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Conceptualizing Generative Ethos in Service Learning

This essay investigates ethical issues inherent in service learning through considering the dynamics of generative ethos, Jim Corder's term for a process of becoming through writing. By closely examining the ethical issues involved in Phyllis Ryder's Rhetorics for Community Action: Public Writing and Writing Publics and tracing parallels between students' experiences in Ryder's course and Corder's own idea of generative ethos, this essay argues that generative ethos can offer a productive lens into understanding how students navigate the ethically tenuous territory of service learning.

In *Writing Partnerships: Service Learning in Composition*, Thomas Deans traces the historical and political contexts of service learning to explore case studies that demonstrate how the field has developed as a strategy for social change.¹ While much of his analysis focuses on “curricular and pedagogical arrangements as they relate to rhetorical, critical, and composition theory,” it also includes moments that do not fit neatly into these categories (52). One such instance involves a case study of a service learning course in sports management that required students to write brochures for a local recreational organization. Deans quotes one student writer who resists the ventriloquism that he perceived to be an expectation of the assignment: “In this writing I was representing another organization so I couldn't voice my own personal opinions. It was a pain. I couldn't wait to get it over with” (57). Deans claims that this student's dissonance is a result of the conflict students experience when attempting to fulfill the standards and expectations of workplace writing, which differs from the academic, argumentative essays students are accustomed to composing in university courses.

Deans continues his analysis of this dissonance with an explanation of Anson and Forsberg's three stages of transition—expectation, disorientation, and transition and resolution—to show how the student was experiencing the process of adapting to a new social setting. Anson and Forsberg attempt to understand how the public conditions of writing in a professional setting are influenced by the dynamic changes among writers, texts, and contexts (203). While their study identifies how writers transition among discourse communities, they also inquire as to how future studies may extend our understanding of composition “into the realms of territoriality, initiation and membership, ritual, and dialect” (228). Despite these explorations of the stages of dissonance, neither Deans nor Anson and Forsberg account for the particularities of voice and identity embedded in the student's comment. This makes it a moment that highlights the ethical issues that complicate how students conceive of their own characters and authority while writing for service learning. According to Nora Bacon, carefully coordinating relationships with community partners and developing assignments that do not require too much expert knowledge are pragmatic solutions to the obstacles of discursive adaptation (47). However, ethical issues of ventriloquism and identification persist beyond Deans's research and continually resurface, especially in studies concerning the intersections of private and public in service learning.

Many studies have examined these ethical issues within a variety of theoretical frameworks. Feminist ethnography and feminist object relations theory have both been deployed for creating courses that achieve reciprocity while enacting social change. In their efforts to navigate the murky waters of service learning, both Himley and Welch use these theories to articulate the exigencies of insider-outsider relations and to consider the personal, embodied conflicts of activists who confront the realities of power and privilege. Narrative is another framework that has been discussed as a way to conceptualize service learning approaches that account for difference and inequality. Telling difficult stories about race and class reveals a wealth of experiences by individuals from different racial and socioeconomic groups, and developing productive ways to share these personal stories is crucial to forwarding activism (Green).

In order to theorize how students may begin to cross these socioeconomic boundaries, service learning research has begun to disrupt one-sided approaches to community action by problematizing the terms *public* and *private*. Rather than perpetuating the traditional understandings of *public* and *private* as locations, Anne Ruggles Gere and Aaron Schutz interpret them as modes, “ways of interacting with people” (132). Within this framework “private” represents unique relations among individuals who care for one another, and “public” involves collective relations among multiple individuals “who join together in a common project” (132). In their response to Herzberg's critique of service learning's

tendency to enable students to consider illiteracy and poverty as personal problems rather than systematic injustices, Gere and Schutz outline how to reinvigorate the conception of public in service learning, which is a task taken up by Phyllis M. Ryder in her rearticulation of “publics” in *Rhetorics for Community Action: Public Writing and Writing Publics*. Her study is cogent to this investigation of ethical issues in service learning due to its focus on redefining public and its inclusion of student narratives, which illustrates the need for further investigations of ethical action that may redefine approaches to service learning.

Despite Deans’s warning against too much contemplation to the detriment of action, I dare to call us to reflect upon these moments of ethically based resistance. While service learning scholarship has outlined some best practices for ethical action, the concept at the core of the phrase “ethical action”—ethos—has yet to be fully explored in relation to service learning. This lack of direct attention to ethos may be because the relationship between ethical action and ethos is often taken for granted: Implicit in ethical action is a person with “good character” capable of carrying out that action. Ethos, as the linguistic and conceptual root of ethical action, can be more productively considered when thought of beyond the definition of “good character” or persona, which is often limited to a fixed, stable quality. As the previous studies demonstrate, character and persona defy stability in service learning, and this points to the need for conceptualizing ethos as a way to explore the nature of the ethical dilemmas that student writers experience. Jim Corder’s concept of generative ethos offers a productive framework for understanding the interpersonal and public dynamics of ventriloquizing and the challenges of identification, and it can guide us in understanding these phenomena as opportunities and strategies for social justice. In this article I identify moments in Ryder’s study that suggest the importance of ethos in service learning, specifically instances when students comment on their experiences speaking for/to/about others, and I analyze them using a lens of generative ethos. Reflecting upon these ethical dilemmas using this lens can reveal ways we can improve service learning practices to account for how shifting voices and identifications are necessary and productive to the aims of service learning for social justice.

Corder defines generative ethos as being “always in the process of making itself and of liberating hearers to make themselves. In this form of ethos, there is always more coming. It is never over, never wholly fenced into the past. It is a speaking out from history into history” (“Varieties of Ethical Argument” 14).² As a process of movement among hearers and listeners—or in the case of service learning, among instructors, community partners, and student writers—generative ethos draws our attention to how writers in service learning move

among identities, voices, and time to generate new understandings of themselves, the communities with/about/to whom they write, and the work of social justice. Approaching ethical issues in service learning through the lens of generative ethos can illuminate how moments of resistance, like the ventriloquism and challenges to identification that occur during these shifts, are integral to social justice activism. Conceptualizing these personal and public dilemmas within a framework of generative ethos answers Himley's call to "disrupt the production of the stranger in order to produce alternative relations than those ordained by 'the imperatives of power'" (435, qtd. in Said, 168, "Knowledge and Interpretation").

Generative Ethos

According to Erik Juergensmeyer, Corder aspired to formulate a more commodious understanding of rhetoric that expanded upon Ancient Greek conceptions of ethos as an argumentative strategy. Because he believed that the course of rhetorical theory from Ancient Greece to the mid-twentieth century only perpetuated a static concept of ethos that limits our ability both to develop identities and to communicate, Corder expands the definition of ethos to include a variety of approaches, one of them being generative ethos, "which enables the openness necessary for improving conflict situations" (92).

Corder's engagement with ethos resulted from trying to answer his own question about credibility and character: Why do we trust what certain people have to say and not others? During his attempts to answer it, Corder meditated on the "social turn" in composition, which saw theorists considering how discursive practices are implicated in social issues like race, class, and gender (Julier 144). At this time he also became concerned with the postmodern notion of the death of the author, and he grappled with the possibility that that there may, somehow, always be some character and some trace of an author in every piece of writing. Student writers encounter this same tension, perceiving their own voices as lost when writing for community organizations. Corder's explorations of the presence and absence of voice and identity in writing culminate in the concept of generative ethos, which maintains that while character in writing continually changes, the author has not completely disappeared; the author becomes reconstructed in the process of shifting among voices and contexts in order to merge with listeners or audiences. Generative ethos deserves consideration in service learning research because it articulates the obligation to bear witness, rather than act as a hero, in order to make room for enfolding—a kind of "rhetoric that closes the distance between readers and writers" (Carlo 98). As service learning has attempted to move out of the "jungles of otherness" that Forbes et al. warn us about, and as it continues to develop reciprocal relations among student writers and community

members, it is crucial for all participants to devise strategies for moving close to each other in order to exceed “any one construction of who we all are.”³

Because the purpose of this article is to initiate future discussions about how ethos works in writing for service learning and because it is impossible to completely review the nuances of Corder’s approach to ethos within the scope of this article, I find it productive to focus on two facets of generative ethos that are relevant to ethical issues in service learning: privileging witnessing over heroism, and the process of enfolding, which imagines how writers can simultaneously reinvent themselves and merge toward each other through discourse, while accounting for (instead of eliding) difference.⁴

Witnessing and Enfolding

Developing best practices for ethical action in service learning has primarily focused on confronting the liberal savior complex, a phenomenon that occurs in service learning (usually when students take on the role of tutor or volunteer) and begin to see themselves as coming to the rescue of less-privileged community members who need their service in order to overcome personal struggles (Cushman 332). In some poorly structured service learning environments, the student’s service provides more benefits to him/her, in the form of grades or credit hours, rather than contributing to lasting and meaningful change in the community. Relevant to service learning scholarship’s resistance to the liberal savior complex is Corder’s argument for redefining the roles of teacher/writer/activist/researchers as witnesses, rather than heroes, in a community-university context. Articulating this redefinition is important because service learning has often seemed like a “panacea, a gospel to be spread, a silver bullet that will energize and invigorate teachers, motivate students, connect academic activities with ‘real world’ learning, and effect social change” (Julier 137). Confronting the “do-gooder” mentality implicated within service learning has led to critiques of its roots in the volunteerism of white middle- and upper-class women with social capital who sought to raise the status of the poor (while raising their own) and who operated within homogenous conceptions of “community” and “service” (Himley; Deans). Typically, these conceptions reflect the meritocracy that service learning initiatives challenge: In order to encourage students to develop a social imagination, instructors must trouble a “world that seems natural, inevitable, given” by challenging students’ definitions of “server” and “served” (Herzberg 57). While scholars have detailed the problems of the liberal savior syndrome, they have not centered their arguments within a discussion of ethos. The concept of generative ethos reflects these concerns by prioritizing the provisional and often uncomfortable act of bearing witness instead of assuming

the role of hero. Corder considers the problematic nature of participating in heroic efforts, and his discussion evokes the complexities that postmodernism, with its claims against the authenticity of the individual, imposes upon the academy.

The decentering project of our time that will find us relocated after a curious, glorious, disastrous five-hundred-year journey at the center of things might lead to a new collective in which we are lost, but it needn't. We're here. We make what's left. Then we go. While we're here, we give witness to others, to ourselves. The epic of our time . . . will not, I hope, tell of war and of the hero's triumph with spear or gun; and surely it's unlikely that it will begin with fallen angels. The angels have flown away, and no hero awaits. ("Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret" 105)

While Corder cares for "individuals, solitary souls," as grand inventions, he is also, paradoxically, unsettled by the possibility of an identity becoming caught in a text. While a hero may embrace the task of identifying, or as Corder would say, "trapping," a voice in a text, much in the way a well-intentioned volunteer may label a community partner "needy," the slippery reality of identity compels us to acknowledge where and when we cannot speak our own truth or the truths of others. Corder reconciles the social turn in composition as a pivotal moment in which writers take responsibility for whom and about what they write. Our identities are at stake when we must confront how our own stories and journeys are embedded in complex and shifting relations of power. The absence of a hero compels an ethical recognition of our own responsibility to make change in the world as we speak with/to/about others against injustice. We must confess and bear witness to how service learning engenders ethical complications on the way to realizing social justice and recognize instances of generative ethos created when participants navigate the unpredictable terrains of service learning.

The liberal savior complex, an unintended and much maligned consequence of service learning, is a weak manifestation of identity that holds itself as monolithic and one-dimensional: The belief in one's own heroic identity necessitates seeing others as victims. When scholars and activists argue against this liberal savior complex, they also dispute static expressions of identity that reinforce ideological oppression. Negating the urge to act heroically in order to bear witness to others is an ethical rejoinder to practices that enable students to approach a community partner in a univocal way that closes off the partner's rights to his/her own identity, which opposes the victimized identity that student volunteers expect. Michelle D. Trim explains that the origins of this mentality reach back to mid- to late-1990s discussions of writing instruction that deployed Freirean revolutionary

pedagogy to direct courses toward disenfranchised groups (69). The effect of this situating led to attention to “race and class as almost Orientalized subject positions” that would be sought outside campus walls and would be subject to assumptions about what those groups knew, “needed to learn, and should want to believe” (69). As we resist the Orientalizing effects of the liberal savior complex, we search for a more flexible conception of identity that accounts for complex identifications in service learning, and Corder offers such an approach in his formulation of enfolding: a process predicated upon an understanding of identity as a felt and embodied reality.

While Corder does not profess identity to be a stable entity, he acknowledges the painful reality that in certain contexts, identity is embodied and felt on the page, especially when our writing is the subject of critique. In “Studying Rhetoric and Teaching School,” Corder equates speaking with writing because both actions are entryways for conveying identity. He claims that “when we speak, we stand somewhere, and our standing place makes both known and silent claims upon us” (135). Moments of scrutiny, wherein we perceive a distance between our self-conceptions and what outsiders expect us to be, make identity more real than an idea that poststructural theorists claim to have deconstructed. In the context of service learning, we have heard students’ difficulties in using voice and identity as ways to shrink this distance in efforts for social change. If one of the goals of service learning is to bridge community-university divisions and thereby create new connections with the effect of rearticulating the “college or university as part of rather than opposed to the local community,” then we must confront how and why microdivides happen within this process (Adler-Kassner et al. 4). The idea of enfolding is a way to reconsider the dynamics of these identity-based divides to create more empathetic and open discourses, wherein the claims made upon our standing and speaking places can be negotiated and emerge into more spacious discourses.

In “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” Corder describes us all as authors who do not always know the best way to communicate our narratives to others; because of this, we must continually adjust our communication style, and thereby our identities, in writing. This adjustment “requires a readiness to testify to an identity that is always emerging, a willingness to dramatize one’s narrative in progress before the other; it calls for an untiring stretch toward the other, a reach toward enfolding the other” (26). In this rhetoric of love, all parties engaged in the communication process become enfolded in each other’s discourses. Lest this formulation of rhetoric seem too utopic, consider that this process is laden with disjunctions and uncertainties: “Enfolding is problematic in the sense that when we risk ourselves to emerge toward another person, as writers or readers, we open

ourselves to the possibility of change. Change can be transformative and wonderful for some, but change can also be painful, hard, and for some people, unwanted” (Carlo 106). While it is true that identities are never complete and/or authentic, this becoming—a function of generative ethos—emerges in writing for service learning when students can recognize ventriloquism as a reconstruction necessary to negotiating their positions as writers/volunteers/student/activists. Applying this conception of generative ethos to understand the kinds of resistances that students experience supports Nancy Welch’s investigation of how student writers pushed beyond a liberal savior complex by breaking out of binary modes of identification, such as active/passive and server/served. Generative ethos resists the one-way trajectory from outsider to insider and also seeks to embrace the back-and-forth play that’s the hallmark of a more responsible construction of mutuality that can improve our approaches to service learning (245).

We can hear such a creation of mutuality within Corder’s own writing. He embodies the concept of generative ethos while writing *Hunting Lieutenant Chadbourne* because he continually repositions himself among specific identities: a researcher, a writer, a teacher, a Texas native. While writing for service learning, students parallel this ethical repositioning as they relearn how to compose themselves through mutual interactions that demand an awareness of their own identity adjustments. Corder exemplifies this relearning while writing *Hunting Lieutenant Chadbourne*, an historical investigation into the life of a Civil War soldier named Theodore Lincoln Chadbourne. Corder reconstructs himself as he writes the book; and with each detail he unearths—through researching government records and newspaper articles, and interviewing archivists and Chadbourne’s descendants—he creates a tentative portrait of the soldier within an equally tentative portrait of himself as a researcher who disappears in his work and reappears, in bits and pieces, along with Chadbourne. Corder discovers changes within himself during the search for the life of Chadbourne—a man who, through Corder’s writing, speaks out from history.

Corder reflects upon these changes, manifested in his ethical anxieties of voice and identification while writing the life of Chadbourne. His anxieties are paralleled with a recognition of poststructuralist trends in composition; the ethical implications of these forces are revealed through questions about how he should approach reading student writing: “If the author of an essay or a poem in the literature anthology is dead to me, if I can never find him or her, must I learn that I will never find my composition students either? Has Lieutenant Chadbourne vanished before he arrived?” (69). He continues to speculate that all writing “intrudes upon, alters, blesses, and damns anything anyone else writes”; and, after studying Chadbourne’s letters, Corder believes that Chadbourne may yet emerge, “altogether accountable for himself” (69). Corder wonders how Chadbourne, the man

whose life he is researching and intending to share with the world, will find a voice in Corder's own writing. Simultaneously, Corder wonders how his own identity will somehow be felt by readers. While Corder's conceptual approach differs from those of service learning in their purpose and context, ethical questions join both endeavors: How can one appropriately give voice to another while maintaining some semblance of one's own textual presence? Who speaks for whom and how can multiple voices speak concomitantly through one text?

Reconstructing student/writer/activist identities are a part of service learning assignments, and these reconstructions typify the uncertainties central to generative ethos. Corder calls us to examine how students may reconstruct themselves in service learning and how we, as instructors, can acknowledge the shifting presences of students writing for/with/about others as exercises of generative ethos that emerge when approaching social justice work. Abandoning heroism in exchange for witnessing, and embracing shifts in identification as moments of enfolding, highlight how the concept of generative ethos is already at work in service learning. Being conscious of these strategies when re-examining service learning pedagogy supports the aims of mutuality that have been forwarded as integral to social justice work.

Generative Ethos as a Public Formation

One work that reflects this urgent call for mutuality in writing for social action is Ryder's *Rhetorics for Community Action: Public Writing and Writing Publics*. I explore her work because while it primarily focuses on retheorizing "publics," it also suggests that ethical dilemmas play a critical and productive role in service learning. Investigating instances of ethical struggle in Ryder's work through the conceptual lens of generative ethos can problematize the public nature of service learning and inspire future applications of generative ethos to explore how students negotiate their personal apprehensions while writing for public causes.

Ryder examines her experiences teaching a first-year writing course at George Washington University that uses public writing as a mode of engaging disparate communities and interrogating class privilege. In order to approach this complex task, Ryder proposes that researcher/writer/teacher/activists must first complicate their definitions of public. She introduces the term *publics*, which more accurately expresses the effects of writing for the community, as "social entities that come together with particular visions of people's role within democracy" (5). "Publics" refers to conflicting and competing ideas about what the public looks like and how it should operate. It compels her to ask: "How does public writing turn people into publics? What is it in public writing that people

respond to?" (5). Ryder argues that to best study and teach the complexities of public writing, we should partner with community nonprofits and guide students through rhetorical practices that challenge their roles as writers and community activists.

In her service learning course, students work with Washington, DC nonprofits dedicated to social justice, such as environmental protection groups, mentoring programs for at-risk youth, and campaigns against homelessness. As students volunteer with these organizations, they complete commissioned writing tasks, such as composing a newsletter or editing online content, and in doing so, they give voice to the people served by the organization. Complex power relations undergird the course: Typical GWU students' privileged backgrounds permit them to pay the school's high tuition, yet they work with organizations dedicated to countering policies that reify privilege and inequality. These tensions shape Ryder's definition of public writing as a site of rhetorical struggle that includes tools of community-building, resistance, and strategies of circulation, and that recognizes academia as a public (63). It is through these interacting sites and acts of public writing that students explore how their rhetorical choices can further the nonprofit's work toward social justice within specific sociohistorical, geographic, and ideological contexts. Ryder's endeavor is ambitious and entangled in "power asymmetries, social antagonisms, and historical determinants" that engender a spectrum of "ethical desires," not unlike the ones Himley examines in her own study of the figure of the stranger in service learning (417, 423). Although Ryder does not fully explore how students negotiate the ethical dilemma of entering these organizations as strangers, understanding how students approach this negotiation is crucial to improving service learning pedagogy, and generative ethos offers us an opening into this understanding.

In initial iterations of Ryder's course, students analyzed how democratic, grassroots-based organizations influenced change in public policy. Students read social protest writings and investigated the rhetorical tactics of organizations and leaders who deployed revolutionary models. Saturated with the rhetorics of grassroots democratic action, students were assigned to work with community nonprofits who appeared to share similar goals of social justice. What Ryder discovered, however, was that when students started to work closely with nonprofits, they found that the nonprofits often contradicted the direct democratic action models at the center of her course. In this instance of disjuncture, both Ryder and her students undertook the ethical task of figuring out how to work with a nonprofit whose structure contradicted social justice action models. In order to negotiate this realization, Ryder revised the course to incorporate diverse and divergent approaches to social justice that demonstrated how publics can emerge from agonism and opposition.

Although this course revision attempted to engage students in rethinking their approach to public writing as one that welcomes disjuncture, some students still found it difficult to perform the acts of ventriloquism necessary to reach the goal of creating publics. Ryder reflects upon a student's experience writing for an organization in its specific voice:

One student, who had presented her detailed analysis of CentroNia's bilingual education philosophy at a student academic conference earlier in the semester, remarked that she was struck by the challenge of writing a newsletter article using the voice of the organization. She recognized that she would need to embody the worldview that she has just analyzed; furthermore, she recognized that for her piece to be successful, it would need to convey the ethos of the organization to continue its public making function. (90)

Here Ryder uses ethos to describe the nonprofit organization's character and its attempts to market that character to maintain the publics that support its social justice work. However, this anecdote is revealing not so much for its critique of how the organization represents its own ethos but for how the student perceives the identity shifts she must make in between representing the university, the nonprofit, and herself. Students become conscious of the need to shift among identity positions as they work, write, and form relationships with community members. Welch's study of her own students' ethical dilemmas, as recorded in their class journals, reveals how they "counter exclusionary forces and expand options, but in relationship with, not opposition to or ignorance of" the activities of others (260). While both Ryder's and Welch's students remain aware of the challenges of preventing oppressive ideological reproduction through avoiding what Bickford and Reynolds call a "volunteer ethos," countering these exclusionary forces entails a consciousness of patterns of identification and communication (230). Generative ethos is an initial step in creating this consciousness that can frame an understanding of the complex process student writers undertake when speaking for/with/about others.⁵

In "Varieties of Ethical Argument," Corder claims that character is revealed in language; but what happens when student writers perceive restrictions on using their own language? Through the conceptual lens of generative ethos, we can hear the student describing her process of moving toward and identifying with CentroNia. During this dissonant and difficult movement, she is attempting to stretch her words out to meet CentroNia's universe without her words being completely overtaken by the organization. This student's ethical apprehension can be interpreted as an instance of authoritative doubt, an uncertainty of whom to

trust and why. In a larger sense, we can categorize this experience as a step in the process of enfolding: adjusting her discursive style, which she considers an exclusion of her identity, in voicing the organization's message. However, just because she uses the voice of the organization does not necessarily mean she abandons herself. Rather than labeling this instance as an obstacle to realizing the boundary-crossing goals of service learning, the concept of generative ethos allows us to interpret it as an opening where students move beyond their positions to participate in an enfolding process, which is often dissonant and fraught with the politics of identity and power. Social justice work demands discomfort because it challenges our identities and positions of privilege as members of the university. Instances of cognitive dissonance and disidentification are bound to occur when student writers are positioned as critical actors: Activists are identity-conscious as they negate the liberal savior complex and confront their roles as both beneficiaries of the system and agents who resist it.

Corder's generative ethos recognizes the messy provisionality of speaking with/for/about others and lends itself well to illuminating the complex social relations embedded in the collaborative, activist writing projects we ask students to complete. Corder reflects the uncertainty students confront when discussing his own experiences with ventriloquizing a single representation of an organization. In "Hunting for *Ethos* Where They Say It Can't Be Found," he humorously recalls the ethical dilemmas he faced when composing the statement of philosophy for the university in which he taught: "God help me—I wrote the last six or eight drafts of that statement, including the final draft that's printed in the catalog. . . . I am embarrassed that I did it and spent so much time on the project. Once again, this was clearly a version of community discourse" (309). He mentions the various communities with whom he worked—the deans, the faculty senate, the chancellors, and the vice chancellor; he jokes that even Aunt Maude and Cousin Duane worked on a few of the drafts. He invested considerable time in the project and "didn't want it to sound like institutional pap . . . really didn't want it to sound as if it had been written by a clerk or a plain damn fool, or, worse, an administrator." Corder claims that he tried not to infect the statement with his character, but with the character in the document (309).

The struggles of voice and identification at play within any public writing exercise are intimately related to questions of power and the idea that the act of writing imbues the writer with a certain authority. It's no surprise, then, that Ryder's student's experience of writing in the voice of CentroNia elicited apprehension because she does not yet identify as authorized in the organization's discourse. Corder echoes this in his resistance not only to speaking for the university in its statement of philosophy but also to incorporating the voices of others while doing so. Ryder's work includes an example of the sociopolitical

maneuvering that happens in her service learning course as students are expected to assume more critical roles as activists within community partnerships. Ryder remarks that, as a whole, her students remained aware of their university identity and how it creates disjunctions inherent in the service learning process:

For faculty and students both, the challenge of studying and writing about people with whom you have ongoing relationships is a big one. Students often comment that they are unwilling to criticize their community partners . . . doing so seems to impose the objectives of a university—unfettered research—into places where the power and language of the university may have consequences. They are aware that in sharing their observations, they cannot set aside their location as part of a privileged institution whose modes of reason and contexts for interpretation may not be trusted by the organizations they are working with. (260)

The students' apprehension indicates that they are privy to a discursive reality of academic writing: the strategy of discrediting the knowledge of others and critiquing their views to strengthen one's own argument and reassert one's power. Service learning illuminates these strategies as ethical concerns for composition as a whole and for writing in the disciplines. Corder ruminates on the necessary antagonisms within academic writing when he shares that his own article, "Varieties of Ethical Argument," is the result of his attacking the ideas of others (as often happens in academia): "I deny the other in his or her text. I am too stubborn or too unthinking or too self-centered to accept or to yield to the other; I won't willingly efface myself before the other, though I may do so quite without knowing it" ("Hunting for *Ethos*" 301). As an instance of generative ethos, Corder's observation demonstrates how students can come to terms with the social complexities embedded in writing.

Both of these excerpts suggest that ethos, deployed in terms of constructed identities and authorities as privileged university students, does play a role in Ryder's students' service learning experiences. As an embodiment of generative ethos, the concern of Ryder's students' manifests the silent claims made upon their privileged places as GWU students while standing in the place of an other—a marginalized population represented by a community nonprofit. Because Ryder primarily focuses on developing a theory of publics and public writing, she does not feature detailed accounts of students' experiences with writing for nonprofit organizations.

I see a deeper engagement with ethos, particularly with the concept of generative ethos, as an initial step toward more productive interventions with writing

for social justice. In order to teach writing for social justice more effectively, we can allow more room for contingencies and listen closely to how students approach these contingencies and make provisions, regarding voice and identity, in the process of writing for service learning.

Generative Ethos in Service Learning

With its roots in Deweyian pragmatism and Freirean critical pedagogy, service learning has set the pursuit of social change at the core of its initiatives (Adler-Kassner; Deans; Julier). Donna M. Bickford and Nedra Reynolds take the social change model one step further and argue for the prominence of activism in curriculums and urge instructors to emphasize the term *activism* in order to engage students in social change (238). However, some scholars argue that requiring an activist component in writing courses only serves liberal agendas of professors and discourages students from truly immersing themselves in service learning (Eyler and Giles). Taking on the responsibility of social change and framing the roles of students as activists in service learning are both ethical issues at the heart of these debates.

Understanding the concept of generative ethos is productive to service learning because it allows us to interpret character as in flux rather than static, and it inspires a critical consciousness of how one's ethos continually changes during the process. This kind of critical consciousness offers a different approach to the social implications of the hero syndrome (or, the liberal savior complex) and may prevent the ethical failures that Bruce Herzberg warns us about: "Writing personal responses to community service experiences is an important part of processing the experience, but it is not sufficient to raise critical or cultural awareness" (59). Although Herzberg focuses here on writing about the community, paradigms of writing *for* and *with* the community require students to critique a volunteer ethos and create narratives beyond the conventional "We're all in this together" theme. Sharing the concept of generative ethos with students can motivate them to remain aware of their own authorial voices, and it can encourage them to embrace moments when their voices merge with those of their partner organization in a process of becoming that can result in a new, activist discourse. Gaining a fuller understanding of generative ethos begins to answer the questions of how service learning courses can empower students to see themselves as agents of social change who can work with others to build coalitions that foster activism (Forbes et al. 167). When we consider ventriloquism and identification as steps in the process of enfolding, the complex, ethical nature of social justice activism can be made manifest in our approaches to service learning.

Ethos is a particularly apt term through which to re-examine service learning because much of its pedagogy has invested in the development of better citizens, that is, improving the characters of our students. As we keep this investment in mind, it is worth exploring how students shape and present their characters through writing in service learning. Considering the concept of generative ethos begins to illuminate how, when, and why students reconstruct their ethos and how we can understand these undertakings as movements beyond, between, and among discourses that form in response to social injustice. Instead of confronting ventriloquism and identification as issues that need fixing, we can engage them as processes of listening and enfolded as students merge with community organizations. The resulting voice, or document, is a part of the student's identity that has shifted to enfold the values of the community organization and has developed to express those values. Although studies have contended that the goal of service learning is to decrease the divide between the university and the community, it is equally important to develop curricular objectives that recognize how students themselves bridge divides among their characters as students, activists, and writers. One strategy toward accomplishing this goal includes structuring pedagogical approaches that assist students in noticing how and when they experience resistances and disjunctures during the service learning process. The concept of generative ethos offers a framework for making this strategy a transparent and integral part of service learning coursework.

Service learning represents a microcosm of the issues of rhetoric and argumentation that shape the basis for composition theory. Initiating qualitative research of university-community partnerships is one way that we can begin to understand complex patterns of ethical engagement that underlie service learning composition. If we can identify obstacles that community partners and students face, through interviews and surveys, we can improve our understanding of diverse happenings of service learning, therefore improving our work toward social justice. Corder forwards radical possibilities for problematizing student/writer/activists partnerships with communities and for interrogating the work of service learning itself. Reflecting upon and accounting for the nuances of ventriloquism and identification demands a theoretical framework that prioritizes the role of ethos in those experiences.

Notes

¹I would like to thank Dr. Enos for introducing me to Jim Corder's work and allowing me the opportunity to explore the connections between his work and current service learning issues. I would also like to thank Dr. Thomas Miller for helping me better triangulate the issues at the core of my argument; Dr. Phyllis Ryder for her insights and productive commentary, both at the CCCC's and

via email exchanges; and everyone at RCTE for their continual support, wisdom, and constructive criticism. Finally, I am grateful for the time and energy that Dr. Keith Miller and Dr. Frank Farmer put into their review comments—their generosity and openness is greatly appreciated by this first-time article writer!

² I am indebted to my reviewer, Keith Miller, for identifying parallels between Bakhtin's essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" and generative ethos in service learning. Bakhtin claims that the author answers to a collective of voices and remains responsible for the social interactions that inform textual production; furthermore, the author is someone "who is axiologically yet-to-be," or as Corder may say, always in the process of becoming (13). The ethical imperative informing Bakhtin's formulations of answerability can add another conceptual dimension to service learning frameworks. Future investigations may benefit from taking up this Bakhtinian thread of inquiry.

³ According to Forbes et al., community service can enable student participants to view service as a kind of adventure into observing the living conditions of an "other" rather than an opportunity to build coalitions that respond to injustice (158). Ellen Cushman parallels this concern and suggests planning for "reciprocal, mutually beneficial relations" that can culminate in activist scholarship (332). Nancy Welch's approach to fostering such activist-based relations involves critical reflection on the part of student participants that allows them to consider all community participants as active and knowing (247).

⁴ It is important to note here that Corder's conception of ethos relies heavily on style: Authors develop their ethos and embrace audiences through deliberate uses of stylistic techniques, and Corder himself deployed a range of such techniques to reinvent himself through intimate and humorous prose. Rosanne Carlo, along with scholars like Wendy Bishop, James S. Baumlin, and Theresa J. Enos, argues that Corder accomplishes the task of enfolding through his stylistic technique (100). The question of style offers a basis for future studies of how students develop their own voices while writing for service learning.

⁵ One crucial element that's missing from this exchange is CentroNia's account, highlighting the need for more research to be done concerning the involvement of community nonprofits within service learning. In 2000 Nadinne I. Cruz and Dwight E. Giles, Jr. cite a lack of research about how communities perceive service learning initiatives. All too often, composition studies elides community responses to service learning. A few texts, such as *Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning*, have challenged such endeavors through insights from interviews and surveys with community partners. To further this call to problematize the established student-centered approach to service learning research, I propose considering works, like Miranda Joseph's *Against the Romance of Community*, that compel us to rethink the meaning of "community" within service learning pedagogy.

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