turning the stories gathered in the interviews into actionable ideas, I tapped service-learning's theories of reflection, which are grounded in experiential learning theory. Instead of analyzing the stories myself, I invited community members to reflect on their experiences, adapting the classic service-learning reflection questions—"What? So What? Now What?" (Eyler et al.)—into an interview structure. The high school students were asked to describe stories from their experience with college students (the "What"). Then we reflected on the "So What," analyzing emotional, political, and cultural dynamics through questions such as "Why did he say that?" and "Would you have reacted differently if your college partner were female?" Finally, in the "Now What" stage, I invited the secondary students to identify implications for other partnerships. The interviews were transcribed and inductively coded, and transcripts and interview summaries were shared with the high schoolers when possible for feedback. Following a practice from indigenous methodologies, interviewees were given the choice to be cited by name to credit them for their insights and encourage researcher accountability (Chilisa), and all chose to have their names used. Based on their insights, I explore the implications of some striking emotional dynamics the high school students identified.

When Octavio offered advice to other secondary students participating in college collaborations, he challenged his peers to "soak it all in" and "learn as much as you can because it will help you," but when I asked him what stopped high school students from doing this, his immediate response was "fear."

Outlaw Emotions and Fear

The majority of high school students experienced fear at some point during their partnership with the university. They described the experience at times as "intimidating" (Jackie, Naomi, Chynna) and "scary" (Jackie), and several students reported feeling "nervous" (Gabbie, Keianna, Ilandra, Chris, Nohely, Brenda) about meeting their partners or sharing writing. When Octavio offered advice to other secondary students participating in college collaborations, he challenged his peers to "soak it all in" and "learn

as much as you can because it will help you," but when I asked him what stopped high school students from doing this, his immediate response was "fear"—fear "that their writing isn't at the level that the university students are used to seeing or maybe just embarrassment that [the college students are] going to make fun of them" (Octavio).

This fear is an example of what feminist philosopher Alison M. Jagger terms "outlaw emotions," which are emotions "distinguished by their incompatibility with the dominant perceptions and values" (Jagger 166). Jagger explains outlaw emotions and details why minoritized subjects are more likely to experience them:

> People who experience conventionally unacceptable, or what I call "outlaw" emotions often are subordinated individuals. . . . The social situation of such people makes them unable to experience the conventionally prescribed emotions: for instance, people of color are more likely to experience anger than amusement when a racist joke is recounted, and women subjected to male sexual banter are less likely to be flattered than uncomfortable or even afraid. (166)

As an outlaw emotion, the fear experienced by the high schoolers does not fit the conventionally prescribed emotion that dominant society might expect of minoritized youth in a college-access program: gratitude. The stories most frequently told about community engagement in scholarship and promotional university materials feature the positive aspects of outreach. For example, an article about Wildcat Writers written by the University of Arizona's University Relations Office was titled "Innovative Writing Program Helps High Schools." As the title indicates, the dominant perspective of community engagement highlights benefits the community members receive, and the dominant value of charity celebrates college students "helping" local youth. A common expectation might therefore be that the secondary students would express gratefulness at the opportunity to participate in Wildcat Writers—yet many also expressed the outlaw emotion fear.

Jagger argues that outlaw emotions can "motivate new research" and serve as a critical starting point for gaining insight into situations or social phenomena (167). Exploring outlaw emotions can help researchers identify problematic dynamics, and can do so in a way that foregrounds the lived experiences of nondominant people. Outlaw emotions "may provide the first indications that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been

constructed, with accepted understandings of how things are" (Jagger 167). Therefore, I begin this analysis with the fear experienced by several of the high school students. This starting point, I believe, may reveal perspectives of community engagement that are often overlooked or silenced in scholarship on community partnerships and lead to implications for how WPAs and composition instructors connect students with community members.

Analyzing the high school students' expressed fear begins with an exploration of the nature of emotion. The students' fear is not an irrational or private response, as emotions have often been historically understood (Jagger; Stenberg). As scholars studying emotion in writing classrooms have recognized, emotion is socially constructed and shaped by political and institutional contexts (Micciche; Stenberg). In her classic definition, Lynn Worsham identifies emotion as "the tight braid of affect and judgment, socially and historically constructed and bodily lived, through which the symbolic takes hold of and binds the individual, in complex and contradictory ways, to the social order and its structure of meanings" (216). Therefore, to understand emotion, we must look beyond the individual to the social and political order that shapes such responses.

The students' expressions of fear may make more sense when read in the political context of Arizona, where nonwhite youth are frequently devalued and criminalized. For example, prominent education policies at the time of this study included the banning of ethnic studies courses that focus on Mexican-American history and culture in high schools, despite widespread recognition that these programs increase graduation rates and deepen student engagement (Cabrera et al.); the segregation of English language learners into four-hour blocks of language instruction that stop students from accessing core curriculum (Gandara and Orfield); and the removal of teachers with accents from the classroom (Johnson and Blum). In 2014, it came to public attention that State Superintendent of Public Instruction John Huppenthal had been posting anonymous comments online that characterize welfare recipients as "lazy pigs" and advocate for English-only media, because, in Huppenthal's words, "This is America, speak English" (Faller). Conditions in Arizona are similar to those described by Angela Valenzuela in *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring*, as she explores how school often "dismisses or derogates [Latinx students'] language, culture, and community" (64). Though youth in Arizona are organizing and speaking back through channels such as slam

poetry (Fields et al.), many students seek education within an environment that is hostile—dynamics that, though varied in the particulars, are often present across the United States.

This context that devalues the intellectual, cultural, and social resources of minoritized and low-income youth likely contributes to the production of fear in Wildcat Writers. Surrounded by discourses that suggest they are unintelligent, many high school students expressed fear that they would not be able to sufficiently engage the intellectual community of Wildcat Writers. For example, Chynna and Jackie were apprehensive that the college students would not take their ideas seriously, that the college students would think, in Jackie's words, "God, this girl doesn't know what she's talking about." As Octavio—valedictorian of his high school class—explained, "To be honest I wasn't really looking forward to [Wildcat Writers] just because I expected my writing to not be at the level of theirs and to be so much more lower-level that it was going to be embarrassing." Chynna and Gabbie joked that they originally believed the college students would be using a vocabulary so complex that it would require a pronunciation guide on the side of their emails. The students, likely influenced by larger discourses, were concerned about the intellectual component of the partnership.

The students' fears extended beyond just academic concerns, to worries about how their personal experiences and identities may not be valued. Ilandra explained:

> I really was nervous because my [essay sent to the college students] was really personal. It was about me being a teen mom. It always makes me nervous when people first learn about that because it's not that I'm not proud to be one, it's just the problem is that people are really judgmental. And I just hate hearing it, so I was scared to send it off and see what they were going to say back.

Ilandra's concerns were grounded in pernicious discourses of teen mothers, especially minoritized teen mothers (Vinson). Similarly, other high school students reported worries that the college students would have stereotypes that reflect the negative discourses about youth from the south side of Tucson (Chris, Brenda).

Considering the fears of community partners is critical because fears can negatively impact partnerships. The high schoolers revealed that fear can make it more difficult to voice opinions, share writing, hear feedback, or engage with college partners (Octavio, Jackie, Naomi, Gabbie, Chynna,

Ilandra). Educational research aligns with the insights of interviewees: scholars have recognized that people learn more successfully when they feel relatively secure, and negative emotions like fear can drain energy needed for academic engagement (Darling-Hammond et al). Intellectual fears are particularly damaging, as "when emotions interfere with competence beliefs, students might withdraw from classroom activities in order to avoid appearing incompetent" (Darling-Hammond et al. 91). Anne Dipardo and Pat Schnack describe how emotional climate shaped the outcomes of an intergenerational literacy program that involved students in exchanging letters with local elders, arguing that "emotion permeated the whole of these exchanges" (33), and theorizing how emotion and cognition are inextricably bound in literacy learning.

Given the crucial nature of emotional climate and recent calls that rhetoric and composition "engage emotions as part of intellectual, rhetorical work" (Stenberg 351), I suggest that scholars and partnership coordinators consider the emotional dynamics of engagement for community members. The first step may be to listen to community members and acknowledge the presence and political context of emotions if shared, with the awareness that power dynamics may make it difficult for community partners to express negative perspectives of partnerships (Stoecker and Tryon). While the emotions of community members may not be fully understood by those university representatives who do not come from a similar background—as Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhoades argue, caring about the stories of "others" must "proceed from the space of acknowledged not-knowing" (449)—instructors and administrators can work to structure writing partnerships in light of these emotions, especially with guidance from community partners. To this end, I share four themes identified by the high school interviewees as strategies that may counteract fear and promote healthier direct partnerships: *personalismo,* affirmation, rigor, and role fluidity.

Strategy 1: *Personalismo,* "A Great Stepping Stone"

Several students identified a positive relationship with their college partner as a key antidote to fear (Chynna, Gabbie, Keianna, Nohely, Brenda, Jackie, Naomi). Keianna shared that building a personal connection was a pivot point in Wildcat Writers, explaining that "as soon as I got to know [my college partner], I got comfortable." It was critical that relationship building happen early, because, as Keianna noted, "If we went right off the bat

sharing our work with each other, I wouldn't be comfortable." Interviewee after interviewee voiced the importance of relational activities such as small talk, and nearly every student requested more face-to-face interaction with their partners to develop connections.

The focus on personal relationships in this study aligns with the concept of *personalismo,* an interactional value often associated with Latinx cultures.[4] *Personalismo* has been defined as a cultural norm in which "individuals place a high value on personal relationships, even in the most time-limited encounter" (De Luca and Escoto 35), a type of "formal friendliness" (Flores) where "interpersonal behaviors are perceived as more important than task achievements" (Gloria 249). In high school student Chynna's words:

> We got to like, not just talk about school stuff. I think our second field trip was right after prom, so they were like, "How was your prom? Oh I remember my prom!" . . . . It wasn't always just "Oh, let's get this assignment done, I'm going to my next class." They had time, they were really interested in our lives.

To Chynna, the connection should extend beyond the task-oriented bounds of the writing assignment. Yet as Nohely explained, "It doesn't have to be *personal* personal, it could just be like simple questions: where are you from? do you like it here? or like, what sports do you play?" *Personalismo* exists in the space between formal relationships and—in Nohely's terms—the "*personal* personal."

While *personalismo* in scholarship has most frequently been used to encourage culturally responsive psychology and healthcare (Falicov; Flores), the concept has also been theorized by Latinx education scholars to describe a social principle that is important to the educational success of some Latinx people (Antrop-González and De Jesús; Castellanos and Gloria; De Luca and Escoto). These scholars take up the term not through an essentializing move that suggests *personalismo* is inherent to all Latinx cultures, but rather to explore how this interactional style—or the lack of this style, as is more common in dominant spaces—can influence how Latinx students experience formal educational environments. *Personalismo* has been used as part of an orientation to community-based learning sites that involve Latinx populations (Keen and Matthews), but this principle may also be applicable beyond partnerships with Latinx populations because of its potential for easing community member apprehensions.

The high school students had several recommendations for how *personalismo* could be enacted. Many suggested that time be set aside early in the partnership for social conversations, and Naomi and Jackie recommended that facilitators provide, but not mandate, questions to spark conversation. The secondary students also shared that when college students referenced personal details about the high schoolers, this helped break down fears about being stereotyped. Gabbie and Chynna riffed off the trope of judging a book by its cover, arguing that while they were worried the college students would judge them based on stereotypes, the college students moved beyond the "cover" and "read into us"—by reading their bios exchanged via email and bringing up details during downtime on field trips. For example, the college students remembered Gabbie was joining the military and shared how some of them had considered the military. As Robert Brooke argues, student writers often desire to demonstrate that they are more than just students, to "show that their identities are different from and more complex than the identities assigned them by organization roles" (143). This desire that might be especially urgent for low-income and/or minoritized high school students, given that institutions and social structures often attempt to position them as "at risk" and "in need." While interactions can never be completely free from problematic discourses, Gabbie and Chynna explained that personal details can help high school students feel like the college students are not only seeing the negative stereotypes: "we were not just the label . . . we were people." This concept of *personalismo* could be incorporated into a writing assignment, challenging college students to establish rapport and respond to personal details through a letter or email exchange with community members. A writing exchange with the purpose of building a relationship could provide a rich opportunity to teach rhetorical concepts such as *ethos,* identification, and style. Participants could also be asked to incorporate *personalismo* moves in feedback on each others' writing, offering connections between content and their own lives or beginning peer review letters with a friendly paragraph that discusses winter break plans or shared music interests. Other strategies recommended by interviewees for facilitating *personalismo* include incorporating food into partnership events—especially homemade—and intentional pairing of community members and college students based on common hobbies, shared career/major aspirations, personality similarities, or parallel life experiences.

Community partnership coordinators, in their focus on outcomes such as improving writing skills, may not always see how *personalismo* can lay the groundwork for achieving these outcomes. For example, building a relationship first, according to Keianna and Chynna, leads to better feedback on writing and deeper intellectual engagement. These high school students felt more comfortable allowing their partners into their invention process and less defensive about criticism on drafts in the context of *personalismo*. Martin explained that the opportunity to build rapport with his college partner was "a great stepping stone" for the partnership. The paradox is that *personalismo*'s emphasis on people over tasks can ultimately allow tasks to function more effectively and therefore generate better outcomes.

In fact, *personalismo* can be linked to the high school students' motivation. For Naomi, believing the college students were personally invested sparked her own commitment to learning with them: "At first I was just like, 'They're just doing this for a grade, I shouldn't even be reading their comments [on my writing] . . . But they actually care.'" In order to take the emotional risk of interacting with college students about their writing and their lives, the high school students wanted to feel they were more than an assignment to their partners. When this affective investment from college students was not present, the secondary students noticed. Interviewees described instances where particular college students only did the bare minimum, acted uninterested, or complained about the partnership, and the high schoolers suggested that instructors may need to "keep people like that away" (Jackie) or invoke greater college student engagement because of the effect these attitudes can have on community members (Martin, Enrique, America, Chris, Jackey).

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Surprisingly, even as high school students expressed wanting the college students to "care" about the partnership and demonstrate *personalismo*, some also recognized that such *personalismo* might not be genuine—and they were satisfied with a performance.[5] When Chynna described how she appreciated that the college students "were really interested in our lives," she quickly added, "Not, well, interested, but they acted it, I guess." As Gab-

bie explained, "Even if they weren't [interested in us], they at least made it seem like they were, so we had something to communicate about." This insight is salient for engagement coordinators, as they cannot mandate that participants experience emotions, but they *can* ask for the performance of *personalismo* through specific actions such as referencing personal details in written responses. Personal relationships—even if they come through "acting it"—are central to the high school students' understanding of a healthy partnership.

These findings about the importance of personal connections resonate with previous scholarship on direct community engagement. Drawing on interviews with adult learners at a service-learning site, Ellen Skilton-Sylvester and Eileen Erwin argue emphatically that "the positive benefits of service-learning hinge on seeing the building of relationships as central rather than peripheral to the work that is being done" (74). The authors share stories of adult literacy learners who left the literacy program or deepened their learning because of the strength of the personal relationship formed with the college students, and they detail scholarship on the link between personal relationships and literacy education. The fact that Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin's findings with adult literacy learners are so similar to my findings with high school students suggest that personal relationships may be the foundation for multiple kinds of direct engagement partnerships.

Strategy 2: Affirmation, Recognizing the "Younger, Fresher Perspective"

High school students Octavio, Jackie, and Naomi recalled for me the first college discussion they participated in with Wildcat Writers—a Socratic Seminar on *The Glass Menagerie*, in preparation for an analysis essay. Naomi confided, "At first, all of us didn't want to speak. It was just the college students and we were just kind of observing." Jackie remembered "dodging every [question]—I was like, NO." Their hesitance to participate was related to the fear of sharing ideas in a context where these ideas might not be valued.

Gradually, though, the high school students stepped up to take a larger role in the Socratic Seminar. As Octavio, Jackie, and Naomi expressed, affirmation helped them take that risk. Octavio explained, "Our Wildcat Writer [college partner] encouraged us. He would raise our hand for us, he'd tell us like, 'Hey raise your hand, c'mon you gotta say something,' and he was

really encouraging. I think that's the thing I would recommend for the [college students] to do is to encourage the high school students to speak up, because they can have an idea that the university student has never heard or thought of." When high school students did share their insights, Octavio continued, the college students "would say, 'Hey that was a really good idea, I hadn't thought about that.' They made you feel like you were at their level."

Considering the social context that shapes fears about participating in college courses, this affirmation of the high school students' contributions is not only an individual exchange between a college student and a high school student—it is a political move: a counter to the pernicious discourses that frame youth, and especially minoritized youth, as unintelligent. John Saltmarsh, Matt Hartley, and Patti Clayton sketch the dominant conceptions of knowledge production in the academy, a paradigm in which "knowledge flows in one direction, from the boundaries of the university outward to its place of need and application in the community" (8). In university-school collaborations, these paradigms position the college students as "mentors" who help the high school students improve their writing; the high school students are knowledge consumers, not producers.

Resisting these discourses requires affirmation of community knowledges. In Gabbie's words, college students should "keep an open mind" by "not automatically thinking, 'Oh, they're kids, they don't know what they're talking about.'" Saltmarsh, Hartley, and Clayton describe this openness to community knowledges as an epistemological component of reciprocity: "Reciprocity signals an epistemological shift that . . . favors mutual deference between lay persons and academics. Knowledge generation is a process of co-creation, breaking down the distinctions between knowledge producers and knowledge consumers" (9–10). In high school student Chynna's framing, reciprocal partnerships value both the college students' "wiser perspective" and the "younger, fresher perspective" of secondary students.

On the ground, affirmation is especially important in interactions about writing. Octavio advised college students who will partner with youth, "In their writing, actually point out what they're doing right, and then help them improve. Because that helps, that makes you feel good about your writing that you're doing something right." As negative discourses about youth writing are especially vitriolic, given the national focus on standardized, timed writing exams and narrow definitions of what makes good writing, affirmation can play a critical role in opening up high school students to

growing their writing skills. The salience of affirmation extends not only to giving feedback to community members, but also to receiving it from them. Some Wildcat Writers partnerships invite high school students to offer feedback on college students' compositions, and the majority of high schoolers expressed hesitance about this role. However, several shared that it helped when college students praised their feedback and implemented their suggestions.

Affirmation in direct engagement recognizes not only intellectual but also experiential, cultural, and linguistic assets community members bring to the collaboration. Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll, and Cathy Amanti argue that the homes of marginalized students are filled with literacy events, cultural knowledges, critical skills, and learning opportunities, and educators should bring these knowledges into the classroom. Characteristics often framed as deficits, such as bilingualism or cultural ties to Mexico, can and should be refigured as assets.

The power of acknowledging cultural assets is exemplified in a story Jackie shared about a moment that she considered a turning point in Wildcat Writers. She had been sitting next to her college partner in a theater waiting for a play to start. The college student turned to her, holding a smart phone, and said, "You speak Spanish, right? Would you mind proofreading this email I'm sending to my Spanish professor?" Up until this point, Jackie had been shy about sharing writing with the college student and uncomfortable speaking out during discussions, but she told me this moment shifted the relationship: she was much more willing to exchange writing and take intellectual risks. Having her skills as a "translingual literacy broker" (Alvarez) affirmed helped develop epistemological reciprocity—and consequently created emotional space for Jackie to enter the Wildcat Writers collaboration as a partner. As the high school interviewees emphasized, affirmation of their contributions can help counter fear.

Strategy 3: Rigor, "Not Just a 'Good Job'"

The high school students stressed the importance of affirmation—but affirmation to them did not mean empty praise or lax expectations. When Ashley discussed what she appreciated about Wildcat Writers, she identified critical engagement with her writing. Describing a visit from the college students, a warm February afternoon when the students shared clementines and discussed papers on race, class, and culture, she said: "I think as

I looked around the room, the amount of interaction with each other and actually listening to each others' feedback, it was amazing. . . . [T]hey were actually talking about the essay and . . . It wasn't just, 'Oh you did this, good' . . . It was more actually focusing on what it was about." Ashley did not want simple praise—she wanted college students to engage her ideas and push her thinking. In a similar spirit, Jackie reflected, "I think the best part [of Wildcat Writers] was when they would criticize us." I found myself smiling as I listened to her recount how she valued the in-depth feedback the college students offered and lament that their feedback became less intensive, shrinking from a page to a paragraph, as the college students became busier over the semester. The high school students I interviewed were seeking rigor, not shallow affirmation offered out of paternalism.

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René Antrop-González and Anthony De Jesús criticize colorblind notions of caring "as an emotion-laden practice characterized by low expectations motivated by taking pity on students' social circumstances" (411). They term this type of caring the "*Ay Bendito* syndrome" in reference to the Spanish exclamation of pity. *Ay Bendito* syndrome occurs when educators offer insincere praise and relax standards as a way of "caring" for students. Antrop-González and De Jesús argue that educational environments must include high academic expectations —especially, as Audrey Thompson asserts, for minoritized students, who need academic tools as a survival skill in a racist society. High school student Naomi made a connection between care and academic rigor when she suggested that the college students' intensive feedback, including both marginal comments and extensive end notes, "showed that they really did care." The students interviewed for this study resist educational discourses that depict minoritized students as lazy or uninterested in intellectual growth.

To develop academic rigor in community partnerships, high schooler America suggested that teachers train high school and college students how to give effective feedback, going beyond surface suggestions or praise to point to specifics and explain why certain comments are given—echoing best practices in composition for peer review (Zhu). The responses should be "critical, but in the most respectful, polite, nicest way possible" (Naomi). America recommended that teachers review and comment on

students' feedback—offering feedback on feedback—to make sure the responses reflect high standards. Similarly, Gabbie and Chynna suggested that engagement activities be tied to the grades of both high school and college students to raise the level of intellectual exchange.

Perhaps because they are surrounded by political discourses that devalue their intellect, many interviewees shared that their root concern was that college students would not take them seriously. So paradoxically, as several students reported, rigorous engagement made them feel *more* comfortable. Gabbie explained that she was initially concerned the college students would not respect her, but she began to believe they recognized her as a colleague when they responded to particular ideas she had—"that's when you could tell they were listening." Because of this, Octavio emphatically recommends that college students in direct engagement partnerships "notice their ideas, don't just [think], 'Oh, it's not really important.' *Acknowledge their ideas*." The high school students were looking to participate in an intellectual exchange; they wanted, as Thomas Kent theorizes, to make meaning out of interactions with others and the world.

Most secondary students I spoke to recounted specific learning outcomes from participating in Wildcat Writers: they shared with me about visual design principles, described in detail a paragraph structure strategy learned from a partner, explained how to integrate textual evidence and develop voice, and expressed an intellectual shift from clinging to a particular interpretation to responding to alternate interpretations with questions about *why* and *how* (Keianna, Jackie, Octavio, Gabbie, Chynna, Ashley). Direct engagement partnerships have the potential to be rich sites of intellectual exchange, but only if participants commit to co-building high expectations for shared inquiry and rhetorical action.

Strategy 4: Role Fluidity, "Give and Give"

One of the most striking insights about direct partnerships came from a soft-spoken high school student named Brenda. Brenda suggested that Wildcat Writers incorporate more face-to-face interaction—listen to her reason why:

> [I'd like more time] to get to know my partners . . . and create a connection so they don't feel so homesick from home, because they come from other places. We're from here, so we know the area, so we could—this project was to help

> them stay in school, like not drop out and stuff. To have some connections around so when they felt lonely they could come back to us.

For Brenda, one of the purposes of the partnership was to help first-year composition students, many of whom are not native to Tucson, feel part of the local community in order to support college student retention. Brenda is right, as community engagement has been shown to impact college student retention (Bringle et al.). By framing the partnership in this way, Brenda was resisting approaches to service-learning that position college students as the ones who serve—Brenda sees herself as helping the college students stay in school. In other words, Brenda was seeking role fluidity, where the lines between server and served become blurred, dynamics reverse, and she has the opportunity to offer something to the college students. Some restrictive notions of mutuality in community engagement focus on ensuring that both sides benefit in some way (Saltmarsh et al.), such as community members receiving tutoring and college students receiving tutoring experience, yet roles—not just outcomes—are important to balance. Role fluidity creates space for community members to take an active role in teaching and supporting university students, challenging the notion that there are only two set roles in a community-university partnership—those who give and those who receive—implying instead a range of positions and easy, fluid movement among them.

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Brenda is not the only high school student who sought to inhabit role fluidity during Wildcat Writers. Martin, for example, told me that when his college partner shared a personal artifact during an introductory activity, she got a bit emotional because it was related to a difficult family situation. He responded to her with his own personal story. Martin explained, "I felt like I could be there for her and we could be there for each other and help each other out . . . . I was there to give her some support. I like to help others." Martin wanted to help his college partner, challenging traditional community engagement roles. In Ashley's words, "It's not a give and take relationship, it's like a give and give."

As Aaron Schutz and Anne Ruggles Gere argue, "To be successful, service learning projects need to create spaces where college students are

given opportunities to be 'cared-for' by those they wish to serve, moments where they require initiation into the practices of a community they do not understand, moments where *they* are the learners instead of the experts, as all participating negotiate common projects together" (145). Schutz and Gere offer this suggestion as part of a critique of tutoring programs that firmly place community members in the role of served, reifying power dynamics that position college students over community members. Creating opportunities for role fluidity by diversifying the roles offered to students and community members can work to partially upset these traditional dynamics.

High school students offered practical strategies for fostering role fluidity. Gabbie suggested that coordinators create activities that allow participants to teach one another. For example, secondary students might learn how to use infographic software, which they then teach to college students, and at the next joint event, the college students teach the high schoolers about design principles. Gabbie asserted, "I still believe that college students can learn from younger people." In particular, community youth might be knowledgeable about local issues and places, dynamics in the education system, or techniques for reaching a youth audience. Keianna suggested that college students explicitly communicate to high school students that they want critical feedback, saying in her words, "It's okay to give me feedback, I know I make mistakes." She shared that she had only offered positive, "lenient" feedback to her college partner, because she did not feel her partner would accept criticism from a high school student. It may take direct communication about openness to reversing teaching roles for role fluidity to occur.

Framing can also develop giving positionalities for both high school and college students. Brenda's assertion that the purpose of Wildcat Writers was college student retention, I found out later in the interview, was influenced by how her teacher discussed Wildcat Writers. This teacher emphasized to her students the emotional and intellectual contributions they had to offer their college partners and led role-play activities to practice supporting college students. While composition scholarship discusses how to frame partnership activities for college students (Dubinsky), I have yet to encounter scholarship that explores how community-based pedagogies should be framed for community partners in direct engagement. Brenda's

insights suggest the potential of framing that emphasizes the resources community members bring.

A fourth strategy to encourage fluid server-served roles is to structurally place community members in the position of expert. For instance, consider partnerships between ELL college composition classes and high school students who are fluent English speakers. America, Chris, and Jackey worked with a writing class composed of international students, so they found themselves supporting the language learning of their college partners. America offered extensive guidance on grammar and idea development to her partner, a student from China. She said, "It was like volunteer work, but I really like helping people, making them feel more accomplished and better about themselves." This statement about "volunteer work" sounds like a quotation one might expect from a college student participating in service-learning, rather than a high school student supposedly "served" by a college access program. The high school students took on the positionality of expert, teacher, and leader because the partnership was designed to allow the high school students to be language authorities.[6] Centering other kinds of community expertise, such as local knowledge about a city, may create the same effect. Taking another approach, Wildcat Writers teachers Jessica Shumake and Kurt Fisher sought to position Kurt's high school students as experts by inviting them to participate in grading Jessica's college students (Shumake and Shah). Intentionally building, framing, and enacting partnerships to match knowledge and strengths in the community with needs in the university can help college students and community members hold more fluid conceptions of their roles in the partnership.

Building from the Courage of Community Partners

The high school students interviewed for this study offered concrete strategies that people involved in community collaborations can pursue in order to create more vibrant partnerships. *Personalismo,* affirmation, rigor, and role fluidity help community members counter the devitalizing emotions that can arise in interacting with college students within a political environment that may marginalize community knowledges. However, it is also important to recognize that these strategies are no panacea for the complex power relations in direct engagement partnerships. The fear many high school students experience is valid, and no strategies can com-

pletely address this fear or create a "safe space" for community members interacting with college students—such a space does not exist. Stereotypes, problematic power relations, negative discourses: all are at play in direct engagement partnerships.

Yet I find it hopeful that despite the challenges in direct engagement collaborations, the high school students overwhelmingly valued their involvement with college students, and every secondary student was encouraging about the continued growth of programs like Wildcat Writers. They deeply appreciated the opportunities to see inside a college classroom, to grow their thinking and writing, to build relationships, and to support college students. Some high school students described the program as having a significant impact on their college readiness or college decision process. These students, given their life experiences, are no strangers to navigating complex power dynamics. They actively negotiated the dynamics involved in traveling from their high schools to engage undergraduate students—and they displayed courage. This courage, to take risks in working with college students, and even to be interviewed for this study and cited by name, exemplifies the strengths of community partners.

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Community members have much to offer as composition and rhetoric continues to practice community partnerships. As community organizer Manuel Portillo explains in an interview with Eli Goldblatt, "There is an attempt to make us believe that a person needs the university to be somebody decent and that true knowledge emerges out of the university. That's bull, you know?" (Goldblatt, "Story" 55–56). Similarly, John Saltmarsh, Patti Clayton, and Matthew Hartley have argued that the dominant epistemology of the academy, which focuses on expertise, specialization, technocracy, and presumption of neutrality, has delegitimized the knowledges of community members, and they call for a shift in knowledge production toward a "democratic epistemology."

This "democratic epistemology" has been applied occasionally in community partnerships to address social issues, through approaches such as participatory action research (Reardon), in which community members and academics collaboratively research issues such as food deserts; rival-

ing (Flower et al.), an approach that encourages students and community members to identify multiple interpretations of issues such as drug use; and community publishing (Parks, *Gravyland*), which calls for academics to publish community voices on topics such as the working class.[7] Yet with limited exceptions, this democratic epistemology with community members is not applied to academic inquiry *about university-community partnerships*. Strangely, even with firsthand experience of engaged pedagogies, community members have rarely been invited to contribute their perspectives—they are not understood as knowledgeable.

The Inside-Out Prison Exchange offers a model of what this kind of collaborative epistemological partnership could look like: the program co-enrolls college and incarcerated students in courses, and alumni from both inside and outside have organized into think tanks that meet regularly at prisons to guide the ethics and pedagogy of the program. These think tanks play a major role in coordinating teacher training for future Inside-Out instructors, and in 2013, alumni and teachers collaborated on an academic edited collection, *Turning Teaching Inside Out: A Pedagogy of Transformation for Community-Based Instruction,* that theorizes the program and offers intriguing implications for the field of community-based pedagogy (Davis and Roswell). Collaborating with community members to explore university-community partnerships offers dynamic potential.

I encourage instructors and administrators who invite students to interact with community members to seek out the insights of these partners—even if over a short coffee conversation.

In addition to adding my voice to the calls for research on community engagement that involves community members and not only nonprofit staff (Skilton-Sylvester and Erwin), I encourage instructors and administrators who invite students to interact with community members to seek out the insights of these partners—even if over a short coffee conversation. Because community collaborations are so dependent on context (Sura), articles like this may be a starting point, but they are no substitute for conversations with the people involved in specific collaborations. As Eli Goldblatt recounts in his chapter "Lunch," healthy community partnerships are rooted in face-to-face connections (*Because)*, and I suggest that in addition to nonprofit directors and school principals, important lunch partners also include adult literacy students, youth poets, and elderly writers in our programs. Over ice cream or french fries with high school students, I gathered significant

ideas about how to improve the Wildcat Writers program, learned about dynamics I would not have understood if I had only listened to high school teachers, and walked away reenergized about how to address the challenges.

As the woman who spat at my feet expressed strongly to me, community partners are not service projects. I am still working to understand the implications of her statement and respond to it. But I believe one step is to recognize that community partners are holders and producers of knowledge about community engagement pedagogies, and I would love to see how the field might develop with their guidance.

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Notes

1. Of course, *university members* and *community residents* are not mutually exclusive categories. Often, students and faculty are clients of partner nonprofits, residents of neighborhoods involved in university initiatives, and members of collaborating grassroots organizations. In some cases, university representatives may identify more with the community partner than with the university. See Kannan et al. for an important discussion of the dangers of assuming a university/community binary.

2. See descriptions of some of these school-university writing programs in Faulkner-Springfield; Gabor; Lindenman and Lohr; Parfitt and Shane; and Warren.

3. I use *minoritized* rather than *minority* following Yasmin Gunaratnam's argument that the former term gives a "sense of the active processes of racialization that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a minority" (17). The term suggests *minority* is not simply about numbers, but power dynamics that create social, economic, and political marginalization. See McCarty for how the term connotes agency—I would add responsibility—to effect change.

4. *Personalismo* shares similarities with feminist caring theory, though I diverge from service-learning scholars who adopt caring theory (Rhoads; Kahne and Westheimer). The potentially paternalistic overtones of this framework, from

examples involving parents to a definition of reciprocity that frames the cared-for in a passive role (Noddings), are troubling in the context of community partnerships. While scholars of color have taken up caring theory in more critical ways (Thompson; Valenzuela), Audrey Thompson raises concern about "the deficit assumptions informing educational theories of care that offer to provide children of color with the kind of support supposedly not found in their homes" (527), and I worry these deficit assumptions, with conceptual metaphors of parenting, might be invoked by discussing *caring* in youth partnerships. Therefore, I use *personalismo* as an alternative to caring theory.

5. While I draw on *personalismo* as an alternative to caring theory, Noddings would refer to this performance as *ethical caring*, or caring not because one feels a desire, but because it is appropriate.

6. For more on how TESOL affects power dynamics in service-learning, see Shah.

7. Nonprofit scholarship is also exploring strategies for integrating community knowledges, such as board participation, surveys, co-planning, and research collaboration (Wellens and Jegers), which may prove applicable to university-community partnerships.

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