ASSEMBLING RELATIONAL SYSTEMS: A CULTURAL RHETORICS MODEL FOR BUILDING, ENACTING, AND SUSTAINING SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNERSHIPS

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ABSTRACT

ASSEMBLING RELATIONAL SYSTEMS:
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This paper describes a partnership between an academic service-learning course at Michigan State University and a public elementary school in East Lansing, Michigan. The course—Writing Center Theory and Practice—connects students with community partners to practice theories associated with writing center consultation. I will describe my experiences developing the partnership between Writing Center Theory and Practice and a local school, Glenhills Elementary. To build, enact, and sustain this partnership, I integrated perspectives associated with both service learning and Cultural Rhetorics.

Cultural Rhetorics scholarship and the responses of my research participants moved me toward three central findings: (a) To establish this service-learning partnership, I practiced a methodology of listening grounded in feminist and rhetorical scholarship. This perspective encouraged me to listen to the teachers, staff, and administration in East Lansing Public Schools as they self-identified the assets, knowledge practices, and needs that circulate within their communities. Such a perspective works against civic engagement models that only configure community partners in terms of deficits. (b) Enacting this partnership centered on assembling relationships. I suggest that those of us who participated in the partnership cultivated not only interpersonal relationships, but also relationships that connected ideas, concepts, practices, and theories. (c) I conclude by arguing that these networks of relationships are structures that contributed to the partnership's sustainability.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Fourth Grader: Can I come over to your house this weekend?
Me: I wish, but I have to write my Master's thesis.
Fourth Grader: Tell your Master to write his own thesis.

By the spring of my second year at Michigan State University (MSU), I had worked with the same two fourth graders—Jordan and Jasmine[1]—for a little over a year. They moved to East Lansing from Papua, New Guinea when their father enrolled in a PhD program at MSU. Once a week, I took a break from my reading and writing, walked to Glenhills Elementary School, and worked with Jordan and Jasmine for about an hour before I went to my classes at MSU. On Thursday afternoons over the summer, we worked together in the community center near their parents' apartment.

I met Jordan and Jasmine while I was trying to establish a partnership between Glenhills Elementary and the MSU course, Writing Center Theory and Practice (WRA 395). During one of my meetings with staff at Glenhills, a group of teachers asked if there were any writing center consultants who could work with Jordan and Jasmine, who entered the elementary a few years behind their classmates by US academic standards. In a move typical of a graduate school student, I said, without thinking, that I would do it. I had spent the year previous volunteering full time in an elementary school in Minneapolis. There, I had been an elementary literacy tutor with an AmeriCorps program, working with elementary schoolers on reading. I enjoyed tutoring younger students, and I felt comfortable working in an elementary school.

Jordan and Jasmine turned out to be two of the most thoughtful and sensitive people I have met—they could remember a concept after I (sometimes messily) explained it once, and

[1] I use pseudonyms for names of places and people throughout.

they almost always remained positive, happy, and kind when we worked together, even if I pulled them out of a fun class activity or took up part of their summer afternoons.

I found that my work with Jordan and Jasmine started to seep into my work at the university. I was motivated by their enthusiasm and kindness, and our work together led me to question some models for civic engagement that I encountered in academic journals or experienced first-hand. Such models often configured community partners as objects of university study, as projects for publication, or as texts that could reaffirm the theories we studied in the university. Working with Jordan and Jasmine seemed to run contrary to those configurations for civic engagement; my connections with Jordan, Jasmine, and their teachers were not objective and distant, but necessarily subjective and personal.

Over the course of the semester that I helped coordinate the partnership between WRA 395 and Glenhills, I continued going to the school to work with Jordan and Jasmine. The same observations I had while working with those two students motivated my work with WRA 395; I wanted to examine the relationship between academic communities and publics outside the university, and I sought to explore how to balance my commitments to the academic communities where I study with the relationships I cultivated with Jordan, Jasmine, and the staff at the elementary school.

The same questions motivate my study here. To explore these ideas, I have divided the rest of this paper into four sections. First, I will offer my perspective on a few terms and concepts central to my study: Cultural Rhetorics, intercultural research, and service learning. Explaining these terms will not only clarify ideas and theories central to this project, but also frame my perspective for working with Glenhills. Second, I will describe how I coordinated the partnership with various stakeholders, including East Lansing Public Schools (ELPS) district staff, Glenhills

teachers and administrators, MSU faculty, and MSU students. In that section, I argue for a process of building service-learning partnerships grounded in a practice of listening, a practice that not only identifies a community partner's needs, but also recognizes the range of assets, beliefs, epistemologies, and values that circulate within a community. Third, I trace how the participants in this study built systems of relationships—between people, ideas, theories, practices, and spaces—during the service-learning partnership. These relational systems not only entailed interpersonal connections between MSU students and elementary students and teachers at Glenhills, but also contained connections between the MSU students' service learning and work they hoped to do in The Writing Center. Additionally, these relational systems blurred any clear distinctions between researcher and participant, and they resisted a research paradigm that configured the people I worked with at Glenhills, MSU, and ELPS as texts or objects of study. Lastly, I argue that these systems of relationships were structures that helped sustain the partnership.

1.1: Terms and Definitions

Much of this paper relies on my approach to four terms, concepts, and practices: Cultural Rhetorics, intercultural research, community, and service learning. Clarifying my approach to these ideas will, I hope, show my commitment to research that is contextually situated and participant driven while positioning this project in relation to scholarship associated with both Cultural Rhetorics and service learning.

I practice Cultural Rhetorics as an orientation, one that encourages me to value how diverse forms of meaning making operate within cultural communities (The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab, 2014). This orientation resists approaching Western theories as central to the field and other traditions as marginal; it moves me instead towards a perspective that views all

rhetorical traditions as locally—not universally— significant. As a result, Cultural Rhetorics contests the primacy of Western epistemologies in the field of rhetorical studies (see, for example, White, 1980; De Certeau, 1988; Clifford, 1988; Cruikshank, 2002; Powell, 2002). Using this orientation, Cultural Rhetoricians do not need to justify a community's rhetorics by describing how their practices draw from classic or canonical rhetorical theories. My work as a cultural rhetorician is, instead, to recognize how rhetorical traditions are relevant to the histories, beliefs, and practices of the cultural communities in which they are situated (Mukavetz, 2014, p. 109).

Scholarship associated with Cultural Rhetorics often identifies intercultural research as a basis for inquiry. For instance, work in the field draws from a range of disciplines that position culture centrally within the research paradigm, including Anthropology (e.g., Rosaldo 1989), Indigenous Studies (e.g., Cruikshank, 2002; Powell, 2002; Wilson, 2008), Queer Studies (e.g., Bacon, 1998; Cox & Faris, 2015), Decolonial Studies (e.g. Smith 1999), Feminism (e.g., Royster and Kirsch, 2012), Critical Race Theory (e.g., Royster, 1996; Ratcliffe, 2005; Smitherman, 2006), and interdisciplinary studies (e.g., Driskill, 2010; Pough, 2011). However, as Mukavetz (2014) observes, intercultural research should be approached broadly. She writes, "when I talk about intercultural research, I am acknowledging that all research that negotiates multiple spaces, knowledge practices, and beliefs *is* intercultural research" (p. 110, emphasis in the original). For Mukavetz, when researchers work in different spaces, with different people, or across disciplines, they perform intercultural research.

Mukavetz's observations encourage me to view my interactions with Glenhills, WRA 395, and MSU as a form of intercultural research. That is, I consider the work we did at Glenhills to be intercultural because it asked the WRA 395 students and me to think about how

knowledges, practices, and beliefs were situated within East Lansing's school system. It asked us to balance those systems of knowledge that operated in the schools with the beliefs, practices, and epistemologies associated with WRA 395, including theories of writing center consultation, processes for making and distributing knowledge in the university, and the students' and professor's goals for the course. Similarly, the partnership asked the Glenhills teachers and staff to balance the beliefs and values important to them with the practices and knowledges important to MSU. By recognizing that Glenhills teachers and staff, MSU students and professors, and I negotiated multiple scholarly and cultural communities during this project, I suggest that this partnership was a process of intercultural research.

While I view my service-learning research as a practice deeply tied to the concept of community, scholars have not offered a stable definition for the term "community" in service-learning contexts. The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (2014) identifies communities as spaces where any group or public comes together "under a set of shared beliefs and practices" (p. 5); other scholars, though, acknowledge that the term "community" functions under an unstable definition in service-learning practice. Cruz and Giles (2000), for instance, contend that service-learning practitioners refer to communities inconsistently as businesses or non-profits, as the populations who use those businesses or non-profits, as specific geographies, or as intentionally constructed communities (p. 29). Cruz and Giles' (2000) observations align with other scholars who acknowledge that those communities that service-learning programs partner with are not stable or static constructs (e.g., Grabill, 2010; Banks, 2011; Getto et al., 2014; Goodman, 1998). For the purposes of this project, though, I will use "community" or "community partner" to refer generally to the organizations, publics, corporations, assemblages, or geographies that service-learning programs partner with. While I believe that the notion of community deserves

consideration and scholarly attention, my purpose here is not to advocate for a stable conception of community in service-learning practice.

Similarly, I will periodically use "Glenhills" and "ELPS" throughout my argument to refer to the range of people, spaces, ideas, and practices that I worked with or experienced while working in the elementary school. I want to be clear, though, that both the elementary school and the school system as a whole resisted any stable notion of community. In fact, as I hope to show later in this essay, the "community" that WRA 395 partnered with fluctuated, shifted, and changed as people moved towards and away from the project or as new assets, needs, and logistics directed our work toward different spaces and people. I do not intend to reduce the complexity of my experiences or the diversity of my research participants to a single word, phrase, or text. I chose to use "Glenhills," "ELPS," and/or "community" only for the sake of brevity.

Similar to the scholarly discussion surrounding "community," the term "service learning" does not operate under a stable definition. Many scholars have offered definitions for service learning (see, for example Bringle, Hatcher, & McIntosh, 2006; Jacoby, 1996; Torres & Sinton, 2000; Furco, 2002; or Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). The scope of definitions suggests that there exists no static conception of service learning, but rather a range of approaches with various methodologies and intended outcomes. WRA 395's approach to service learning stems explicitly from the definition offered by MSU's Center for Civic Engagement and Service Learning. They define academic service learning as:

> A teaching method that combines community service with academic instructions as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while

> developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility and commitment to the community. (What is Service-Learning and Civic Engagement?, n.d.)

This definition approaches service learning as a pedagogy, as a way of teaching that balances the needs of a classroom and the needs of a community partner. It also encourages student learning, allowing students to develop such skills as critical thinking, civic mindfulness, and problem solving by working with organizations or communities outside the classroom. Further, such pedagogies allow students to see themselves as committed members of local publics.

Notably, other scholars have moved towards the term "civic engagement" to refer to university/ community partnerships. While definitions of service learning tend to acknowledge how service learning can cultivate academic skill, definitions of civic engagement emphasize the effects of these practices on community partners. Ehrlich (2000), for instance, identifies civic engagement as a "means to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and nonpolitical processes" (p. vi). Ehrlich's (2000) emphasis on promoting community change suggests that civic-engagement practitioners prioritize the effects of service-learning practices on community partners. While I recognize the different emphases for the terms "service-learning" and "civic engagement," my goal here is not to argue for a distinction between service learning and civic engagement, but to recognize that there exists a discussion surrounding these topics. I will use service learning to refer to the work we did with Glenhills because the class identifies itself as an academic service-learning course.

Again, I hope that by describing my perspectives on these four terms, I have situated my argument across scholarly conversations surrounding Cultural Rhetorics and service learning

while offering a framework for how this project approaches ideas central to working with publics outside the university, including “community” and “service learning.”

CHAPTER 2: Building a Partnership, Listening for Assets

The commitment is to learn to listen deeply to texts and images and for voices and sounds in order to better understand both what is happening and what is going on; to listen to their views and ideas instead of just our own, to their stories, rather than ours.
(Royster & Kirsch, 2012, p. 147)

About two years ago, I met Jane, the president of the East Lansing Parent Teacher council, for coffee. It was near the end of my first semester of graduate school, and that week, I remember stressing over one of my term papers for a composition studies class. I had contacted Jane to talk to her about some outreach activities hosted by The Writing Center at MSU, where I worked as a graduate assistant. I hoped that Jane, as president of the parent council, could promote the outreach activities hosted by The Writing Center to students, parents, and staff in the local school system who might be interested in attending our events.

She expressed interest in The Writing Center's outreach activities, and I sent her links to information about our upcoming events. Our conversation, though, quickly turned away from The Writing Center. We spent a significant portion of our conversation talking and listening to each other. She told me how much her son likes playing video games and reading comic books, and about how much he dislikes the reading assignments encouraged by one of his teachers. I told her about my time spent in AmeriCorps, where I had volunteered full-time in an elementary school and worked with kindergarteners through third graders on their reading. Because of my time spent in an elementary school, I felt comfortable talking with Jane about some topics associated with K-12 education, and I had heard many teachers, parents, and administrators discuss some of the same ideas Jane had brought up in our conversations. Jane had a deep knowledge of the ins and outs of the school system, a seemingly endless contact list of people involved with East Lansing's public schools, and the kind of passionate commitment to education that I had seen in many elementary school parents and teachers.

Eventually, Jane said that she was intrigued by the work we did in The Writing Center, and she said she would put me in contact with ELPS' curriculum director, Tracy. I had a number of meetings and email exchanges with Tracy that winter. We got to know each other, and we talked together about our interests and the possibility of working together. Like Jane, Tracy showed a boundless passion for what she did. Improving education for students in East Lansing seemed to motivate most decisions she made. She also continually emphasized the budget shortfalls that affected the schools. During one of our first conversations, Tracy and I started talking about a potential partnership between ELPS and The Writing Center at MSU. She said that she envisioned a long-term, sustained partnership focused around literacy instruction in the schools. Tracy mentioned that some of the elementary schools could use more literacy support, and she suggested a partnership in which The Writing Center would send tutors to an elementary school to help students with their writing.

Listening to and working with Tracy and Jane helped me think about the knowledge practices that circulated in ELPS, to consider where we had common ground, and to orient myself towards their self-identified assets and needs. I grounded this process of listening and reflecting in perspectives associated with feminist and rhetorical theory. Royster and Kirsch (2012), for example, argue that listening allows scholars to respectfully interact with diverse perspectives, identities, and cultures. They write:

> The commitment is to learn to listen deeply to texts and images and for voices and sounds in order to better understand both what is happening and what is going on; to listen to their views and ideas instead of just our own, to their stories, rather than ours. In other words—even if and when we find ourselves disagreeing in the end with their values, ideologies, or beliefs, we still look and listen carefully and caringly, contemplate our

> perceptions, and speculate about the promise, potential, and realities of these rhetors' lives and work. (p. 147)

Royster and Kirsch's call to engage "carefully and caringly" suggests a form of listening in which researchers do not dismiss various viewpoints or ideas, but acknowledge the forms of meaning-making already present within a cultural community. They ask researchers to work with difference, rather than work against it or ignore it completely. As I listened to Tracy and Jane, I thought about how the realities of their lives and work influenced the partnership they envisioned.

Royster and Kirsch's (2012) call for ethical intercultural exchange mirrors Royster's (1996) earlier work, in which she describes a process of listening rooted in honor and respect. Royster (1996) argues that researchers need to approach difference (specifically racial and cultural difference) not from a position of authority and entitlement, but with the intent to listen to cultural context. She warns:

> when you visit other people's "home places," especially when you have not been invited, you simply can not go tramping around the house like you own the place, no matter how smart you are, or how much imagination you can muster, or how much authority and entitlement outside that home you may be privileged to hold. And you certainly can not go around name calling, saying things like, "You people are intellectually inferior and have a limited capacity to achieve," without taking into account who the family is, what its living has been like, and what its history and achievement have been about. (1996, p. 32)

Royster directs her argument toward scholars writing on race and ethnicity, and the "home places" she mentions refer to the rhetorics and practices central to cultural communities. Similar

to Royster and Kirsch (2012), she asserts that scholars should not engage with or deem unworthy practices and rhetorics without fully understanding their contextual significance. She asks scholars to listen, to consider the potentials for exchanging knowledge and negotiating meaning by honoring and respecting the perspectives of others (p. 38). I tried to apply this practice of listening to the methods I used for establishing a partnership with Glenhills; I oriented my interactions around listening to Tracy and Jane, as well as honoring, respecting, and identifying potentials for exchanging knowledge with ELPS. As I work in the "home places" important to Tracy and Jane, I listen to and respect the knowledge practices central to ELPS, not rely on any sense of authority or entitlement afforded to me by the university.

During the next meeting at The Writing Center, I proposed Tracy's idea to our director and a group of graduate students. I was initially fearful that The Writing Center could do little to make this partnership a reality; a long-term partnership involving writing consulting at an elementary school away from campus, I thought, would take too many resources, including time, money, and people. However, when I proposed the idea, The Writing Center assistant director, Danielle, and the other graduate students seemed open to and optimistic about the idea. At this point, Danielle mentioned that the service-learning course she taught, Writing Center Theory and Practice (WRA 395) was looking for a new community group to partner with.

WRA 395 is a course designed to introduce undergraduate MSU students to the theories and practices associated with writing center consultation. Offered every Fall and Spring semester, it is a course required for any MSU undergraduate who wishes to apply for a position in The Writing Center at MSU. The syllabus focuses the course's goals on understanding how techniques of writing consultation operate across contexts and situations:

> Writing Center Theory and Practice is designed to examine the techniques of consulting in writing, as well as the various theories that undergird consulting. In particular, this course will train students to consult with writers in the University Writing Center, as well as other consulting spaces across campuses, age levels, and wider communities. The course will focus on the practical components of writing center work and how these methods can be applied across settings. Specific topics will include collaborative learning, approaches to consultations, consultant roles, the role of grammar instruction, consulting strategies for a variety of students, the use of computers in the writing center, composition and learning theories that influence writing center work, and resource development. We also hope you will leave this course in May feeling as though you can apply much of what you've learned (if not most or all) to your future courses and plans in the professional or academic world.

In addition to WRA 395's goal of introducing MSU undergraduates to theories associated with writing center consultation, the course allows students to practice those theories as an academic service-learning course. The class meets once a week and, in lieu of a second weekly group meeting, the students practice the theories they discuss by performing observations, co-consultations, and consultations with actual clients at The Writing Center at MSU. They also spend approximately one hour per week working with a community partner to practice these theories. WRA 395's professor and the director of The Writing Center incorporated the service-learning component to help WRA 395 students practice consulting with learners who have a wide range of skills and diverse backgrounds and to prepare MSU students to work with the range of clients that The Writing Center serves.

I was hopeful—a partnership between WRA 395 and a local elementary school could address Tracy's goal for a partnership, address the district's self-identified needs for literacy support, and it could meet Danielle's need for a new community partner while allowing students in WRA 395 to practice the skills and theories they would use as writing center consultants. When I told Tracy the news, she organized a meeting with an elementary school where she thought ELPS' teachers and students could benefit best from a partnership, Glenhills Elementary.

Glenhills Elementary serves approximately 300 students in a residential area of East Lansing, Michigan, about a mile north of MSU's campus (see Figure 1). Tracy identified this school as a potential partner because the teachers and administration there specifically identified support in writing as a goal for their school. In the annual school improvement plan, the school's principal set a goal that, in the upcoming academic year, "All Glenhills students will demonstrate growth in writing achievement" (p. 35). The school also recently faced district reconfiguration that led to an increase in Glenhills' English Language Learner (ELL) student population. In the academic year 2014-2015, Glenhills transitioned from serving only 5th and 6th grade students to serving Kindergarten through fifth grade. In part, this change stemmed from larger district reconfiguration in which all five East Lansing Elementary schools transitioned into K-5 buildings (Mastrangelo, 2012). This change also aligns with another school reconfiguration effort that closed one of East Lansing's elementary schools—Cedar Elementary. Cedar Elementary served a large number of ELL students and children of international scholars studying at MSU. After the school's closure, ELPS's elementary districts reshaped so most students who originally attended Cedar began attending Glenhills Elementary (Mastrangelo, 2012). Further, as part of the reconfiguration, Glenhills lost one of their ELL teachers. In the school's annual school improvement plan, Glenhills's principal affirmed that serving a large

number of incoming international students was one of the school's major focuses and most significant challenges. She writes, "We have a very transient international population, while our neighborhood population stays constant" (Ware, 2015, p. 13), and "In our first year, it has been challenging to meet the needs of incoming non-English speaking students, as they enroll throughout the school year" (Ware, 2015, p. 13). Tracy identified this school specifically because of the challenges that the school faced and the literacy needs they identified in their school system.

While the goal for writing improvement and the challenges associated with serving international students represent two valid goals, I do not want to limit any description of the school to its deficits or the challenges it faces. Further, it would be a mistake to view serving a large number of international students as a deficit; while Glenhills faces challenges to serve some of these students, the diversity the students contribute to the elementary school only enrich the educational and interpersonal environment there. Additionally, the needs that Tracy, Jane, and Linda mentioned stem from their deep knowledge of the pressures that faced their school system, including budget cuts, the elimination of support services, and district reconfiguration efforts. Even though these needs motioned towards the deficits within the school system, they also revealed the assets that circulated within ELPS, including a dedication to improving the educational experiences of the students in East Lansing. This asset—working towards a better education for local students—drove the partnership as much as the expressed deficit of literacy support.

After more meetings and emails with various stakeholders in the project, we eventually established a concrete plan for implementing the partnership between Glenhills and MSU. Over the course of the semester, students enrolled in WRA 395 spent one hour a week at Glenhills,

working with elementary students on their writing. To help coordinate the partnership, I worked as an instructional intern in WRA 395, organizing parts of their service learning, teaching occasional lessons, and working with WRA 395 students. Each MSU student partnered with an individual Glenhills teacher. The school's principal, Linda, identified the greatest need for writing support in upper elementary grades—grades three through five. As a result, Danielle and I worked to partner the MSU students with third through fifth grade classrooms. Once we established connections, MSU students and individual teachers coordinated their schedules so the MSU students would be in the school when the teachers were focused on writing instruction. The elementary teachers could direct MSU students to work with certain elementary students, or they could tell MSU students to give instruction on particular writing practices. In all, six MSU students completed their service learning at Glenhills in the first semester, and they partnered with four elementary classrooms, two in third grade and two in fifth grade. Based on the constraints of the MSU's schedule, MSU students worked with Glenhills for one semester, and they had the option to return in the spring to volunteer. However, because WRA 395 is offered every semester, a new group of MSU students start working with the elementary school at the beginning of each term.

The model for this partnership balanced the needs of WRA 395 with the assets, needs, and values central to Glenhills. Primarily, Glenhills and ELPS' assets and needs guided the way we worked together, and we oriented the projects' design around both the challenges that faced their school system and the staff and administration's commitment to improving student learning. The partnership also allowed for flexibility in those goals; the Glenhills teachers could work with MSU students to distribute instruction based on both the day-to-day needs of their classrooms and their elementary students' individual learning styles. We balanced Glenhill's

goals with WRA 395's intended learning outcomes; the WRA 395 students could practice writing consultation strategies with a range of learning styles and they worked toward understanding how writing consultation operates within different contexts and educational environments. Additionally, the partnership's logistics made working together more feasible; the school's location—about a mile north of campus on a bus line—was important to Danielle to ensure that her students could reach the school. Because the course is offered every semester, too, we worked towards Tracy's initial goal of establishing a long-term and sustainable partnership.

While the partnership we established balanced each stakeholders' goals, there were many times where my work with ELPS frayed at the seams or nearly fell apart. Jane, for instance, was my main contact with ELPS at the beginning of the planning stages. However, in the summer before the partnership began, we fell out of touch. Texts and emails went unanswered for days—on both of our parts. Near the end of August, Jane texted me to say that she had taken a position at MSU and would not be able to help facilitate the partnership anymore. Luckily, the teachers and staff at Glenhills and I had established enough of a connection to fully coordinate the partnership at the beginning of the school year. Yet Jane's move revealed much about the nature of community work; partnerships often begin with unstable footings, and the process of negotiating a partnership flexes and adapts as people move toward and away from their respective organizations.

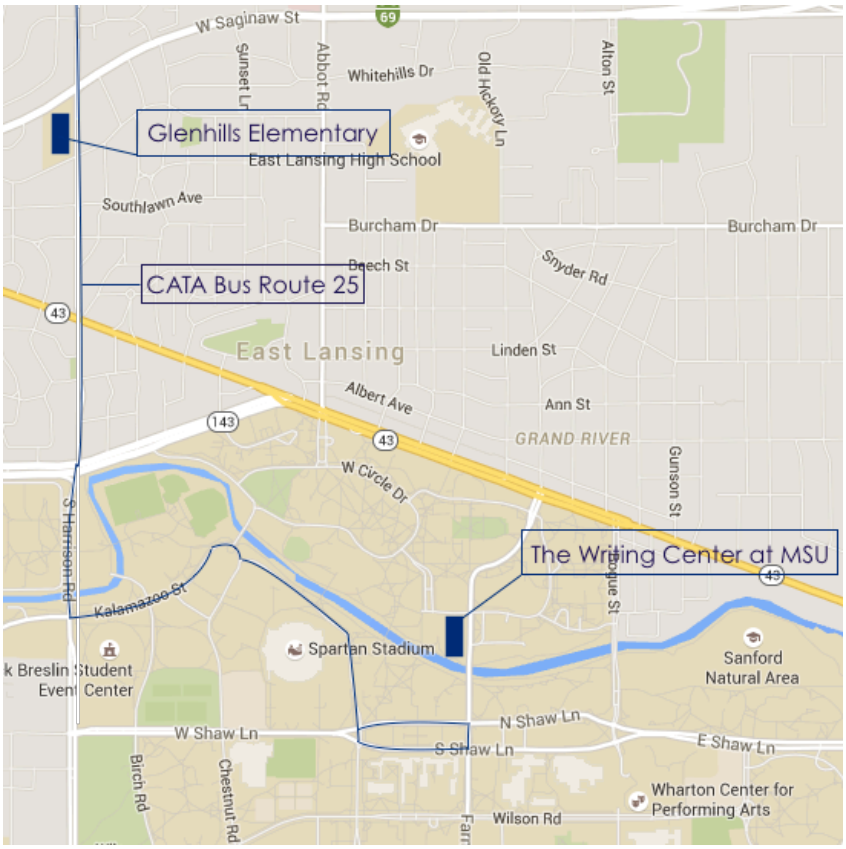

Figure 1: Map of East Lansing

I have intentionally dedicated a large portion of my project so far to describing the meetings, emails, and research that occurred before the students in WRA 395 began working with the students in Glenhills; I want to show that a methodology of listening to ELPS and Glenhills was a continual, sustained, and long-term process. In all, the process took approximately nine months to coordinate before WRA 395 students began their service learning in Glenhills (see Figure 2). I also hoped to show that listening not only helped identify the needs initially identified by Tracy, but also helped respect the assets and values—including the dedication to improving student education—that circulated within ELPS. Listening functioned as a recursive and reciprocal process as well; as new spaces, members of the partnership, and ideas entered into the possible partnership, we had to (re)listen to each other and (re)identify the parameters of our partnership.

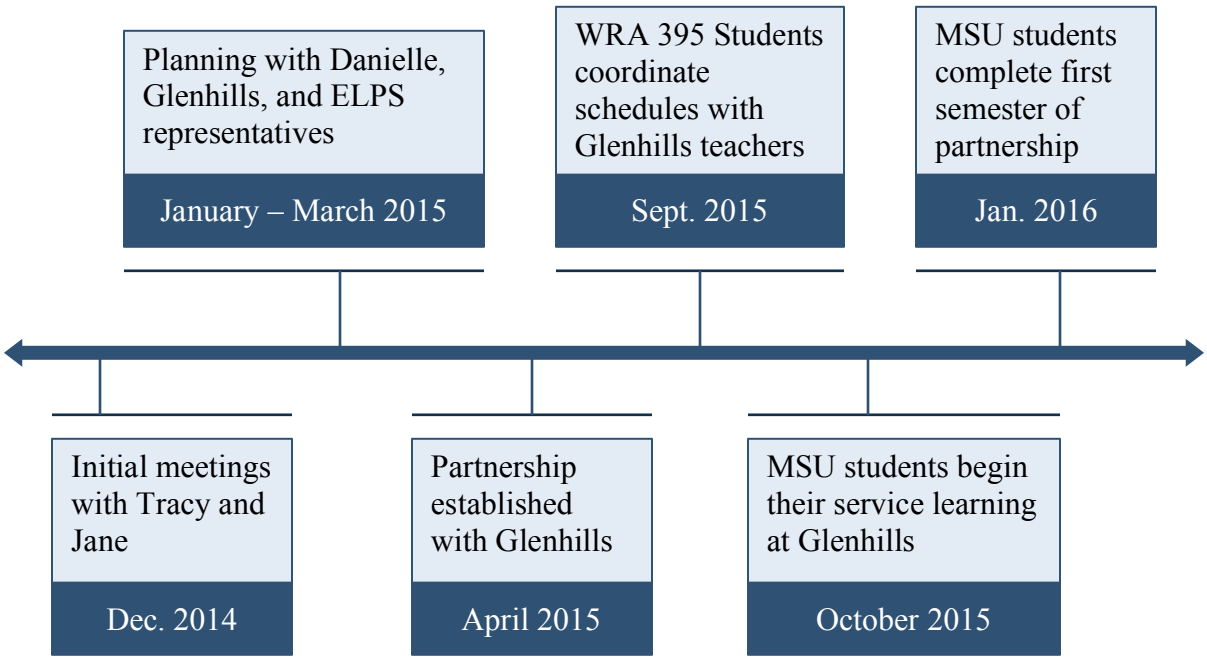

Figure 2: Timetable

CHAPTER 3: Enacting Relationships

"I can't believe how much I've learned from these students. Though they're much younger than the clients that come to the writing center at MSU, they still have great eyes for storytelling and amazing questions to be answered"

In this chapter, I hope to illustrate how the WRA 395 students, Glenhills teachers and staff, and I cultivated relational networks over the course of the semester. On one hand, it is fairly obvious that relationships are important in service-learning partnerships. Grabill (2012) emphasizes this point, writing, "all research, especially all community-based research, is a function of good relationships with the individuals and groups who facilitate and participate in a project. This is an obvious point" (p. 214). While Grabill (2012) aptly recognizes the role of interpersonal rapport between university researchers and community members, I believe my participants' responses motioned toward a more complex understanding of the way relationships influenced their service learning; relationships formed not only between people, but also between ideas, writing center theory, and practices associated with writing consultation.

That is, I cultivated relationships with the people at Glenhills; the MSU students formed relationships with Glenhills students and teachers; the MSU students started to draw connections between the work they did with Glenhills students and the practices associated with writing center consultation; and the Glenhills teachers cultivated relationships based on the MSU students they worked with and the needs they identified in their classrooms. In this section, I argue that by cultivating these relationships, roles of researcher and participant blurred. Additionally, by recognizing the importance of these relationships, I hope to move away from viewing Glenhills and ELPS in terms of texts or objects of study, but instead as members of a network of connections and relationships.

3.1 Method

To assess the partnership, I distributed open-ended qualitative questionnaires via an online survey platform to the six students who completed their service-learning component at Glenhills, the four teachers we partnered with, the school's principal, and Danielle, the professor for WRA 395. I distributed surveys at the beginning of the semester to gauge each participant's goals for the partnership, and I distributed surveys at the end of the semester asking participants to reflect on their experiences[2]. Generally, the surveys were oriented around the following questions:

1. How do we build an outreach infrastructure that will be flexible enough to account for changing personnel yet stable enough to maintain over a long term?
2. How can we ensure reciprocity between all the constituents in this project (that is, MSU students, MSU faculty, Glenhills staff, Glenhills students East Lansing Public Schools administrators)? How can we ensure that all involved parties meet their goals?

I also collected the reflections that the WRA 395 students wrote over the course of the semester, and my email exchanges with both WRA 395 and ELPS representatives.

I sought to employ methods that were both accessible to the people I worked with and reflected and respected their experiences with our partnership. By distributing open-ended surveys, my methods for recording my participants' experiences were unobtrusive, were easily accessible for the teachers and staff working at Glenhills, provided an opportunity for my participants to share their perceptions on the partnership in their own words, and offered an anonymous process for reflecting on their experiences (Creswell, 2014, p. 192). Further, my

[2] I attached copies of the survey questions in Appendix I

methods for collecting data helped justify my research to various institutional and disciplinary communities I belong to. It is the same process Mukavetz (2014) motions towards when she asks, "How do we negotiate the complexity of writing as the arms of the institution while being responsible and accountable to the cultural communities we work with and for?" (p. 110). For me, the "complexity of writing as the arms of the institution" involved writing and distributing questionnaires that could gain approval from Internal Review Board committees. In essence, I used these methods for assessing the partnership because they balanced the institutional and disciplinary conventions central to my field with a form accessible for the people I worked with.

In addition, I sought to analyze the information from these questionnaires and blog reflections using methods that respected the experiences of my participants. Some research design scholars (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2009) advocate for a process data analysis that seeks to dissect responses from research participants. According to Shawn Wilson (2008), such scientific research paradigms ask researchers to break down the responses from participants, categorize them based on commonalities, and rearrange them into a logical order. Reorganizing and categorizing information should, then, allow a new theory, pattern or truth to emerge from the data (p. 119). Wilson, however, offers an alternative approach to analyzing the stories that research participants tell; instead of a linear and scientific logic, Wilson argues for an intuitive logic, one that considers the entirety of information rather than dissecting and rearranging it (p. 119). Such a perspective moves away from viewing ELPS, Glenhills, and WRA 395 students as points of data and objects of analysis. Wilson's perspective, instead, encouraged me to recognize that the people involved in this project were members of a collective who worked together every week to motivate change at Glenhills, and dissecting and rearranging their stories does not do justice to the subjective and relational contexts in which they were situated.

Instead of dissecting and rearranging the responses from these surveys into a new theory or logic, I built from Wilson's (2008) perspective on relationality interpret the responses from the people at Glenhills and the students in WRA 395. Rather than positioning myself as a researcher who creates knowledge by objectively analyzing, coding, organizing, and/or categorizing data from my research participants, I looked for the relationships between ideas and responses and between people. This perspective stems from Wilson's (2008) theory of relationality. Wilson (2008) asks researchers to see relationships not as static links between people or ideas, but as the interactions, associations, and bonds that define those people or ideas. For Wilson, relationships occur not only between people, but also between ideas, spaces, ideologies, and beliefs (p. 94-5). He writes, "rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of" (Wilson, 2008, p. 80, emphasis in original). Wilson's perspective allows me to see relationships not as unnecessary byproducts of working with people, but as associations central to the research process.

Others, too, argue that when researchers assess service-learning partnerships, they should recognize the role of subjective, interpersonal relationships. Kistler (2011) proposes that basing community outreach in ethnographic methods establishes service learning as an active and socially conscious practice. She observes that community service programs often take essentialist views of the populations they work with; approaching service learning from an empirical standpoint—one based on data collection and results-oriented research—overlooks the role of human agency in service-learning situations. Instead, she argues for a model based in collective ethnography, in which a researcher works with a community with which she already has a concrete connection. Using this model, service learning could "represent the indigenous cultural

perspective more justly and holistically by engaging local collaborators in a dialogue that guides all steps of the research process" (Kistler, 2011, p. 13). Kistler's approach works toward a methodology that reflects the necessarily interpersonal and subjective nature of working with communities.

The perspective that I took—one that directed me to recognize the relationships between the stories my participants told—stems from the work of both Wilson (2008) and Kistler (2011); it recognizes that the people in this partnership worked together every week and knew each other personally. By looking for the relationships inherent to my participants' responses, I tried to interpret their stories in a way that accounted for the relationships they formed over the course of the semester; because my research considered responses from people who are in relation to one another, I did not want to separate them from the context of those relationships when I was reading and interpreting their responses.

My position as a researcher, too, resisted any clear definition between researcher and participant. The work of Royster (1996) Royster and Kirsch (2012) and other scholars (e.g., Powell & Takayoshi, 2003; Getto, Leon & Getto-Rivait, 2014; Moss & Lyons-Robinson, 2014) encouraged me to negotiate my role in the service-learning partnership. Royster's (1996) argument, as I tried to articulate above, encouraged me to approach Glenhills with the intent to learn, respect, and listen to the (hi)stories of the people I work with. Getto et al. (2014) echo this approach, observing that the first step for a service-learning program is to get to know to the community partner, its knowledges, its literacies, and its histories, to listen for the knowledge work already happening within a community (pp. 72-3). Notably, they extend this approach to ask researchers to see themselves and their community partners as members of a collective (p. 90) that pools knowledge, expertise, and experience. The model for community engagement

advocated by Getto et al. and Royster—one that asks researchers to first listen to the community, but gradually become part of a collective—informed my approach for the partnership with Glenhills. Instead of acknowledging the divisions between researcher and community, Getto et al. (2014) identify the possibilities for creating a new community or collective that includes as its members both the researcher and community partners.

My relationship to this project—as an instructional intern and volunteer at Glenhills — situated me not as an objective researcher but as a subjective participant in the process. A Cultural Rhetorics methodology encourages me to recognize this fluid boundary between researcher and participant (Mukavetz, 2014, p. 108). I could not position myself as a distant observer who analyzes data, but as a participant who worked with the spaces, people, and practices that were central to my research. Because I served as an instructional intern in the course, I became a subjective member of the class's community. Further, because I volunteered at Glenhills each week, working with Jordan and Jasmine and talking with teachers, principals, and secretaries there, I could not see myself as an objective researcher who was removed from the participants of the research. Instead, by working closely with the elementary students, staff at Glenhills, WRA 395's professor, and the MSU students, I became part of an interconnected network of relationships that resisted any clear division between researcher and participant.

To validate my findings, I worked collaboratively with the WRA 395 students and the staff at Glenhills. I asked them to read sections of my project and give feedback on my writing and analysis. My methods for validating my results stem not from using established systems of data analysis to ensure that my findings are replicable across multiple contexts, but from working with my participants to ensure that my findings accurately represent the work we did together. I grounded this process in Kistler's (2011) call to collaborate with research participants throughout

the research process, and I drew from Mukavetz's (2014) model for sharing research results with my participants.

Both practices—observing the relationships between my participants' responses and working collaboratively with the people involved in this project—blurred the distinctions between researcher and participant. I approached the people I worked with as makers of knowledge. I suggest that the MSU students and the Glenhills teachers and staff operated not as research subjects or sources of data, but as agents who actively contribute to, inform, and shape the research process. Rather than positioning myself as a researcher who creates knowledge by objectively analyzing, organizing, and categorizing data from my research participants, I see those whom I work with as collaborators and theorists themselves.

Further, by looking for relationships between my participants' responses, I started to observe complex relational systems that grew from the partnership. Again, while other researchers (e.g., Grabill, 2012) have noted the importance of interpersonal relationships in community-based research contexts, my participants' responses motioned toward more nuanced understandings of how relationships functioned in the service-learning project. In the rest of this chapter, I will map how the WRA students saw themselves engrained in relational systems both between people and between ideas, theories, and practices associated with writing center consultation.

3.2 Mapping Relationships

Many times, the WRA 395 students articulated their roles in the elementary school in terms of tutor/tutee or as mentors that help the elementary students. For example, two WRA 395 students recounted:

> "I hope that, over the semester, I can find a way to create some repport [sic] with her and help her realize that writing isn't the chore that she currently thinks it is. Until that happens though, I hope to help as I can, even if it isn't much, and slowly build the relationship necessary to really make a difference."
>
> "More than anything though, I know that I am going to have a great time at Glenhills and have the opportunity to help budding writers."
>
> "To help the students, I explained to them that there was no such thing as a bad story (at least not at their age) and addressed their concerns about length."

The WRA 395 students recognize that one of their roles in the school was to distribute knowledge to the elementary students. Using a rhetoric grounded in notions of "help[ing]," "mak[ing] a difference," and "explaining," some of the WRA 395 students positioned themselves as sources of knowledge that they can direct toward improving the students' writing.

Notions of "help" and perspectives focused on distributing knowledge work against best practices in both service-learning and writing center scholarship. Many service-learning researchers (e.g., Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014) move away from viewing university students and professors as distributors of knowledge, arguing that such a model perpetuates an inaccurate division that configures communities in terms of deficits and universities in terms of assets. Other scholars, too, suggest service-learning partnerships can easily assume a colonial power structure when university affiliates see themselves as those who "help" community partners (e.g., Gorski, 2011; Kistler, 2011; Gilbride-Brown, 2011; Good, 2005; Coogan, 2006; Gent, 2010; Webster & Coffey, 2010; Wu & Dahlgren, 2010; Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010).

When universities approach service learning without careful ethical and cultural considerations, according to Gorski (2011), community partnerships can take the form of privileged university students "doing something *to* or *for* or even *upon* disenfranchised community rather than *with* it" (emphasis in original, p. x). Such notions of "help[ing]" and "explaining," too, work against some canonical approaches to writing center theory that describe consultations in terms of collaboration and nondirective learning (e.g., Hawkins, 1980; Bruffee, 1981; Bruffee, 1983; Lunsford, 1991). I was initially nervous when I saw the MSU students describe their roles as helpers or teachers; I feared that the partnership had shifted into one that ran contrary to theories and best practices associated with both service-learning partnerships and writing center consultation.

However, in this case, I suggest that positioning WRA 395 students as helpers largely aligns with how the teachers at Glenhills articulated the WRA 395 students' roles. One teacher recounted that the partnership "helped my students to have someone who they knew would come every week and work on writing with them." Another explained that having a tutor allowed them to reach more of the students in her class, writing, "I was able to give 2 students the help they needed when I was working with the other students." They go on to say, "my students had a mentor to help them write and this was needed!" Another Glenhills teacher, too, wrote:

> "…it was very helpful to have a student to work with individual and a small group of students on their writing. Also, my particular student was bi-lingual in Chinese and English[,] which was exceedingly helpful to my students who speak and write in Chinese as their first language and are learning English."

The teachers' observations about the WRA 395 students' roles in their classrooms reiterate rhetorics that center on "help," "mentor," "need," and improving writing. Such rhetorics mirror

the MSU student's approach to "help[ing]" and distributing knowledge to the elementary students.

Further, the MSU students' language centered on "help[ing]" aligns with both the principal's and the district's goals. Linda, Glenhills' principal, originally identified her goals for the partnership in terms of improving student learning. She wrote that she wanted "to establish a collaborative partnership with MSU that results in enriched educational experiences for our students." Her emphasis on providing an "enriched educational experience" for the elementary students aligns with the teachers' descriptions of the partnership that centered on helping students improve their writing. Linda's goal of enriching the educational experience for students also mirrors the way some MSU students described their roles in terms of "helping" or explaining. Further, in one of my first meetings with Tracy, she identified a need for literacy support in Glenhills specifically because of its large ELL population. The MSU student who spoke Mandarin helped address Tracy's goal through their tutoring in the classroom.

I argue that when the students say they are "helping" or addressing literacy needs in the school, it is not necessarily a perspective that falsely positions them as authorities. Instead, the needs they sought to address through their "help" are part of a relational system—those needs are related to the teachers' goals, the principals' goals, and the goals of the particular elementary students at Glenhills. The role of mentor or distributor of knowledge is a role that aligns with the goals for the partnership. By viewing their role in the elementary school in terms of helping elementary students, the WRA 395 students, in part, worked within a relational system constructed around Glenhills' goals for the partnership.

As the semester continued, some WRA 395 students started to see their relationship to the service learning shift and change. In the excerpt from one of the WRA 395 student's blog

reflections above, they wrote that they hope to "create some repport [sic]" with students and "build the relationship necessary to really make a difference." The WRA 395 student's attention to building rapport motioned towards a process of cultivating interpersonal relationships with the students. Indeed, as the semester went on, the WRA 395 students saw their roles as tutors or helpers shift to account for the personal connections they developed with the students. Some WRA 395 students recounted:

> "The kids made me feel like I mattered…I had kids who called me friend and hugged me when I left and were quite sad to see me go."

> "On my last day when I was leaving, a girl I worked with earlier ran out and gave me a hug goodbye. It's great to see not only how we consultants affect a clients writing, but them as a person as well."

> "I adore kids so I expected to get attached. Maybe not as strongly as I did, but kids are unpredictable and they seemed to like me a lot, which made leaving very saddening."

By the end of the semester, the WRA 395 students articulated their roles at the elementary school not only in terms of distributing knowledge and helping the elementary students, but also in terms of strong interpersonal connections with students.

In addition to interpersonal relationships with elementary students, WRA 395 students started to see connections between theories associated with writing center consultation and the work they did in Glenhills. Some MSU students told me about the ways the elementary students taught them to become better writing center consultants, and others described the energy and enthusiasm that the elementary students brought to the tutoring environment:

> "I think helping the students provided a lot of insight on the writing process, which has already helped me understand other writers when I tutor a lot better than I would've otherwise."

> "This week I was reminded once again how incredibly creative and driven these kids are in their writing. It makes me want to be the best consultant I can!"

> "With all that I learned, what I loved most was seeing them working hard and enjoying telling their stories at the same time. At MSU the stories may be research papers, graduate school applications, or literature analyses, but they all have meaning that is important in some way shape or form to the writer. I want to help them achieve their goals just like the students at Glenhills."

> "Working with the kids really gives you insight into different ways of thinking because the kids are still able to look at the world's events without the jaded or cynical viewpoint that most older people have. Experiencing that is really helpful when it comes to working with people from different cultures."

The MSU students connect the traits they saw in the elementary students to the work they hoped to do in The Writing Center. The motivation and enthusiasm the elementary students showed in turn motivated MSU students to be better writing center consultants. Their responses, too, show a complex interplay between the different relationships they cultivated with students; on one hand, cultivating interpersonal relationships with the elementary students motivated them to become better writing center consultants, and on the other hand, the act of tutoring the

elementary students in turn taught the WRA 395 students how to interact with clients in The Writing Center. Their responses show that over the course of the semester, they cultivated a network of relationships that connected them to the students and connected the work they did in the elementary school to the practices associated with writing center consultation.

The WRA 395 students even reiterated that the skills they cultivated at Glenhills reappeared when they practiced consulting university students. As part of the WRA 395 course, MSU students practice co-consulting in The Writing Center, working with actual clients who come to the center. In some of their blog reflections, they described moments when co-consulting reminded them of working with Glenhills students:

> "I finally got to do a co-consultation, which seemed unnerving at first. However, things lightened up pretty quickly. I feel like what got my nerves down was realizing that this is basically like helping at Glenhills…"

> "After thinking for a moment, she said she struggled at first, and then worked hard to get to where she was. The consultant said that's what she should talk about—not that she's a good student, but that she overcame difficulties and engaged in her studies to become the scholar that she is today. Interestingly enough, this reminded me of what my teacher at Glenhills is teaching her fifth grade students: to show their story, not just tell it."

The WRA 395 students show that the practices they cultivated during their time at Glenhills reappeared when they started practicing consultation in The Writing Center. Their relationship to practicing writing center consultation in the elementary school affected the way they approached consulting at The Writing Center; they drew on skills, perspectives, and lessons learned at Glenhills.

One MSU student, however, noticed that tutoring at Glenhills did not align with their experiences practicing consultation:

> "Helping kids 10 years younger than me at Glenhills is a completely different experience from helping someone the same age as (or older than) I am. With kids, they trust that you know what you're talking about. With other college students, you have to convince them you know what you're talking about. And I don't even work at The Writing Center yet, which is reason enough for a client to doubt that I know anything about anything."

Even though this student did not align their experiences at Glenhills with their experiences in The Writing Center, they still drew connections between work in the elementary school and their work in The Writing Center. They saw the differences in the relationship between consultant and client at The Writing Center and the relationship between tutor and tutee at the elementary school.

While the partnership between WRA 395 and Glenhills encouraged a reciprocal and community-centered relationship, the course leaves space for more opportunities to (re)integrate the knowledge made with Glencairn into the WRA 395 classroom. WRA 395 students made connections between consultation and serving at Glencairn in their weekly blogs and graded assignments. WRA 395's class time, however, often focuses on the week's readings or is allotted for students to practice writing consultation strategies. The course offers few contexts for incorporating the lessons from service learning into the class' discussions. The breadth of material covered in the course—including research and practice on consulting strategies and logistic considerations for working at The Writing Center at MSU—may limit the potential to spend significant course time discussing service-learning experiences. However, a pedagogy that more directly draws connections between service and course outcomes could, as Rìos (2015)

suggests, encourage students to more critically consider how collaborating with communities can shape and change the knowledge they make in the university classroom[3] (p. 63).

By working with the elementary students, the WRA 395 students saw themselves enmeshed in a system of relationships. These relationships were not only interpersonal, but drew connections across theory, practice, and tutoring spaces. While some of the students articulated their roles in terms of distributors of knowledge, others worked toward networks and systems of relationships that connected their service-learning experiences and writing center practice. Further, in building these systems of relationships, the people involved with this partnership also "built" community. This community shifted and changed based on the way we cultivated those relationships—the people we worked with was directed by my conversations with Jane and Tracy, and the skills that WRA 395 students brought to the elementary school helped determine which elementary students they worked with. The elementary students we worked with, too, were influenced by ELPS's goals, including serving a large ELL population, and local goals, which depended on the goals of the individual teachers, the specific days in the class, and the needs of particular elementary students.

This system of relationships resists a community engagement model that configures our community partners—the students and teachers at Glenhills—as texts or objects of study. Scholars of Cultural Rhetorics have observed the tendency for universities to textualize and objectify community partners, noting that civic engagement partnerships often configure research participants solely as objects to be studied or theorized. Monberg (2008), for instance, argues that some service-learning scholars approach community members as research objects. She writes, "community members are seen as research objects to be categorized rather than as

[3] In Appendices II and III, I suggest curricular revisions for WRA 395 based on these observations.

human beings who might be affected by the methods and outcomes of academic knowledge production" (p. 98). The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab (2014), too, affirms this tendency. They observe that frequently within the field of rhetoric, "human practices and makings are often reduced to texts, or to textual objects" (p. 4). The work of Monberg and The Cultural Rhetorics Theory Lab recognize the tendency to textualize the partners—the people—that universities and researchers work with in order to realize academic or scholarly projects. Conversely, a Cultural Rhetorics methodology views research participants as makers, researchers, and theorists themselves.

By cultivating and explaining these systems of relationships during their service learning, the MSU students, Glenhills teachers, and elementary students saw themselves as engrained in a network of relationships and connections that positioned them not as texts, but as active theorists or makers of knowledge. These relational networks cultivated associations between writing center theory and practice, interpersonal and pedagogical rapport between students and tutors, and connections between the skills that the elementary students brought to the tutoring environment and the MSU students' motivations for becoming writing center consultants. These systems of relationships work toward Getto et al.'s (2014) observations on building a collective in a service-learning partnership. The Glenhills teachers, elementary school students, and MSU students started to establish a collective or system of relationships. This collective worked toward a relational system that configured the people who worked on this project not as objects or texts of study, but as members of a cooperative that pooled knowledge and expertise to work toward common goals.

CHAPTER 4: Sustaining the Partnership

"Yesterday was my final Service Learning day…for the semester, but I'm happy to say that I'll probably be returning next semester to help some more (assuming my class schedule permits that)… I don't think I can post the picture of this due to faces and signatures of the kids in the class I helped in, but they all gave me a big "Thank You" card with their class picture on it. I swear my eyes almost teared up"

In this section, I argue that the relational systems assembled over the course of the semester helped sustain the partnership. These relational systems, in combination with institutional and logistic considerations, worked toward a long-term connection between ELPS and WRA 395. The responses from WRA 395 students, Danielle, and the staff at Glenhills motioned toward a model for sustainability that integrated institutional structures with relational systems.

The first assumption I brought to this partnership was that sustainability relied solely on logistics. When I was working with ELPS representatives to design this partnership, I considered only logistics as structures that would or could sustain the partnership. That is, I only thought about the school's location along a bus line, the fact that the course was offered every semester, or how to organize the specific times when MSU students went to Glenhills; I thought these were the structures that would sustain the work we were doing. This perspective—one that prioritized logistic and institutional concerns, aligns with scholarship that assesses the best practices for sustainability for campus and university partnerships. Vogel, Seifer, and Gelmon (2010), for example, conducted a retrospective and qualitative study of sixteen colleges and universities engaged in service-learning initiatives to identify which factors influenced the sustainability of community/university partnerships. They identified three factors that support and sustain community engagement programs: (a) institutional characteristics and policies, (b) resources and infrastructure, and (c) strategic activities (2010, pp. 59-60). In general, their findings suggested

that institutional structures—including incentives for faculty to engage with service learning, institutional recognition for community-based research, funding for service-learning projects, and strategic planning to align community partnerships with long-term university goals—support the sustainability of service-learning partnerships (2010, pp. 59-60). Vogel et al.'s observations that logistical structures primarily support sustainability align with my own original ideas for sustaining the partnership between WRA 395 and Glenhills.

However, I want to conclude this project by suggesting that by building a system of relationships and a network of connections, the MSU students, Glenhills teachers, and I can work toward a model for sustaining the service-learning partnership based not only on logistics and institutional concerns, but also on relational accountability. That is, sustaining this partnership in the future entails maintaining, respecting, and being accountable for the relationships we cultivated at Glenhills.

The WRA 395 students' experiences at Glenhills motioned toward a process of sustainability based in strengthening the relationships they cultivated at elementary school. Some students identified their interpersonal connections with the students as motivators for returning to Glenhills:

> "Yesterday was my final Service Learning day…for the semester, but I'm happy to say that I'll probably be returning next semester to help some more (assuming my class schedule permits that)… I don't think I can post the picture of this due to faces and signatures of the kids in the class I helped in, but they all gave me a big "Thank You" card with their class picture on it. I swear my eyes almost teared up"

"I adore kids so I expected to get attached. Maybe not as strongly as I did, but kids are unpredictable and they seemed to like me a lot, which made leaving very saddening."

The WRA 395 students described their relationships with elementary students in terms of emotional and embodied connections, emphasizing the personal connections they cultivated with the elementary students. Importantly, they recognize that these connections motivated them to return to the school; they wanted to return, at least in part, because of their relationships with the elementary students.

The teachers at the school, too, identified personal connections between MSU students and elementary students as relationships worth sustaining. For instance, the Glenhills teachers suggested that the relationships between MSU students and specific elementary students helped them address needs within their classrooms. One teacher describes how having a MSU student who was fluent in Mandarin supported individual students in their class develop skills in English, writing, "Having the student in my classroom allowed English Language Learners to be supported by someone who spoke both their language and English." Another described how the MSU student worked well with specific students who needed additional attention. They wrote, "[by having the MSU student in the classroom] I was able to give 2 students the help they needed when I was working with the other students." They go on to state that the support in the classroom could have been augmented if the MSU students could stay all year. One teacher wrote, "I wish that the MSU students could commit to a full year" and, "I want a student for the full year next time!" For the Glenhills teachers, the relationships that the MSU students and elementary students cultivated were valuable to sustain because they helped distribute instruction to specific elementary students who the teachers could not always reach.

While the responses from the teachers at Glenhills affirm that they hope the partnership can continue in the upcoming years, their reflections on having MSU students remain in the classroom for an entire academic year motion toward the institutional constraints that faced the partnership. That is, because MSU operates on a semester-based academic calendar, WRA 395 students were not required to continue their work at Glenhills after the semester ended. Many MSU students affirmed that they hoped to continue working with the Glenhills students, they had little academic incentive to return to the school.

Based on the goal of Glenhills' teachers to keep MSU students in their classes for an entire academic year, The Writing Center at MSU and I are working to require the WRA 395 students to continue working at the elementary school over the course of an entire academic year, not only one semester. We are working to allocate funds to pay students for the time they spend in the elementary school after they complete WRA 395. That is, after the MSU students become consultants in The Writing Center, they will work (and be paid) for one to two hours of tutoring per week at Glenhills. This structure allows MSU students to sustain the relationships they cultivated at Glenhills, and it addresses the Glenhills teachers' goal for sustained and stable partnerships with the MSU students.

While the Glenhills teachers identified relationships between elementary and MSU students as relationships worth maintaining, Danielle, the WRA 395 professor, suggested that the relationships between writing center theories and the service-learning practice were among the most important to sustain. These relationships encouraged students to draw connections between their work in the elementary school, the theories they read for class, and the work they hope to do in writing center consultation. Danielle wrote, "[the service learning in Glenhills] did meet the goals of the course which is to give students experience working with different age groups on

writing. I believe it helped hone their skills as writing consultants." Danielle's responses identified that during the semester, the MSU students were not only building relationships with students, but also drawing connections with the theories and practices central to WRA 395's intended outcome. This relationship, for Danielle, was central to her goals for the partnership.

The MSU students also recognized that logistics played into their desire to return to the school. The WRA 395 student I quoted above recognized that they wanted to return to Glenhills "assuming [their] schedule permits." Another reiterated the emphasis on logistics, writing, "I am glad to say that I really enjoyed my time at the elementary school and, if my schedule permits it, I would consider volunteering there again." The MSU student emphasizes that returning to Glenhills relied on balance between emotional connection to the school and students—"I really enjoyed my time at the elementary school"—and logistics—"if my schedule permits it." Accounting for student's logistical concerns recognizes the range of responsibilities that MSU students have to negotiate and the material constraints that they face while working with community partners off campus. This might be an obvious point, that college students balance commitments to a number of other spaces and people. However, what is important is that by working closely with Glenhills, the MSU students began to integrate the relationships they formed at Glenhills with the commitments they have to other spaces and systems on campus. Integrating the relationships they formed during their service learning into the systems of relationships that they already maintain with other spaces and people on campus motions towards a sustainable model for the partnership.

Further, Danielle mentioned that coordinating logistics could help sustain the partnership from an institutional standpoint. Danielle identified the need for sustained communication between Glenhills and The Writing Center at MSU. Because I am leaving MSU for another

university, Danielle and I decided that she would serve as a point person to coordinate the partnership long-term. Danielle's position as The Writing Center's Associate Director suggests that she will be able to work with Glenhills for the long term, and her familiarity with both Glenhills and MSU's requirements for service learning (including background checks and required medicals tests) make her best suited for coordinating the partnership.

By recognizing that the connections we cultivated during the semester formed relational systems that were important to the partnership's infrastructure, the WRA 395 students, Glenhills teachers and administrators, MSU faculty, and I moved toward a process of relational accountability that helps sustain the work we do. We saw ourselves as engrained in a system of relationships that included different spaces, theories and practices associated with writing center consultation, ideas, and people. The MSU students not only interrogated the ways that they were engrained in these systems of relationships; they also saw those relationships as structures that helped move the partnership toward sustainability. I want to suggest that by recognizing the importance of these relationships, we can cultivate a more sustainable partnership in which MSU students return to the school not only because they are forced to nor because there are institutional systems that make it easier for them to do so, but because they are accountable and committed to the relationships they cultivated with the elementary students and the ideas about writing center consultation they developed while working there.

Cultural Rhetoricians offer a model for sustainability based on relational accountability. Wilson (2008), for example, encourages researchers to respect and maintain the relationships they form with ideas, people, and spaces (pp. 7, 71, 91-5). Mukavetz (2014) too, approaches relationships as bonds that should be maintained and respected. She argues that in an Indigenous and Cultural Rhetorics research paradigm, "respect, reciprocity, and accountability are not just

things to do to be ethical, but a way to cultivate and maintain the relationships we form with people, spaces, land, and the universe" (Mukavetz, 2014, p. 113). Based on Mukavetz's and Wilson's observations, I am accountable for maintaining both the partnership between Glenhills and MSU and the relationships I made with the students, staff, and teachers involved in the project. Being accountable for my relationships aligned with both my goals and Glenhills's goals; the staff and administrators I worked with identified sustainability as a long-term goal for the partnership. By viewing the partnership between MSU and Glenhills in terms of relationships—relationships that those involved in the partnership are accountable for maintaining and respecting—we worked towards our ultimate goal of creating a sustainable partnership. Service-learning and civic-engagement researchers, too, have focused on making public engagement programs reciprocal and sustainable (e.g., Cushman, 1996; Cushman, 2002; Powell & Takayoshi, 2003 Hyde & Meyer, 2008).

4.1 Conclusions

Throughout this project, I have intentionally avoided generalizing the findings from my research; that is, I sought to avoid suggesting that the work we did at Glenhills should offer a rigid model for the work of other service-learning practitioners. My methodology—one grounded in Cultural Rhetorics—encouraged me to avoid this process of generalization by recognizing how the service-learning configuration we established is locally—not universally—meaningful, and that the relational systems we developed relied on local—not universal—considerations. This project has moved me toward an approach to service learning that recognizes how relational systems comprised of assets, needs, rhetorics, values, resources, and people are constructed by the specific contexts where we live and work. So as I move forward, I am invested in approaching my findings in this project not as static or concrete frameworks that

fit all community engagement programs, but a set of perspectives, questions, and orientations that can help me think about what a service-learning partnership could look like, not necessarily what it should look like.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Survey Questions

I. Pre-Pilot Program Questions

a. Glenhills Staff

i. How do you hope the Michigan State University (MSU) student will support your classroom? What are your goals for having a MSU student in your classroom?

b. Glenhills Principal

i. What are your goals for partnering with Michigan State University?

c. MSU Faculty

i. What do you hope the WRA 395 students will gain from completing their service-learning component at Glenhills Elementary?

d. MSU Students

i. Describe what you hope to gain from volunteering at Glenhills Elementary School. This could be professional, personal, or educational.

II. Post-Pilot Program Questions

a. Glenhills Staff

i. Were the MSU students reliable?

ii. In what ways did the MSU students help or hinder your teaching?

iii. Would you continue this partnership? Why or why not?

iv. Did the program have any unexpected benefits? If so, what were they?

v. Did the program have any unexpected negative aspects? If so, what were they?
vi. How can this program be modified to better meet your goals?
vii. Are there any additional resources you want or need that could make this program better?
viii. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in this program? If so, you can provide feedback here.

b. Glenhills Principal
    i. Would you continue this partnership? Why or why not?
    ii. How did the pilot program meet your goals/needs?
    iii. Did the program have any unexpected benefits? If so, what were they?
    iv. Did the program have any unexpected negative aspects? If so, what were they?
    v. How can this program be modified to better meet your goals?
    vi. Are there any additional resources you want or need that could to make this program better?
    vii. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in this program? If so, you can provide feedback here.

c. MSU Faculty
    i. Would you continue this partnership? Why or why not?
    ii. Did the pilot program meet your goals/needs?

iii. Did the program have any unexpected benefits? If so, what were they?

iv. Did the program have any unexpected negative aspects? If so, what were they?

v. How can this program be modified to better meet your goals?

vi. Are there any additional resources you want or need that could to make this program better?

vii. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in this program? If so, you can provide feedback here.

d. MSU Students

i. What did you learn about literacy and writing from working in the schools?

ii. How can you apply your service in the elementary school to your work in The Writing Center?

iii. What aspect of this service-learning experience benefited you most? This could be professional, personal, and/or educational.

iv. Would you recommend continuing this partnership in years to come? Why or why not?

v. How can this program be modified to better meet your goals?

vi. Are there any additional resources you want or need that could make this program better?

vii. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience in this program? If so, you can provide feedback here.

APPENDIX II

Relationship Mapping Assignment for WRA 395

This assignment is intended to more fully integrate WRA 395 students' experiences with service learning into the course's outcomes. As the course operates currently, there are no assignments that ask students to articulate the connections they see between their service learning and their current or future work in The Writing Center.

Directions - (to be distributed to WRA 395 students):

This project asks you to explore and describe the relationships between your service-learning experiences and your ideas on writing center theory and practice.

There are three stages to the assignment:

1. In your weekly blog reflections, generate ideas about your community partner's assets. This will be a continual process, one that you should revisit as you spend more time with your community. Use the following questions to generate ideas. Importantly, do not simply ask your partnering teacher or the residents you work with these questions; instead, listen, watch, and talk with the people there. We will discuss in class methods for listening and engaging with your community partners. Based on those experiences, consider these questions:
    a. What knowledges or practices are valued?
    b. How are those knowledges or practices valued?
    c. Why are they valued?

2. At the end of the semester, after you have explored some of Gelnhill's or Northwind's assets, map the relationships you see between those assets and other ideas you've developed throughout the semester. Your map should be visual; you could make a poster and physically draw connections between ideas, or you could use a digital platform to visualize the relationships you describe. Consider mapping the relationship between the assets you identify and the following concepts:
    a. Your experiences with writing center theory
    b. Your experiences with writing center practice
    c. Assets you associate with MSU
    d. Emotions associated with writing center consultation
3. Write a 2-3 page reflection on your map. Consider the following questions as you reflect: How did you identify the relationships in your map? Why are those relationships important? As you move forward, how will you further integrate your service-learning experiences into your work in The Writing Center? What did the service learning teach you that you did not learn in class?

    Logistics:

    - We will establish a rubric together in class
    - You will present your relationship map on the last day of class

Rationale:

Many service-learning researchers and practitioners have adapted models for building civic engagement partnerships that ask students to view community partners not in terms of deficits, but in terms of assets (e.g., Baron, 2008; Kretzman & McKnight, 1993; Donaldson &

Daughtery, 2011; Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Shabazz & Cooks 2014; Roehlkepartain et al., 1999). In general, these asset-based approaches work against savior, top-down, and/or colonial narratives that identify community partners in terms of deficits and problems and university affiliates in terms of assets and solutions. Instead, this scholarship advocates for identifying the assets that community partners contribute to a partnership. Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore (2014), for example, posit that mapping a community's assets allows community resources—rather than university resources—to promote development. That is, mapping a community's assets ensures that "community development is constructed on solutions originating from the people and organizations within community itself" (p. 50).

Shabazz and Cooks (2014), however, warn that assets should not be code words for resources. They identify assets as deeply held values within a community that can develop into solutions for problems that face a community, not as the material resources available to a community partner. Indeed, it seems easy to view assets in terms of physical resources. Garoutte and McCarthy-Gilmore (2014), for example, identify community assets along the lines of physical resources, including parking space (p. 53), gymnasium equipment (p. 53), and space to build a playground (p. 52). Such a perspective, while not pervasive in the literature, perpetuates narratives that objectify communities, viewing them in terms of material resources or assets but not as collectives with valuable knowledges or perspectives.

The mapping activity I advocate for encourages students to recognize how communities are composed of valuable knowledges and perspectives through practicing four concepts: (a) they work toward a process of listening to community partners to identify the values and practices that operate in their communities; (b) they see assets already present within a community; (c) they consider assets in terms of knowledge practices or values, not resources;

and (d) importantly, they situate those assets in relation to ideas, contexts, and experiences related to their work in The Writing Center at MSU. This process moves students toward a more nuanced view of the relationships between theory and practice, between university and community assets, and between their work in the community and their work in the university. This project also builds off the relationships that the students already started to acknowledge in their reflection blogs and responses to the surveys I distributed.

Integrating this Assignment into the course's structure

I suggest that this project replace two assignments in the original syllabus: the annotated bibliography and the remix. For the annotated bibliography, WRA 395 students compiled a set of 10-15 annotations that focus on a genre of writing other than the traditional essay. For example, a student could compile an annotated bibliography on sources that give advice on composing a screenplay. The project is intended to help students explore best practices for writing in various genres. Exploring these best practices can give them a vocabulary to explain those composition practices to clients in The Writing Center. The remix assignment asks students to reconfigure the ideas they explored in one of their previous assignments into a multimodal project. For instance, the student who wrote their annotated bibliography on sources that give advice on writing screenplays could, for their remix, write a screenplay using the practices they learned about and perform sections of the screenplay for the class. The remix assignment is intended to give students experience composing in a range of genres, and, subsequently, give them experience to draw from if they are consulting a writing center client on a multimodal project.

I recognize that the outcomes associated with these projects help WRA 395 students become better consultants in The Writing Center; that said, I think the relationship map can work toward similar outcomes. For instance, because the relationship map asks students to use a genre

other than the traditional essay to present their findings, it can give them experiences with multimodal composition similar to those experiences they would have had working on the remix.

Ultimately, I argue that more directly integrating students' experiences with service learning into the course content will allow for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the way their work with community partners will affect their work with clients in The Writing Center.

APPENDIX III

Further Curricular Revisions for WRA 395

Allotting more time in class for discussion of service learning

I suggest that more discussion time be dedicated to students' experiences with their community partners, at least 40 minutes every two weeks. These discussions could allow the class sufficient time to discuss the work required for their Relationship Mapping assignment, to think about the ways that working with community partners could relate to work in The Writing Center, and/or to explore how their service-learning experiences change the way they think about writing center theories or practices.

I realize that setting aside time for service-learning discussions could cut short the course's already limited class time. However, I think other portions of the class could be condensed productively. For example, one assignment asks students to read scholarship on writing center theory, create 1-page handouts that summarize the article's main points, and present their findings in a 5-10 minute class discussion. Each student has to complete two article reports over the course of the semester. These presentations, while productive, took up a large portion of class meetings. I suggest that instead of composing 1-page handouts and assigning 5-10 minute presentations, the students instead write standard 250-word annotations for the articles, briefly present their annotations in class for one to two minutes, and then collaboratively compile those annotations into an annotated bibliography for the class as a whole. This structure would allow students to engage meaningfully with contemporary scholarship on writing center theory, share their findings with the class, and practice writing annotated bibliographies while reducing the amount of class time dedicated to the process. The practice of writing annotations,

too, might be particularly beneficial since I also advocated for replacing the original annotated bibliography assignment with the Relationship Mapping assignment (see Appendix B). This structure would also allow more class time to discuss students' service-learning experiences.

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