The pairing of college writing instruction with community action marks a relatively new (and growing) movement in rhetoric and composition. Increasingly, novice college writers are working in teams to compose research reports, newsletter articles, and manuals for local nonprofit agencies; tutoring children and bringing that experience back to the classroom as a text to be analyzed alongside other texts; and collaborating with urban youth to craft documents in intercultural, hybrid rhetorics. As one who sees promise in such community-based pedagogies, I have entered the fray, integrating community outreach into my teaching as well as developing university–community partnerships hinging on writing instruction. In this study I step back from the range of existing service-learning courses and projects in order to explore how the movement relates—in theory and in practice—to composition studies. My approach balances discussions of composition theory, critical pedagogy, and rhetoric with three case studies of particular service-learning initiatives.

The Commission on National and Community Service defines service-learning as a method of teaching that: (a) provides educational experiences under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with school and community; (b) is integrated into the students’ academic curriculum or provides structured time for a student to think, talk, or write about what the student did and saw during the service; (c) provides a student with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities; and (d) enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community, thus helping students to develop a sense of caring for others (National Community Service Trust
Act of 1993). Thus, service-learning is not volunteerism or community service; nor is it simply an academic internship or field placement. While service-learning may draw on these practices, it is at heart a pedagogy of action and reflection, one that centers on a dialectic between community outreach and academic inquiry. I use the terms service-learning, community-based learning, and community writing to refer to programs covered under this definition and, more generally, to initiatives that move the context for writing instruction beyond the bounds of the traditional college classroom in the interest of actively and concretely addressing community needs.

Reports of service-learning from the field are largely encouraging. Practitioners have opened new contexts for teaching and learning that simultaneously address disciplinary learning goals and pressing community needs. Teachers and students speak of reenergized classrooms and a boost in motivation. Moreover, pedagogical values now universally lauded in composition—active learning, student-centered learning, cooperative learning, life-long learning, cross-cultural understanding, critical thinking, authentic evaluation—are built into the very blood and bone of most community-based academic projects. Until recently, much of the evidence in support of service-learning has been anecdotal—teaching narratives of renewed student engagement, improved writing competency, and expanded social awareness and ethical development. Because part of this study is about trusting experience, we should not dismiss out of hand the teaching lore in support of service-learning. But there is also a growing body of empirical research that analyzes how community-based pedagogies relate to particular learning and development outcomes, and much of that research, like the teaching narratives, points to promising possibilities for service-learning.

For example, in a comprehensive study of college-level service-learning, Janet Eyler, Dwight E. Giles Jr., and John Braxton gathered data from fifteen hundred students at twenty colleges and universities in an attempt to answer some key questions about the value added to student learning by combining community service and academic study. The study measured students’ self-assessments of citizenship skills (including listening and verbal skills, leadership skills, and capacity for tolerance), confidence
that they can and should make a difference in their communities, community-related values, and perceptions of social problems and social justice. As might be expected, the data revealed that students who opt for a service-learning component in a course differ significantly from those who opt out. Students who selected the service-learning option scored higher on virtually every outcome measured (10).

More important, the study finds that participation in service-learning has a discernible effect on student learning. The authors conclude that service-learning programs appear to have an impact on students’ attitudes, values, and skills, as well as on the way they think about social issues, even over the relatively brief period of a semester (13). However, the authors qualify that conclusion: “While the effect is significant, it is small; few interventions of a semester’s length have a dramatic impact on outcomes. What is impressive is the consistent pattern of impact across a large number of different outcomes; service-learning is a consistent predictor and often the only significant or best predictor beyond the pre-test measure of the variable” (13). As might be expected, positive interaction with faculty, one of the other factors measured in the study, also contributed independently to many outcomes; still, according to the researchers, “these interactions did not wash out the effect of service on students” (11). Furthermore, service-learning was “the only significant or best predictor” of two student outcomes that are of particular interest to composition teachers: the capacity of students to see problems as systemic, and the ability to see things from multiple perspectives. The study suggests that service-learning makes a unique impact on college students with respect to these two factors, improving student outcomes with greater predictability than even the level of faculty–student interaction. In turn, if one assumes that an important goal of composition courses is to encourage critical consciousness, then one needs to attend to service-learning, insofar as it is a pedagogy that helps students see problems as systemic and helps them acknowledge multiple perspectives.

In a different study, using data collected from 3,450 students (2,309 service participants and 1,141 nonparticipants) attending forty-two institutions, the Higher Education Research Institute
at the University of California at Los Angeles analyzed the impact of community outreach work on students. After accounting for the influence of the characteristics that predispose students to engage in community service (not service-learning, but community service more generally), researchers discovered significant positive correlations between service and student outcomes in all three areas they measured: civic responsibility, academic attainment, and life skills (Sax and Astin). For example, with respect to civic responsibility, undergraduates who engaged in service were more likely than nonparticipants to strengthen their commitment to promoting racial understanding, to participating in community action programs, and to influencing social values. With respect to academic development, those who engaged in service saw their grades rise slightly, were nearly 50 percent more likely to spend at least one hour a week interacting with faculty, and spent more time studying than did nonparticipants. With respect to life skills, service participants showed greater positive change in all outcomes analyzed, with the largest differences occurring in understanding of community problems, knowledge and acceptance of various races and cultures, and interpersonal skills. Moreover, a separate longitudinal study of more than twelve thousand students over a nine-year period confirmed long-term benefits, particularly greater commitments to racial understanding and to civic involvement in the years after college.²

While these results of the UCLA studies pertain to community service in general, researchers found additional benefits for students in course-based service-learning. Students who have participated in academic service-learning report a deeper commitment to their communities, better preparation for careers, improved conflict management, and greater understanding of community problems.³ Likewise, a cluster of other empirical studies of service-learning suggests discernible learning and development outcomes (see Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley; Mabry; Reeb, Katsuyama, Sammon, and Yoder; Miller; Markus, Howard, and King; Kendrick).

The results of such research are important because they confirm and sharpen the anecdotal support for service-learning, even as they temper the sometimes overenthusiastic claims made in its name. Still, quantitative studies never tell the whole story; they
often overlook significant contextual concerns and they always have limitations (the research discussed above, for example, is based almost exclusively on self-reported data). Moreover, and of particular note for my focus on college composition, these studies tell us precious little about situated student writing or rhetorical competency. Because of this oversight, composition researchers themselves need to take up the charge and investigate community writing projects in context, as I do in the three case studies of community–university partnerships that form the core of this book.

While I focus on English studies, and more specifically on college writing instruction, we should note that service-learning is afoot across the disciplines. In the sciences, social sciences, arts, humanities, and preprofessional disciplines, one can find active, even if relatively small, pockets of community-based learning at a range of colleges and universities. Some early adopters of service-learning are working in isolation; some are connecting with others on their campuses; some are networking within their disciplinary and professional organizations; and some are collaborating across disciplines and campuses through national organizations that promote service-learning. Those opting for community-based pedagogies are a diverse lot who hail from a range of institutions and who practice varied approaches to teaching and social action, but they all share a commitment to improving the quality of undergraduate education by combining classroom learning with community outreach. They believe that they have discovered an innovation that encourages curricular synergies and student learning in ways that traditional pedagogies often do not.

Such claims might sound familiar, since in years past we have experienced cross-disciplinary swells of enthusiasm for such movements as writing across the curriculum and instructional technology. These movements are akin to service-learning not simply because they are cross-disciplinary and focus on improving pedagogy, but also because, when done well, all encourage active, rigorous, and reflective learning. These approaches invite students to assume agency in their own education and to draw on that education when venturing beyond campus. Moreover, just as composition specialists have played leading roles in cross-
curricular movements such as writing across the curriculum, it is important that they assert themselves as leaders in the service-learning movement. Not only do most service-learning projects—no matter the discipline—involves significant writing components, but also they advance teaching values—student-centered learning, collaborative inquiry, critical reflection—that compositionists have long championed.

There is, of course, a salient irony in inviting writing teachers to embrace the term “service,” which has been a problematic word for composition studies for so long (see Crowley; Mahala and Swilky). However, service-learning practitioners do not associate service with subservience or with academic housekeeping. Instead, they redirect the meaning of the word toward its more vital associations with democracy, outreach, and social action. Furthermore, far from composition field’s experience of “service” dragging it into institutional limbo, the affirming sense of civic service in service-learning might even have the potential, as suggested recently by Ellen Cushman, to play a significant role in the ongoing efforts of English studies to characterize its teacher-scholars as “public intellectuals” (“Public”).

Why Now?

Some forms of what is now being called service-learning have been practiced for decades under other banners—experiential learning, field work, literacy outreach, action research, and certain kinds of critical pedagogy. However, as the number of courses and programs continues to grow, as formal service-learning administrative units are added to colleges and universities, and as a corpus of scholarly work on service-learning begins to take shape, one can discern something genuinely new under way in the current movement. With respect to composition, the editors of a recent collection of essays on service-learning and composition have gone so far as to name it a “microrevolution”—small enough to go unnoticed by large segments of the profession but significant enough to prompt a rethinking of how we conceive of the teaching of writing and, more specifically, its connection to social action (Adler-Kassner, Crooks, and Watters).
English Studies and Public Service

All this raises the question, Why now? And, in particular, Why now for rhetoric and composition? Most service-learning practitioners who experiment with community-based pedagogies do so because they see them as a way to improve their teaching, to motivate students, to advance disciplinary learning, to facilitate student agency, or to enact values they hold dear, such as expanding public consciousness of social injustice or connecting cognitive learning to grounded social action. Yet some have tagged service-learning an educational fad, the latest in a long line of pedagogical quick fixes that will recede once the next big thing comes along. Still others have dismissed service-learning outright on the assumption that it represents a dressed-up version of paternalistic charity or noblesse oblige that will inevitably reproduce the injustices it purports to address.

Such dismissals of service-learning tend not only to prejudge the movement before examining its actual practices and outcomes but also to ignore the seismic shifts now under way in higher education. Such shifts are highlighted by some of our most perceptive observers of university life—people like Ernest Boyer, Clark Kerr, and Derek Bok. All suggest that we have entered a critical period in which colleges and universities need to reimagine not only how they go about teaching and doing research but also how they relate both to their host communities and to society more generally. Bok, former president of Harvard, questions whether “our universities are doing all that they can and should to help America surmount the obstacles that threaten to sap our economic strength and blight the lives of millions of our people” (6). Boyer, a longtime observer of higher education, urges colleges and universities to “respond to the challenges that confront our schools, and our cities” (“Creating” 48). Kerr, once president of the University of California system, predicts that “better integration of education with work and public service is clearly forthcoming” (223). In concert with such institutional changes, higher education in the United States is also in the process of reimagining the very definition and purpose of liberal learning, with many voices arguing the need for a Deweyan pragmatist orientation that avoids the extremes of both “ivory tower” and utilitarian conceptions of education in favor of an integrative perspective that puts liberal education in service to democracy.
(see Orrill). The service-learning movement does not pretend to have the only fitting response to such sweeping concerns, but it does claim, and rightly so, to take them seriously and to respond at the level of teaching and learning.

Major theoretical shifts in the disciplines have also set the stage for service-learning—changes that make this movement more than simply an innovative teaching approach. In particular, the disciplinary discourse of rhetoric and composition, as it has unfolded over the past decade, posits a sound theoretical footing for community-oriented pedagogies. As a discipline, rhetoric and composition has adopted the broadly defined “social perspective” on writing. The discipline prefers to see itself as having evolved from studies of the lone writer to more contextual understandings of composing; from a narrow, functional definition of literacy, focused on correctness, to a broader definition; from an exclusive focus on academic discourse to the study of both school and nonacademic contexts for writing; from presuming white middle-class culture as normative to analyzing and inviting cultural difference; and from gatekeeping at the university to facilitating the advancement of all students.

Many scholars have suggested that in order for compositionists to align our practice with theoretical stances more social in orientation, we should adopt a critical pedagogy or cultural studies approach. I find such advocacy for having students read and analyze culture and ideology extremely promising; students should indeed learn habits of cultural critique and critical reading (which we usually ask them to express in academic essays). Yet I also recognize the theoretical and pedagogical corollary that students should learn to write themselves into the world through producing rhetorical documents that intervene materially in contexts beyond the academy. Just as some feminist scholars contend that critiques of patriarchal structures need to push beyond the language and genres dictated by the dominant culture, so too is there a need for writing teachers who imagine composition as a site for social justice work to push beyond the traditional genres dictated by the academy. In other words, we must persist in more coherently and more creatively matching our writing strategies to the claims we make for our reading strategies.
Most service-learning writing teachers, like composition instructors who are committed to critical literacy or cultural studies approaches, underscore the imperative to read the complex social forces that constitute one’s cultural context—what Freire calls “reading the word and the world” (Freire and Macedo). But service-learning instructors also ask students to write purpose-driven documents for audiences beyond the classroom. Thus, in addition to inviting abstract critical interpretation of cultural phenomena, service-learning initiatives demand the logical corollary, that is, grounded, active intervention in the very cultural context we inhabit.

If the general inclination of members of the discipline is to theorize about writing as a social act, then service-learning is one means by which to underscore and extend this commitment. Take, for example, some of the most widely held theoretical stances in composition studies and how service-learning affirms and potentially extends each one:

- While the social turn in composition has resulted in widening the audience for student writing from the lone teacher to peer groups, service-learning does the same and takes the next logical step of widening the audience for student writing to include those beyond the classroom.

- While the social turn in composition encourages teachers and students to see their writing not as skills and drills but as participation in a disciplinary discourse community, service-learning writing takes the next logical step of asking students and teachers to situate their work in both disciplinary and wider nonacademic communities.

- While the social turn in composition has led researchers to study sites of writing and literacy beyond the academy, community-based writing takes the next logical step of asking students themselves to write within nonacademic discourse communities.

- While the social turn in composition underscores the need to encourage multicultural awareness and understanding in our classrooms, community-based writing takes the next logical step of asking students to cross cultural and class boundaries by collaborating with community partners who often inhabit subject positions different from those of the students.
• While the social turn in composition (particularly as it takes the form of critical pedagogy) speaks to the ethical, democratizing, and consciousness-raising potential of the writing classroom, many forms of service-learning confirm such critical intellectual habits and go the next logical step of marrying them with pragmatic civic action.

Therefore service-learning—and, within that broad umbrella, what others alternately call community service writing, community-based learning, literate social action, activist research, or academic outreach—can be viewed as the fruition of some of the most important contemporary theoretical claims of rhetoric and composition studies. Given such theoretical footings—in addition to the promising cognitive and motivational outcomes suggested by the first wave of programs— it is no wonder that interest in service-learning is on the ascent at institutions ranging from community colleges to liberal arts colleges to research universities.

Furthermore, if we take the long view, in the history of Greek and Roman rhetoric we find compelling warrants for service-learning. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was intended, after all, not to help students succeed in school settings but rather to equip rhetors to intervene in the public sphere. Isocrates, Cicero, Quintilian, and a host of others speak of the need to connect rhetorical practice to civic responsibility, which is, certainly, a central concern of contemporary service-learning theory and practice. Likewise, in the sweep of U.S. history—from Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin to Jane Addams and John Dewey—one finds examples of experiential learning combined with democratic aspirations that support a service-learning approach to teaching and learning.

**Emerging Conversations about Service-Learning**

Throughout the history of U.S. higher education, service to the community—be it the local, national, or global community—has been integral to the missions of a wide range of colleges and universities, whether motivated by an ethic of public service, a mandate to extend research to the general public, or a commitment
to particular religious beliefs. The current service-learning movement builds on this past and on several strands of educational history that emphasize the integration of higher learning with grounded social action, especially the extension programs spawned by the land grant movement of the 1860s, the progressive education reforms of the first half of the twentieth century, and the civil rights and activist movements of the 1960s (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz).

Likewise, English studies has a long-standing tradition of concern for social justice. Much of our theory is propelled by commitments to democracy, equality, critical literacy, and multiculturalism. Moreover, much of our classroom practice is motivated by a commitment to prepare all students for reflective and critical participation in their personal, cultural, working, and civic lives. Yet as English teachers, we focus nearly all our energies on the textual realm and limit our teaching of reading and writing to the classroom space, trusting that the critical and imaginative habits of mind we encourage in the classroom will carry over into the world beyond. I believe that many such habits do carry over; but I also recognize the need for connecting the work of English studies directly to action in local communities. Just as critical theory and cultural studies have demanded that we widen our reading beyond the traditional literary canon, service-learning demands that we widen the sites for writing and learning beyond campus gates. Some disciplines that have long-standing traditions of integrating fieldwork with academic study, such as education or anthropology, find this move quite natural. However, for teachers of composition and for others in the humanities, moving beyond the bounds of campus may feel unfamiliar, even risky.

Recent enthusiasm for service-learning across the disciplines and at all levels of schooling should hearten us, as should the first wave of community-based college writing courses. Across the country, service-learning is being heralded as a promising pedagogical approach by scores of school and community partners. It also finds allies in university administrators, foundations, local community leaders, government agencies, professional associations, and the general public. Thus, those new to service-learning can benefit from growing networks of service-learning
educators and learn from their collective experiences—the successes as well as the failures.

Community-based learning is new to nearly all quarters of English studies, except for some small pockets of technical writing and journalism. And even though the past ten years have seen a surge in rhetoric and composition scholarship focused on sites of writing beyond the classroom, our teaching practices, for the most part, lag behind this research trend, particularly with respect to writing in nonprofit and community settings. However, important experiments in service-learning, as well as research into the theoretical dimensions of this pedagogy, are now under way—and with increasing range and vigor. Some teachers are dipping a toe in the water, adding a small or optional service-learning component to an existing composition course. Some are wading in waist deep by more fully integrating community writing into new and existing courses. Some are diving in headfirst, setting up comprehensive programs, collaborating with other administrative units on campus, and cultivating long-term relationships with community partners.

Service-learning is also working its way into the professional forums and disciplinary discourses of English. At the 1997 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), thirty-three papers headlined service-learning; two workshops advised participants on how to start a program; two special interest groups convened; and one keynote speaker lauded service-learning as a particularly apt response to major institutional changes in higher education. The 1998 CCCC featured many service-learning papers and added a symposium and a number of local community site visits during the conference. The 1999 CCCC continued this upswing in interest with a range of diverse papers, workshops, and presentations on service-learning.

Networks formed by and for teachers and scholars in rhetoric and composition have emerged and continue to develop—for example, the CCCC Service-Learning and Community Literacy Special Interest Group. National organizations working to support service-learning now include such groups as Campus Compact, the American Association for Higher Education, the National Society for Experiential Education, the National Information Center for Service Learning, the American Association of
Community Colleges, and the National Council of Teachers of English. The Invisible College, a cross-disciplinary faculty association focused specifically on service-learning in the disciplines, is now active. Furthermore, service-learning is supported by various administrative units at particular universities, such as Edward Ginsberg Center for Service and Learning at the University of Michigan, the Feinstein Institute for Public Service at Providence College, the Bentley College Service-Learning Project, and the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University, among others.

Scholarly publication, perhaps the most powerful legitimizing force in the academy, is also making a place for service-learning. Publications offering broad overviews and bibliographies of service-learning are now available (e.g., Barber and Battistoni; Delve, Mintz, and Stewart; Jacoby and Associates; Julien; Kendall and Associates; Kraft and Swadener; Leder and McGuinness; Lempert; Lisman; Parsons and Lisman; Rhoads; Rhoads and Howard; Schine; Waterman, Service-Learning; Zlotkowski, Successful). The first peer-reviewed journal devoted to service-learning, The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, was launched in 1995. In rhetoric and composition, the first collection of essays explicitly connecting service-learning and composition studies, Writing the Community: Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Composition, was published in 1997. Articles are starting to surface in College Composition and Communication, College English, Composition Studies, and The Writing Instructor. More and more composition graduate students are writing dissertations that center on service-learning. Without doubt, further research and reflection on community writing is in the pipeline.

Community-based learning in composition may still be a largely experimental and marginal activity, but it seems to have secured at least a beachhead in the disciplinary discourse. Thus this book contributes to an emerging body of research investigating the intersections of service-learning, college writing pedagogy, and composition studies. In addition, particularly through my discussion of John Dewey and Paulo Freire in Chapter 2, the book develops a coherent and substantial theoretical framework to guide the development of community writing initiatives.
CHAPTER ONE

Guiding Purposes

While service-learning practices are gaining steam, and some particular programs are well-researched, the movement as a whole remains largely unstudied. Among the available research on courses and projects, there is little sense of how one initiative relates to others or to the broader landscape of composition studies, rhetoric, and critical theory. Therefore, this study adopts a comparative and contextualizing approach, even as it examines three particular service-learning projects in action. It is guided by five purposes:

♦ To examine the theoretical assumptions of a diverse range of university/community partnerships that hinge on college-level writing instruction and rhetoric.

♦ To sort those community writing practices into coherent categories, so as to understand more clearly their literacy aims, ideological assumptions, and curricular goals.

♦ To relate the aims, assumptions and practices of service-learning writing initiatives to current scholarly discourses in composition studies, rhetorical theory, and critical theory—and in particular to the writings of John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

♦ To balance deliberations on theory with discussions of lived experience by presenting empirical case studies of three exemplary service-learning writing projects.

♦ To assert that service-learning writing initiatives deserve a place in the college English curriculum, and to suggest how teachers and administrators might thoughtfully design and support such courses and programs.

As a first step in analyzing service-learning, I propose a taxonomy for this relatively new but already quite diverse movement in writing pedagogy and research. Yet even as I do this, I examine root theoretical and curricular concerns in English studies. I take my cue, in part, from James Britton’s early work. Describing the contributions of Britton and Albert Kitzhaber to the Dartmouth Conference of 1966, Joseph Harris sees them as speaking out of two fundamentally different theoretical frames—
Kitzhaber wanting to define the field of English, and Britton questioning the assumptions and aims of the field. Harris remarks: “While Kitzhaber looked to theory for a map of the subject to be studied, for a set of principles that would organize what we need to know about how texts are composed and interpreted, Britton took a more rhetorical or performative view of it as a means to an end, a form of reflection on action whose aim is to change teaching in direct and immediate ways” (142).

I do some mapping by dividing community writing programs into three categories: writing for the community; writing about the community; and writing with the community. However, I also critically examine my categories, putting each in dialogue with scholarship in composition and critical theory. Ultimately, my findings function, in Harris’s words, as “a form of reflection on action whose aim is to change teaching in direct and immediate ways.”

**Sorting Courses and Programs: Three Paradigms for Community Writing**

A dizzying range of courses and programs march under the banner of service-learning. Just as approaches to teaching composition vary widely, so too do the ways that teachers combine writing instruction and community action through service-learning. The variety of initiatives currently under way is at once encouraging and overwhelming. Some courses look like standard composition courses with a service-learning add-on (whether required or optional). Some are (or resemble) technical writing courses or internship programs with a nonprofit rather than a corporate focus. Some foreground critical pedagogy and cultural critique. Some center on intercultural inquiry or problem-solving. Some devote nearly all of their energies to personal narratives of and reflections on student outreach experiences. Some gather a mixed bag of service-learning strategies into one course. Some are comprehensive literacy projects or cross-disciplinary efforts rather than revamped composition courses. Given this range—and in order to discuss community writing with any degree of clarity—we must first sort through the variety of courses and programs.
CHAPTER ONE

One method of sorting composition initiatives that has surfaced in service-learning research is a division between “writing about service” and “writing as service” (Bacon, “Instruction”). Making such a division is helpful. But to my mind, the most fruitful way to sort service-learning initiatives is to discern their distinct literacy goals and then group courses according to their assumptions and aims. In other words, one needs to ask, “What is this service-learning course supposed to do?” As Laura Julier suggests, a thoughtful investigation of service-learning in composition throws us back upon a basic question of purpose with which all teachers of writing must wrestle, what Erika Lindemann has called a “prior question.”

The taxonomy I propose emerges from putting questions of purpose to a range of service-learning courses and programs. From “What is this service-learning course supposed to do?” follow other more specific questions, such as: Which literacy outcomes does each service-learning initiative privilege? What kind(s) of texts does each initiative generate? How does each define “social action”? What are the ideological assumptions embedded in each course or curriculum? How are relationships arranged among student, teacher, and community partner? Which audiences are being addressed? How is student writing assessed?

Putting such questions to current service-learning initiatives leaves us with three distinct groupings of community writing programs: those that write for the community; those that write about the community; and those that write with the community. Figure 1 illustrates these differences. Note that the chart is intended as a hypothesis, a schema that outlines how different types of service-learning initiatives foreground discernibly different literacies and learning outcomes. The three categories are, of course, simplifications that will betray the lived complexities of actual programs—that is, all the lines I’ve drawn will leak. Much like James Britton’s creation of the “poetic,” “expressive,” and “transactional” categories to describe the range of student writing, the taxonomy is intended as a heuristic for unpacking the aims and assumptions of a diverse range of literacy practices.

The categories will become clearer in later chapters as I examine the three paradigms and present a case study of each. In short, writing-for-the-community courses are those through which
Figure 1. Three paradigms for community writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Site for Learning</th>
<th>Writing for the Community</th>
<th>Writing about the Community</th>
<th>Writing with the Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Privileged Literacies</td>
<td>Nonprofit agency</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Community center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplace discourse</td>
<td>Academic and workplace literacies</td>
<td>Academic and critical literacies</td>
<td>Academic, community, and hybrid literacies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor–agency contact person</td>
<td>Instructor–agency contact person</td>
<td>Instructor–community site contact</td>
<td>Instructor/department–community center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>(1) Students learn nonacademic writing practices and reflect on differences between academic and workplace rhetorics. (2) Students reflect on service experience to attain critical awareness of community needs. (3) Students provide needed writing products for agencies.</td>
<td>(1) Students serve at schools or community sites and reflect on their experiences. (2) Students develop critical consciousness and habits of intellectual inquiry and societal critique. (3) Students write journals and compose academic-style essays on community issues and/or pressing social concerns.</td>
<td>(1) Students, faculty, and community use writing as part of a social action effort to collaboratively identify and address local problems. (2) Students and community members negotiate cultural differences and forge shared discourses. (3) University and community share inquiry and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Can the students move ably between academic and workplace discourses? Have students critically reflected on the writing and service processes? Did students produce documents that will be of real use to the agencies?</td>
<td>Have students provided adequate service to the community site? How sophisticated a critique of social concerns can students demonstrate in academic discussion and writing? Has student academic writing improved?</td>
<td>Have local and academic community members engaged in collaborative writing or research? Can students reflect critically on issues such as cultural difference? Has the local problem been effectively solved, addressed, or researched?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
college students collaborate with understaffed nonprofit agencies to provide workplace documents (grant research, newsletter articles, news releases, manuals, brochures) for the given agency. The student or team of students enters into a client relationship with the nonprofit, and the writing that the student or team generates constitutes both a service for the nonprofit client and a medium for student learning in a “real-world” rhetorical situation. This approach to community writing changes the traditional composition classroom in three major ways: it adds workplace and public genres to traditional essay genres; it shifts the exigency and motivation for writing from meeting teacher and grading expectations to meeting the standards articulated by the community partner; and it changes the teacher-student relationship because the classroom instructor is no longer the sole authority in creating or assessing assignments. Writing-for courses, with their instrumental bent, value workplace literacies and thus differ significantly from most courses that abide in the writing-about-the-community paradigm.

In writing-about-the-community courses, students engage in traditional community service (often tutoring youth or working at a homeless shelter) and then draw on that lived experience in their writing of essays. Gaining lived experience through working with people in need can open new perspectives for students, particularly as they write about complex social issues. Here the emphasis is generally on personal reflection, social analysis, and/or cultural critique. How these are weighted depends on the instructor. Even though the source materials (including the student outreach experiences) and the topic choices (which often emerge from those outreach experiences) for student writing differ from those of most composition classrooms, students express their reflection, analysis, or critique in familiar academic discourses (the journal, the reflective essay, the research paper), and are evaluated according to largely traditional methods of academic assessment. Thus, writing-about courses tend to advance academic and critical literacy goals.

Writing-with-the-community initiatives take a different approach, often adopting a grassroots sensibility. These programs elude easy categorization but generally follow a pattern in which university faculty and students collaborate directly with commu-
community members (rather than through established nonprofit or governmental agencies) to research and address pressing local problems. Writing-with initiatives take many forms, including activist research, literacy work, proposal writing, and collaborative problem solving. They tend to value many different literacies (academic, community, and even hybrid literacies) and often devote significant attention to intercultural communication. In later chapters, I draw on the example of the Community Literacy Center of Pittsburgh.

With the chart of service-learning categories I do not mean to imply that programs do not cross fences. In fact, they do. For example, at Michigan State University, first-year writing is usually taught within a curriculum focusing on U.S. civic history. Since 1994, the writing program has been introducing service-learning in some sections, including projects through which students work with nonprofit agencies, writing for agency needs (newsletters, brochures, research, and so on). Yet they also read, discuss, and write about service, ethics, democracy, and social action in U.S. history and culture. As I discuss in Chapter 6, courses I teach are often similarly divided (in terms of the class time, amount of student writing, and methods of assessment) between reading and writing about the community and producing needed written documents for nonprofit agencies. Still, I maintain that the writing-about-the-community and writing-for-the-community strands of such courses, while complementary, value distinctly different literacies, engage distinctly different learning processes, require distinctly different rhetorical practices, and result in distinctly different kinds of texts.

I do not argue that any one of the three paradigms is morally superior or inherently more ethical than the others. Each is built on its own assumptions, evinces its own internal logic, and works toward different goals. Any one of the paradigms might work best within a particular local community or college context. Understanding the fitness, the kairos, of a particular approach to its particular context is the most pressing imperative. Thus, rather than attempt to construct a hierarchy that argues for a “best” kind of service-learning, I prefer to analyze the key differences
among programs, as well as the implications of those differences. As Keith Morton points out, some service-learning theorists and practitioners measure their efforts using a “continuum” which places charity as the lowest form and advocacy as the highest form of service. Articulating an alternative to such hierarchical thinking and ranking, Morton argues instead that “there exist a series of related but distinct community service paradigms, each containing a world view, a problem statement and an agenda for change” (“Irony” 24). Morton’s three community service paradigms are charity, project, and social change, and his method for sorting them seems to me both generous-minded and analytically sound. He emphasizes that we should feel free to evaluate the quality of particular initiatives as they aspire to the goals of particular paradigms (their “thinness” or “thickness”). However, to judge but one paradigm truly worthy would unnecessarily limit the diversity of approaches right from the start and, in turn, create the misleading impression that only one kind of service—advocacy—really matters.

I borrow Morton’s method, but not his particular categories, in proposing three paradigms for service-learning in rhetoric and composition. Writing for the community, writing about the community, and writing with the community constitute three related but distinct paradigms, and each, done well, has its own integrity (and its own limitations) based on its own assumptions and goals. A particular course fitting any one of the paradigms could be conducted either coherently or haphazardly, thoughtfully or uncritically. Much depends on the foresight, planning, and follow-through of the particular instructor. Thus, every service-learning course and teacher should heed the ancient Greek dictum: know thyself. This demands that service-learning teachers interrogate the assumptions and aims embedded in their own practices and proceed in the light of critical self-awareness.

The Ethics of Service: Questions of Power, Representation, and Reciprocity

Before moving on to articulate a theoretical foundation for service-learning and discuss case studies, it is vital that we step back
English Studies and Public Service

and consider key ethical concerns attendant to any form of community outreach. Many teachers are wary, and rightly so, of the dangers of community service, and in particular the habit of casting individuals and communities in the uneven roles of “server” and “served.” Take, for example, John McKnight’s searing indictment of how professionalized service systems tend to define need. McKnight alerts not only professional servers (like social or health care workers) but also service-learning practitioners to the potentially counterproductive and disabling consequences of their efforts.

Professionalized definitions of need produce a logical and necessary set of remedial assumptions, each with its own intrinsically disabling effects.

The first of these assumptions is the mirror image of the individualized definition of need. As you are the problem, the assumption is that I, the professionalized server, am the answer. You are not the answer. Your peers are not the answer. The political, social and economic environment is not the answer. Nor is it possible that there is no answer. I, the professional, am the answer. The central assumption is that service is a unilateral process. I, the professional, produce. You, the client, consume. . . .

We will have reached the apogee of the modernized service society when the professionals can say to the citizen:
We are the solution to your problem.
We know what problem you have.
You can’t understand the problem or the solution.
Only we can decide whether the solution has dealt with your problem.
(“Disabling” 239–41; see also McKnight, Careless)

McKnight’s critique of deficit model approaches to professionalized service resonates with similar arguments in composition studies against deficit models of basic writing. His skepticism about the role of the server raises important issues that need to be on the minds of service-learning teachers and students. Community-based learning faces the complex ethical issues inherent in the service professions (including social work, medicine, and teaching), the ethical quandaries attendant upon research conducted by ethnographers and anthropologists, and the questions of power that accompany collaboration across dis-
parities of wealth and privilege. Among the most formidable challenges for service-learning are broaching such ethical matters with critical rigor, designing programs for mutuality with community constituencies, and problematizing the “do-gooder” mentality entrenched in our culture and our students (see Rhoads). Abiding ethical questions for service-learning include:

- How can service-learning avoid the precarious server/served relationship critiqued by McKnight? Who is serving whom, and why?
- When is service-learning in danger of lapsing into habits of paternalistic charity or noblesse oblige?
- When and how do service-learning pedagogies reproduce rather than disrupt dominant ideologies?
- How do service-learning advocates fruitfully confront the differences in power, class, race, ethnicity, identity, and culture that often separate universities and their members from local communities and their members? When are these issues avoided, and at what cost?
- How do the often problematic histories of universities intervening in surrounding communities relate to current practices?
- How does service-learning structure a reciprocal and dialectical relationship between “serving” and “learning”? In other words, how does one avoid “using” community constituencies for the benefit of student education and at the same time maintain academic rigor?
- When are community partners really benefiting from service-learning? And when are they not?
- What happens when students enter local communities for only brief encounters, usually a semester or shorter, despite the preferences of many community partners for long-term commitments?
- How should instructors deal with unmotivated or resistant students? Also, how should they deal with well-intentioned but relatively immature or underskilled students?

Simply posing these questions is almost enough to send one running from service-learning. But while such inquiries are de-
manding, they are not defeating. Some (but not all) of the issues have been anticipated and addressed in the several iterations of the “Principles of Good Practice” in the service-learning literature (Honnet and Poulsen; Lisman 127–47; Mintz and Hesser). Certainly, we must continually raise these key ethical questions in our research on service-learning. Even more important, we have a responsibility to bring them squarely into the classroom and to our community partners for reflection and dialogue—which, fortunately, is something that many service-learning teachers already do.

Lorie J. Goodman recommends sustained inquiry into the ethical dimensions of service and furthermore reminds us that service-learning advocates should reexamine their most commonplace terms, including community and service. As Goodman explains, community has become a contested term in composition studies. Scholars have questioned how certain uses of community (which often assumes an emphasis on consensus) can function to gloss over important matters of difference and squelch dissent. The same process characterizes service-learning programs which fail to account for the voices and perspectives of community members, which can be steamrolled in the rush to meet student and academic demands. Use of the word service evokes not only the specter of unequal server–served relations (recall McKnight above) but also a gendered history in which women, both within and outside the academy, have been enculturated to submerge their selves in service to others (see JoAnn Campbell, “Vexation”).

Ethical questions persist for service-learning, and they need to be addressed in a critical but hopeful spirit. One could fill a semester (and more) with theoretical and philosophical deliberations on the ethical concerns and dilemmas attendant to community outreach. However, a service-learning pedagogy demands not only contemplation but also action. Devoting all of one’s teaching energies to abstract reflection forecloses any opportunity for grounded action and can ultimately lead to intellectual detachment, fatalism, or paralysis. In contrast, service-learning strives for an equitable balance between serving and learning, an equitable dialectic between pragmatic action and critical reflec-
tion, and an equitable consideration of university and community perspectives. Perfect balance, perfect dialectic, perfect consideration will ever be elusive. Thus, service-learning courses always entail risk. (But doesn’t everything worthwhile?) Shying from that risk by insisting on perfection or some form of ideological purity is bound not only to sabotage student agency but also to trap both teachers and students in a loop of abstract deliberation, ever avoiding the test of experience.

Fruitful inquiry into the abiding ethical complexities of service is central to responsible service-learning courses and to what Robert Rhoads terms “critical community service” (204). Open dialogue on key social justice issues, exacting self-awareness, and reciprocal relationships with community partners need to be fundamental components of community-based pedagogies. This hopeful but critical stance—demanding an active, engaged ethics—is evident in the pragmatist philosophy of John Dewey and the liberatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Their work provides context and depth to current discussions on the relationship of community writing practices to composition studies. They also offer service-learning practitioners compelling theoretical foundations that support experiential learning, community involvement, and a dialectic of critical reflection and grounded action.