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Preparing writing centers and tutors for literacy mediation for working class campus-staff

Christy M. Oslund
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PREPARING WRITING CENTERS AND TUTORS FOR LITERACY MEDIATION
FOR WORKING CLASS CAMPUS-STAFF

By
Christy M. Oslund

A DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment in the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

(Rhetoric and Technical Communication)

MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

2011

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This dissertation, "Preparing Writing Centers and Tutors for Literacy Mediation for Working Class Campus-Staff," is hereby approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE FIELD OF RHETORIC AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION.

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To my very patient family who continued to love and encourage me even when it seemed like I might never finish. Family barbeques, pep-talks on the phone, and chocolate cheesecake are a big part of what made completing this project possible. Thank you for your generous support.

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Abstract

Writing centers work with writers; traditionally services have been focused on undergraduates taking composition classes. More recently, centers have started to attract a wider client base including: students taking labs that require writing; graduate students; and ESL students learning the conventions of U.S. communication. There are very few centers, however, which identify themselves as open to working with all members of the campus-community. Michigan Technological University has one such center.

In the Michigan Tech writing center, doors are open to “all students, faculty and staff.” While graduate students, post docs, and professors preparing articles for publication have used the center, for the first time in the collective memory of the center UAW staff members requested center appointments in the summer of 2008. These working class employees were in the process of filling out a work related document, the *UAW Position Audit*, an approximately seven-page form. This form was their one avenue for requesting a review of the job they were doing; the review was the first step in requesting a raise in job level and pay.

This study grew out of the realization that implicit literacy expectations between working class United Auto Workers (UAW) staff and professional class staff were complicating the filling out and filing of the position audit form. Professional class supervisors had designed the form as a measure of fairness, in that each UAW employee on campus was responding to the same set of questions about their work. However, the implicit literacy expectations of supervisors were different from those of many of the employees who were to fill out the form. As a result, questions that were meant to be straightforward to answer were in the eyes of the employees filling out the form, complex. Before coming to the writing center UAW staff had spent months writing out responses to the form; they expressed concerns that their responses still would not meet audience expectations. These writers recognized that they did not yet know exactly what the audience was expecting.

The results of this study include a framework for planning writing center sessions that facilitate the acquisition of literacy practices which are new to the user. One important realization from this dissertation is that the social nature of literacy must be kept in the forefront when both planning sessions and when educating tutors to lead these sessions. Literacy scholars such as James Paul Gee, Brian Street, and Shirley Brice Heath are used to show that a person can only know those literacy practices that they have previously acquired. In order to acquire new literacy practices, a person must have social opportunities for hands-on practice and mentoring from someone with experience. The writing center can adapt theory and practices from this dissertation that will facilitate sessions for a range of writers wishing to learn “new” literacy practices. This study also calls for specific changes to writing center tutor education.

Introduction

How Writing Center Sessions can Build Relationships

In each first session in the writing center, we encounter the opportunity for a new “relationship” to begin. I use relationship here in a Martin Buber or Luce Irigaray sense, i.e. the opportunity for one human being to recognize the humanity of an “other.” As Buber explains in *I and Thou*, it is possible for my “I” to recognize the person in the “other” – for just a moment “I” do not see “you” instead I see your ‘essential humanity’ or as the idea is usually translated into English, “I” see “Thou.”ⁱ In *My Love to You* Irigaray refers to the similar concept of seeing beyond the outer trappings of gender identity to the being within and calls these moments “recognition” – when one’s spiritual self sees another’s spiritual being.ⁱⁱ In this sense, “relationship” is not about the length of time people know each other or the fondness they share for one another. It is the capacity to see through all the worldly things that separate person from person, to stop seeing the ‘otherness’ of another for long enough to catch a glimpse of the human being underneath the layers of social contexts that separate us as individuals. Unlike Irigaray, I suspect that there are moments when shared traits like gender, socio-economic background, or life

context can bridge other differences and aid in seeing the humanity of another. For example, Thomas Barnes' 2010 documentary movie "Babies" captured attention as it followed four babies from four different cultures for their first year of life. Viewers and critics all report that it is the shared human moments that each baby encounters – first step, first word, trying a new food—that helps make the film so compelling. It is in those "universal moments" that people see beyond cultural differences and are recognizing each other's humanity.

The dissertation that follows is not a new age tome about how to create right relationships between individuals in the writing center. Both Buber and Irigaray would agree that moments of "I and Thou" or "recognition" are rare and fleeting. This dissertation does not argue that point. The point being made is much humbler. As a writing center consultant when I have the first session with a person there is a possibility that I am meeting someone who I might see for one session and never again, someone who will be forgotten in a few hours, or even in fifteen minutes. There is also the possibility that as a first session begins I am on the verge of a relationship that will change how I think about the work I do in the writing center and how I define that work.

Granted, usually my writing center experience falls in between these two extremes; based on the nature of the writing center sessions at Michigan Tech I have worked with a number of people who I've known for at least one semester. As we work together we usually learn more about each other. Occasionally, we will have glimpses of each other as humans with concerns far outside the walls of our mutual institution. For example, I do not forget the young international student I worked with who wanted to be

a musician. His family wanted him to be a businessman. Student and family finally compromised and agreed when he finished his business degree and returned home he would be allowed to become a police officer. The familial and cultural context of this compromise continues to intrigue me. When I first met this quiet young man I did not imagine he would become a memorable part of my life or an exemplar for me of the personal and cultural conflict that students can face when receiving a “privileged” education.

This dissertation grew out of writing center sessions that took place on the campus of Michigan Tech University. The argument to be made in this dissertation was inspired by sessions involving myself, working as a graduate writing center coachⁱⁱⁱ, and unionized members of Tech’s staff. The staff members came to the writing center asking for assistance with work related literacy. Most were filling out a position audit form. All participants in these sessions – myself as the writing center coach and the unionized staff – were female on a campus that is administratively and numerically dominated by males. More will later be said about class, gender, and socioeconomics on Tech’s campus – these are differences that notably mattered in the sessions and the underlying needs that these sessions addressed.

Formats and Relationships

Dissertations have their own format: begin with the argument being made; state why the argument is worth pursuing; explain how this work contributes something of significance to the field. The “story” of how this work came about however, in order to be told the way stories are usually told, would have necessitated first explaining how the

sessions began, followed by explanations of how these sessions led to research and how that research led to the argument and how the argument generates future writing center work. For the sake of the dissertation genre then, the story must begin nearer the middle, with the argument to be made. How and why *this argument* was developed and is being made will be explained. The introduction will introduce not just the argument but why it is important and what this work has to offer writing centers. And underlying all aspects of this argument you will find there are concerns and considerations related to *relationships*.

As previously mentioned, this dissertation's context was in part defined by relationships on the campus of Michigan Tech University. This campus is situated in the northern Midwest, has a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) focus and is geographically isolated from major centers of commerce and education. Those who participated in the writing center sessions that inspired this dissertation were women employed in various capacities by the university; none of these capacities included management. These women were union members of the United Auto Workers (UAW); the majority of them came to the writing center to work on a job related form – the *UAW Position Audit Form*. As will be shown, this form and how the responses to it are weighed and judged by supervisors and the Human Resources department, directly impact the employees who must fill out and file this form. In working with these women, my job as the writing center consultant was to work towards making explicit the implicit expectations of two groups: the professional class employees who had written the form and amongst whose members were the supervisors who would read and evaluate the filed form; and the working class employees whose job level, attendant duties and performance would be observed through the form. The members of each group,

professional and working class employees, brought implicit literacy understandings to the form. These understandings were not shared between the two groups but rather were shared amongst the members of each group. Thus, professional staff ‘read’ the form and the accompanying instructions one way while the working class staff read and responded to the form with different implicit literacy understandings. As a result, the responses written by the working class employees were not necessarily read by the professional class as an ‘accurate’ report of the work being done, e.g. how to talk about work was differently conceived between the two groups due to different implicit understandings about writing and work. Any judgments made by the professional staff based on the responses of the working class staff to the form were in danger not of measuring the actual work being done but of measuring the lack of shared understanding regarding the purpose and use of the form.

In the normal genre of dissertation, I would at this point continue with a discussion of how this project is laid out; I will now deliberately break the pattern of this genre to introduce first the two women from the UAW I worked with. These women would eventually be directly responsible for further writing center sessions with other UAW members. While eventually half a dozen women took part in individual writing center sessions, my glimpse into the humane concerns – the humanity inside the context – began with these two women who, for the purposes of this project I will call Linda and Beth (IRB #M0437).

The Story behind this Dissertation

As mentioned at the beginning of the *Introduction*, there is a story behind the work I ended up doing and why I ended up doing it. It has been argued by Richard Kearney in *On Stories: Thinking in Action*^{iv} that how we as humans make sense, how we explain our experiences, interactions, and relationships, is through the stories we tell ourselves and others about “what happened.” Consider that life is a series of events; a constant, often boring series of actions and reactions. In order to make order of our world, in order to make sense of these series of otherwise often meaningless ‘things that happen’ each person selects particular moments and recounts those moments in story form to other people. Even in retelling a “factual” event, a person selects out ‘salient’ details and puts these details together in a way that creates a story for the listener: “story” is an appropriate way of thinking about this because as we retell events we make use of character, plot points, conflict, and usually a climax moment which precedes “the end”. The end – a point when the story is complete not because events ceased to happen but because the person telling the events has selected that point as the conclusions of the ‘important’ events in relation to ‘the story’ he has told. At particular points in this dissertation, scenes from the “story” will be shown for methodological reasons that will be explained in *Chapter One*.

* * * * *

The elevator ‘pinged’, the door opened, and Linda and Beth stepped out¹. Linda, a little shorter than me, also blonde and rosy cheeked; Beth, taller than both of us, dark thick hair pulled back in an attempt to keep it controlled. Linda wore a flowered blouse Beth a green t-shirt and both were in jeans—they also wore the plastic name tags that marked them as unionized staff. While summer dress was casual on our campus, Linda and Beth were dressed as they did year round. I was in a dress due both to the warm weather and my position—summer coordinator for the writing center.

“I am so mad at him!” Beth was saying as she stepped off the elevator. We’d been meeting long enough that I knew she was either talking about her boss or her husband. These were two of the three men who featured prominently in her conversation and she was never mad at the third, her son. He was a recent high school graduate waiting to be deployed to Iraq.

“Hello,” Linda said, her normal cheerful smile lighting up her face.

“Oh, hi,” Beth said, squeezing my arm. “Sorry, it’s just been one of those weekends.” She had told me in our session the previous Thursday that the families of her son’s unit were gathering where the unit was currently stationed; the military was going to brief the families about the impending deployment of their sons and daughter. What she didn’t have to say was that she was scared to death for her son’s life. This fact

¹ Names and identifying work details have been changed to conceal identities and protect the confidentiality of individuals.

vibrated in her tone and body language every time the subject came up and she would try and dismiss her fear with, “but I’m just not going to think about that right now.”

Before we could begin working, Beth needed to talk a little. Linda was working on some editing and she and I quickly sorted out what she would concentrate on for the first part of the session. Then I turned to Beth who explained that her husband had neglected to reserve a second hotel room for her and their daughter, which was necessary since he’d invited his own father to also stay in the hotel with them, along with their son. “So how are all of us supposed to fit into one room? He just didn’t think about it. That’s his problem, he never plans, I have to do all the planning! If Beth doesn’t do it, it doesn’t get done.” With her son just out of high school, Beth was still the mom in charge of buying the right kind and number of undershirts, skivvies, socks etc. taking care of the minutiae that was part of a deploying soldier’s life.

I was a “responsive” listener. I assured her that it was normal to be stressed out, that she did have a lot to take care of, that from what else she’d told me about her husband he wasn’t a good detail person and so she did end up with more detail work. I remembered how stressful it had been for my family when I had two cousins deployed within a year of each other. I encouraged Beth to keep thinking positively and reminded her that we’d all keep praying for his safe deployment. Linda, Beth and I had already shared insights about our faith and spirituality. We were now comfortable with statements like, “I’ll keep praying for you.”

Beth, having vented a little stress now turned to her purpose for starting sessions at the writing center. “Okay, let’s get to work.”

She pulled out her paperwork. Beth had been receiving pressure from her supervisor to fill out a *UAW Position Audit Form* that would explain how her duties had been added to, compared to what she'd been hired to do. This was part of a process for her job level to be reviewed, the long detailed form of eight or more pages being the first step of the process. She would then take part in an interview about her responses to the document where a member of Human Resources and her supervisor would be present. Finally, HR would review the document and the discussion. HR would then release a decision. If things went well Beth would receive a raise in level and the accompanying pay increase. If things went badly, i.e. if HR decided she was actually doing less than she'd been hired to do, her job level would be decreased, negatively impacting how she would be perceived in the department where she worked and likely affecting her ability to apply for other campus' jobs in the future. Beth had been struggling with the form for a year.

I had met Beth through her friend and fellow UAW staff person Linda. Linda had originally approached the writing center saying she was interested in building on the skills she'd learned in "high school English class". When she asked what we could "do" in a writing center session I told her we could basically work on anything language/writing/communication related. After we'd meet a few times, Linda decided the type of session she and I were having could help her friend Beth finally finish her *UAW Position Audit Form*. Not sure what I'd be getting into trying to meet with two people at once, I agreed that Beth could attend the sessions I had with Linda. I thought if

nothing else, once Beth's foot was in the door she might be willing to arrange different session times from Linda.

As it turned out, the woman worked well together. Beth's goal was to finish her *UAW Position Audit Form*. Linda had meantime decided she wanted to practice reading, writing, and editing skills. Beth would write a draft paragraph for a section of the audit review form, Linda would proofread it. Then the three of us would proofread together; I'd let Linda make her editing suggestions first, I would then raise for discussion any word choices or other editorial suggestions I had, and we'd all note changes and ideas for future drafts on our working copy of the document. Between our twice-weekly writing center sessions Beth made changes and additions and would bring a fresh draft of the form for each of us the following session time.

Linda also proved very helpful to Beth in thinking about the processes that were part of her job; Linda had previously held a similar position and could ask more detailed questions about how Beth accomplished tasks. As we talked things out we also practiced "new" skills. We tried different ways of saying the same thing, thinking about the potential outcomes of different word choices and deciding what "sounds best" for the context of speaking to HR and a supervisor. We practiced using a dictionary as we tried out different phrases and words. I found it notable that as the summer went on Beth and Linda began to display a new sense of agency. They began to see choices for themselves in their workplaces that they had not previously seen. Beth, who did a great deal of work but was the lowest level in her department, began to express her ideas and stand up for her opinions in her work environment. Both women began to see new choices for

themselves in community and family contexts. Linda chose to write a letter to the community and send it to the local paper; when our sessions had begun she had shared with me that the thought of another person reading her “bad writing” was physically uncomfortable for her. Both women also began reading out-loud in our sessions, something that previously they “would never do.” The more we grew to know each other and as trust developed amongst us, we found we were each willing to take new risks; at Linda’s invitation I did something I would’ never do’ and attended a community barbeque on the Fourth of July that she was organizing. At the same time, the different contexts gave us opportunities to practice an expanded range of literacy uses, including community letters to the newspaper.

In one of our early sessions Linda had explained to me what motivated her to seek out “English help” on campus. “Tom in Human Resources told me I’m good with people in a cashier’s job, but I’m not right for office jobs. He says my grammar is too bad.” Bad grammar was the vague ‘reason’ Linda had been given in the past when she applied for office jobs and been turned down for them, even if her interview with the department doing the hiring seemed to go well. She had spent one week in a job that was a step between service and office job, but the tone in that work environment had been so negative she chose to return to her previous position. Tom in Human Resources said this proved his point; “he said he knew I wasn’t right for that job, and that it proves I’m not an office worker.” Linda hoped I could help her “improve” her grammar and punctuation. I realized, in part because of my own background, that there was much more going on in this context than her grammar, and we needed to work on changing the administration’s

perception of her skills, capacity, and the ‘class issues’ that were unspoken but at work in regard to HR’s view of Linda. Both Linda and Beth wanted to make changes to their work related literacy skills. My background and training allowed me to assist them in their recognition of implicit literacy expectations; both their own and those of the professional class employees who wrote and read the forms and applications they had to fill out and file. I was also able to act as an advocate for their own skills and knowledge – pointing out to both women the many ways in which their current literacy practices were already successful in a number of different contexts.

* * * * *

This dissertation proposes that writing centers ought to recognize all members of the campus community as potential users of the writing center. Specifically though, this argument is focused on the inclusion of those who are arguably occupying the lowest level of the campus community power-caste system, i.e. the unionized staff members who are hourly/service workers. On the campus of Michigan Tech the statistical majority of these workers are women; the statistical majority of their supervisors are men.^v

These hourly staff members fill jobs which include duties such as: receiving visitors, serving as clerks in store fronts, handling ticket sales, preparing and serving food, cleaning dormitories and other buildings, maintaining the grounds, and otherwise

filling the “support” roles on campus. Their relationships on campus usually foreground the individual in the role of their job, i.e. they are seen first as their function, “receptionist” or “groundskeeper.” Due to being recognized primarily as their job, the tone of the person’s relationship with others is influenced by what they “do”. Obviously this is true of nearly every member of the campus community; initially we are all recognized as what we ‘do’: writing center coach, professor of Rhetoric, office assistant. What is often unacknowledged is the caste system that is built into this form of relationship. Each ‘job’ has a ‘place’ in the hierarchy of campus life. Interestingly, in some contexts power and prestige can be separated and ranked differently. An office assistant has power to affect change in a student’s life and can simplify or complicate the relationship the student has with the institution. Yet, in some contexts graduate students will be treated with more prestige than office assistants, in part because the grad students are “almost” professionals and often have teaching or research responsibilities; because of their affiliation with professors, grad students may enjoy a social status that is reflective of the respect given to professors, particularly since the expectation for many is that they are on the road to becoming professors.

Something that all campus employees have in common is that their individual relationship with the institutions that employ them is managed through ‘paper work’ or forms. There are different ‘levels’ of forms – faculty report, probation reports for new staff, job audit review – but in one way or another each individual is, from the institutional perspective, a collection of forms in a file. For staff employees, the forms and thus the relationship with the institution are based on the job duties the person was

hired to carry out, therefore the institution is in relationship with the person as their job. Perhaps the highest stake form that unionized staff encounters at work is the position audit form, the form that evaluates the duties each employee carries out in their job, and allows the comparison of what duties the employee is carrying out as opposed to what duties the employee was hired to carry out. The position audit form is used by the institution to evaluate and judge the job/person's worth to the institution. A "good" evaluation of the filed position audit form means potential raises or promotion; a "bad" evaluation means potential demotion, probation, or loss of employment.

Any form which affects the individual's future outcomes is significant, which means the position audit form is not a neutral document. This form is the lens through which an institution looks at the job/person and judges if the employee is carrying out the duties assigned to the job at the level which accompanies the job. These judgments while job related, still result in serious impacts on the person's life. Professional staff/supervisors have the role of reading the filed position audit form and making judgments about how the job is being carried out. The working class employees who fill the positions thus are being observed and judged through their responses to the form. What a person does and how "valuable" he or she is as their job, socially and economically actively impact how the individual is viewed by others. This is particularly true in a society where often one of the first questions we ask upon meeting someone is, "And what do you do?" There is a social impact that comes with the answer to this question. The impact differs depending on the answer: "Professor", "Undertaker," "Lawyer," "Taxidermist," "Waitress," "Librarian," "Receptionist"....

Consider also that economics affect social placement and standing in a community. The “value” of a job is not just measured by the ‘social esteem’ attached to it; the value of a job is also measured by how much one is recompensed for performing the job. Economics and income further socially position a person. Does one have adequate “disposable income” or does one work several jobs to provide basic necessities? Economics also affect the contexts we will find ourselves in due to what we can afford to pursue outside work hours. A coworker and I were recently discussing that the university brings in an interesting, usually diverse range of performers to the local theater; wouldn’t it be nice if we could afford tickets to some of these events? Those with higher incomes can choose to attend events based on personal interest and time. Those with a lower economic standing can afford fewer luxuries. What for one group might seem like a “splurge” for another group might seem like an affordable “educational opportunity.”

On many campuses, composition students are still the primary users of the writing center. Augmenting their numbers are students from other ‘writing classes’. The writing center has grown from a center perceived as working with basic writing skills to a place where all undergraduate, and sometimes all writers, are welcome and willing to work on their writing. This project argues that there is a larger audience for writing center services amongst the members of the campus community – the working class staff. As will be shown in the chapters to come, working class employees are increasingly finding their socio-economic status dependent on their literacy skills. On campuses like Michigan Tech, which does not offer ‘basic literacy’ classes, the writing center becomes the one potential source of literacy education that is available to working class employees.

Preliminary Chapter Summaries

It should now be clear that this dissertation is not just about expanding the definition of “who uses the writing center” but it should also be clear that attendant to this claim is the argument that forms like the *UAW Position Audit* are not neutral. Every form is written to serve an institutional purpose. In the case of the position audit form, the purpose is to evaluate the job and level it is ranked at, which includes relying on the written response of the working class employee to judge what work is being done. When the working class employees who fill in the form do not share the implicit literacy understandings of the professional class employees who will evaluate the form, then the working class employee’s socio-economic standing can potentially be negatively impacted. This in turn impacts the individual’s standing in their community and in their family. These impacts and the argument underlying the call for writing centers to work with working class campus employees will be briefly outlined here, with further theoretical details being provided in the chapters which follow.

Chapter One will more fully discuss the methodology and theory underlying my argument. This chapter will also include fuller chapter outlines. The outline being shared here in the *Introduction* is meant to provide an overall sense of how this dissertation will unfold, not to explore the theory foundational to each chapter discussion.

Chapter Two will use a rhetorical analysis based on Foucault’s argument about the relationship between individuals and the institutions they are part of; it will then examine several key features of the position audit form. This chapter will also show how

the form contains implicit literacy expectations of the professional class staff who wrote it.

Chapter Three will analyze how a person's previous literacy experiences affect her reading and response to the form. Explicating differences between the professional and working class home literacies (Shirley Brice Heath) will show how two groups can have such different understandings of the same form.

Chapter Four will introduce Etienne Wenger's theory of learning to show the kind of hands on learning that is necessary in order for working class employees to more successfully fill out their position audit forms. This chapter will also introduce and explain Kathryn Jones' example of how a "literacy mediator" can create hands on learning contexts for workers first encountering a new form.

Chapter Five will show how writing centers can prepare their own tutors to plan sessions that will facilitate the acquisition of professional class literacy practices for UAW members working on their audit forms. This chapter will also clarify how important it is to recognize the social nature of literacy practices when working with writers.

The personal will be juxtaposed with the analytical in this dissertation. The individuals involved will not be identified – to maintain confidentiality they will be referred to by pseudonym and any identifying details about their work will be withheld. The forms they filled out will be analyzed as framing documents. Prior experiences will

also be analyzed to establish influences outside the form which potentially have also positioned the individual.

Without a few “I to Thou” interactions, however, this dissertation would not have been conceived. The personal goals of a few key people were the starting place for the sessions that lead to this line of study. It is important both for ethical and methodological concerns (to be discussed later) that these persons are viewed as such, and not viewed as just their job or as subjects of this dissertation. As anyone who has successfully told a story knows, to draw a listener or reader into a story the teller must give information about the people involved. Narrative allows small glimpses into the lives and words of the people who were in the initial writing center sessions. Sometimes though, in our culture the difference between real and created stories becomes blurred.

In a culture where story can be used to teach, entertain or provide cultural norms it is important to point out that because someone is part of a “story” does not make her a “character,” e.g. Pinocchio is a character who helps teach a social view of lying. Linda is a person who, while identified by a pseudonym lives in ‘real life.’ Linda and Beth are not creations, or literary devices. They are not composites or a collection of different people’s character traits. Both these women are individuals, humans, who go through their separate lives and the lives they touch with concern for the outcomes of these interactions. Linda for example wants to provide a “better future” for her children than she had an opportunity for. She wants to return to the status of homeownership, something she had to give up when this economy required changes in her family’s

location. She wants to know that people are not making unfavorable judgments about her based on her dialect or uses of literacy.

It is because of early writing center sessions where Linda and I briefly shared “I and Thou” moments – where neither of us was just another—that this work ended up becoming what it is. Hopefully in the glimpses of Linda and Beth that this dissertation offers you will grow to care about the literacy needs of those on your own campus that you may not have previously considered.

“Special Needs” Amongst Staff Members

Although the Michigan Tech writing center has an open policy, “We work with students, faculty and staff...”^{vi} Linda –the first staff person to approach the writing center—did not initially know enough about the writing center to even think of it as a potential site of assistance with literacy. Linda took the initiative to get “help” because she wanted to “change” her literacy skills. She had several personal goals in addition to her professional goal of “improving” her work related literacy skills: As an active volunteer who had taken on leadership responsibilities both on and off-campus, she wanted to be able “to write better letters and e-mails”; as a mother of three she wanted to “know more so I can help my kids with their homework,” particularly their writing. When Linda, however, looked for classes on campus that would “improve her English and grammar,” she discovered the following: our campus did not offer any ‘basic’ literacy classes. Linda was intimidated to be in a class amongst mainly traditional college age, white, males whom she had nothing in common with. Also, the classes offered she

could identify as “English classes” were either focused on literature or on rhetoric, both of which contained content that was what she considered “more complicated” than what she was looking for.

In telling me about her process of finding the writing center, Linda explained that at this same time in her search for literacy aid, she began to reflect more on her own background as a writer and as a student. She had always had “trouble” in academics, particularly in English classes, and as a K-12 student worked with school assigned tutors. As a parent, she became active in the Parent Teacher Organization, learned more about learning disabilities, and began to see similarities between some of the issues she’d faced as a student and some of the issues students in her children’s school faced. Unable to find any “help” on campus for “normal” literacy work, Linda went to the Dean of Students and identified herself as “learning-disabled” and asked what students on campus did when they had “learning disabilities” and asked, “What do students do when they have trouble reading and writing because of a disability?” The Dean sent Linda to the one specialist on campus who dealt with learning different students—one of my co-workers in the writing center—to ask this question of her and see if she had any recommendations for a staff person who self-identified as learning disabled. Linda thus ended up in the writing center originally because she had asked for help as someone who was “disabled” and therefore in need of special assistance. There was nothing available on campus for any of the staff members if they wanted to work on what might be considered “basic literacy.”

As I listened to Linda's story I heard several things. I heard a clash between her home literacy and the literacy she had found in school. I heard doubt about her potential, reinforced by academic literacy practices that she'd encountered in school. I heard an intelligent woman with great determination and insight setting goals and asking for my assistance to reach these goals. I cannot say we immediately had a person to person connection. But for me, by the end of our first session I instinctively felt that something important could potentially come out of these sessions for both Linda and me.

Preview and a Special Acknowledgment

Through her sessions at the writing center Linda would develop enough practice with literacy in different contexts so that she could achieve her own goals. But personal achievement was not enough to satisfy her. Linda is the person who determined that this dissertation was necessary. Once she began to gain confidence in her ability to adapt her literacy usage to the context at hand, once she saw that she could adapt to numerous contexts, she felt empowered. She wanted other people to also feel empowered, particularly her fellow UAW staff members.

Linda began personally soliciting women she knew who had been struggling with the *UAW Position Audit* for months. She would praise the writing center for what it could offer and convinced them to contact me. She told people that they would be satisfied with the results. She made me nervous because she set a high standard for me to meet. Through Linda I met and worked with approximately half a dozen women who had spent months – even years in two cases – trying to complete their position audit forms. As I met

these UAW employees, I saw how each person was being impacted by the relationship this put her in with the institution and with other people on campus and in the community. As sessions and clients increased, I heard similar concerns about how individuals were being impacted by economic concerns and the position audit process. High unemployment was endemic to the area. The university was the largest employer and did offer benefits; however, staff wages started at low levels and could only be changed by going through the position audit process. The form itself had become a millstone for many employees: difficult to understand and intimidating to deal with yet vital to economic survival, the form was something they dragged with them every day, from home to work and back. It did feel like “success” when the women who had used my mediation to work through the form let me know that their levels/pay had been successfully raised.

And when I felt that we had, this handful of women and I, accomplished something worthy of doing, Linda challenged me again. She began to wonder out loud, “How are we going to spread the word so people like you [writing center staff] will do this work on their campuses? In this case Linda relied on me as a person, friend and my job. She reminded me that she had personally informed the local audience about our work. Now it was my turn. “You write it. Then you go to conferences and tell everyone about what we did. You should get it published too.” Her final charge to me was that, “You have to get more people to do this work because it’s really important. You just have to make them care. Just make them care.”

Chapter One

Beginnings

Why This Work

The *Introduction* provided an oversight of this project and the argument that underlies it: writing centers should recognize the larger campus community – particularly working class employees – as welcome potential users. This recognition should be reflected in a writing center’s mission statement. Additionally, I tried to make clear in the *Introduction* that the writing center sessions and this dissertation owe much to the relationship that began between myself and one particular UAW worker. Linda drew me into the world of working class employees on this campus and in doing so changed how I saw the potential of writing center work.

It was not immediately apparent in our initial session that Linda and I would share “I and Thou” moments. Writing center theory usually suggests suspending all judgments about others, particularly in a first session. Yet, like the general public we in the writing

center often cannot help but note in first sessions the first impressions of an ‘other’ which start outwardly: what is the other dressed like; what gender identity do they display; are they well groomed; do they appear educated; is there anything that the individuals in the session appear to have in common? On first appearance Linda and I shared some Scandinavian heritage and were of a similar age.

As often happens in writing center sessions, the opportunities to know each other beyond a surface level increase over time. Do the individuals in the session have anything in common that was not immediately apparent: have they taken any of the same classes, read any of the same books? Linda and I shared commonalities that would come out with time and included similarities in K-12 educational experiences and Sunday school/church backgrounds. Sometimes people do have moments of connection as more than coach and client. Linda and I shared instances of concern for each other as people, different from those larger moments of writing session coach and client working together on literacy education. When one of Linda’s children was discovered to have a medical condition that I have lived with for years, we had discussions that led to “I and Thou” moments where we connected on a person to person level in a way that coaches and clients may not.

Even Buber has difficulty speaking directly about what an “I and Thou” moment is; the metaphor he uses that I have found most helpful is when he compares such experiences to glancing into a window. In little more than a flash you have a glimpse of what is on the other side of the window; a glimpse into someone else’s life. A moment when two people can glimpse through the “window” of each other’s outward experience and appearance to the inner person is an “I and Thou” moment. Photojournalists

sometimes try and recreate this feeling of insight by photographing people in moments of intense emotion. Such photos are more likely to have an emotional impact on viewers, than for example a portrait where the person has had an opportunity to compose himself.

Arguably without glimpses of the other's humanity, one person is not as likely to care enough about another person to act on her behalf. The difficulty the *UAW Position Audit Form* was posing for unionized employees was a piece of information that meant little by itself. Awareness of these difficulties in and of itself does not lead to action. Some kind of connection with the problem is necessary; there needs to be a move which turns 'your' problem into a problem 'I' will work on, i.e. at what point does the concern of an 'other' become a concern worthy of my action? What made the UAW staff's problem worthy of my action ended up being this personal interaction with women who belonged to the local on our campus. What made pursuing the research and writing of this dissertation worthy of my time was the "I and Thou" connections I made with Linda. This is not to say we became inseparable. As mentioned in the *Introduction*, what I am trying to indicate is that we had glimpses of each other as people with real concerns that extended beyond the context of the writing center or the work environment. Linda's request for assistance to increase the literacy contexts she had knowledge of was connected not just to work but also family, to the socio-economic standing of family members, to her own social-literacy roles in the community and so on.

In *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*, Kelly Oliver discusses that sometimes the stories of 'others' are beyond our capacity to grasp – she uses stories of Holocaust survivors to illustrate this point. We do a disservice to a Holocaust survivor if in response

to their ‘eye witness testimony’ we respond, “I understand.” It should be obvious that we cannot begin to understand. Yet, it is vital to listen to such stories. There must be respectful listening in order for witnessing to take place; an individual cannot ‘give witness’ to an empty room. The person telling the story is “witness” to the events/horrors which took place. We as listeners are witness to their recounting of events. In this way, the ‘eye witness’ testimony is not lost; while I cannot replace the listener as an ‘eye witness’ to the original events, I can be an ‘eye witness’ to his/her witnessing.

Oliver is pointing out, by using the most charged example possible, that we as listeners cannot turn our back on the stories or “witness” of others just because their experience is different from ours, or even beyond our understanding. Even when the ‘other’ tells a story that is completely beyond one’s own experience, it is possible to make an emotional connection with an ‘other’ through the act of listening as the other “bears witness” to what they have experienced. As Oliver says, “Realness and reality are experiential categories that refer to a phenomenological truth rather than a purely historical truth. Witnessing and responding, testifying and listening transform our reality, the realness of our experiences” (106). How “real” is an event if society refuses to acknowledge its existence? Any event is in danger of being lost, stolen, misrepresented or ignored if a person is not able to give witness and receive a respectful listening.

While other events are placed far differently on the scale of human experience than surviving the holocaust, I am arguing that we do not want to ignore witness to complicated events that others have experienced. For example, the difficulty of the *UAW Position Audit Form* was real for those who experienced it. The fact that it was presenting

difficulties was in and of itself meaningless to anyone outside those immediately affected as long as others ignored their witness to the difficulty of the situation they were in. It was only when the unionized employees began to give witness that an ‘other’ – in this case I—heard and was moved to act. The point I follow Oliver in making is that it is through witnessing the testimony of others that we learn about the experiences that matter to other people; we are not likely to act in a way that will change someone else’s experiences if we are not first aware of the experiences she is having.

Through the acts of witnessing and listening – of telling one’s story and being heard – action was brought about in this context. Those who acted were multiple: myself, Linda, Beth, half a dozen other women, the administrators in the writing center, the supervisors in other departments and people in human resources all are part of this story though some will not appear in this telling of the story. Part of the goal of this project is to allow the testimony and witness in this context to reach a larger audience; those in the wider writing center/composition/humanities area. Perhaps in reading this recounting of our story, other people may be moved to reexamine their own writing center contexts. Do the working class employees on other campuses, particularly working class women, have any options if they wish to engage in expanding their literacy knowledge? What would be necessary for your writing center to recognize and value carry out similar types work? Will other writing center workers be moved to the extent that they are prepared to change their mission statements to articulate an openness to working with a broader client base?

In writing my own recounting of other people’s testimony, I still had concerns about how I represented their experiences. It was in answer to this concern that the

decision to use personal narrative as a methodology was made. Rather than having everything reinterpreted through my words, it was important to me that the reader have at least brief glimpses of the concerns of UAW employees as spoken in their own words, or as closely as I could “show” glimpses into our writing center sessions. Personal stories or narratives however, are not the most common language to use in the dissertation genre.

Traditionally, dissertations are written in a distancing language in which observations and ideas are stated as facts. This technique is both useful and potentially misleading: it encourages the writer of the dissertation to stick with factual information; it disguises the emotional connection with the work that dissertation writers have, and must have, in order to keep pursuing their dissertation. Distancing language disguises personal writing. The writer has to care, work, select for inclusion and exclusions, constantly make choices, write and rewrite in order to finish a dissertation. A dissertation cannot be written from a place of emotional detachment to the subject being discussed. If anything, a writer moves from one place of emotion to another with their topic – moments of loathing and temporary apathy may occur but the writer cannot stop being entangled with the topic until the dissertation is ‘done’.

Literature Review: Writing Center Journal

Linda and Beth were not traditional writing center clients. They were unionized staff members on the same campus where I was a graduate student working in the writing center. In a broad sense we were members of the same campus community in that all

three of our work lives were centered in the same institution. What sets Linda and Beth apart in traditional writing center theory and practice from traditional writing center clients, is that writing centers typically expect to work with students in composition and other writing classes. In the Michigan Tech writing center while there is potential for dealing with any campus member who walks through the door, in practice this was the first time anyone could recall unionized staff actually requesting an appointment.

This expansion from the norm became apparent to me when I began researching writing center scholarship looking for other people's experience working with unionized staff. I found that there is scholarship on educating "the staff" who work in writing centers. Much has been written on how to prepare coaches/tutors/staff and these articles cover a range of methods, including outdoor wilderness experiences as a group. Particularly important has been the ongoing discussions about how much a tutor should direct a writer, and how much a tutor should encourage writers to 'discover' what it is they want to say. This is an ongoing debate about whether tutors should be "directive" or "non-directive." This debate is most active in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, a monthly online publication where writing center practices are discussed. This was the site of the original publication of Jeff Brooks article, "Minimalist Tutoring: Making the Students Do All the Work," an article that continues to be cited in the directive/non-directive argument. As I searched for articles about working with campus-staff as users of the writing center, however, I did not find any articles that addressed the topic. The entire directive v. non-directive debate in fact, seems to imply that the mainstream composition student as *the* user of writing centers. This debate will be discussed in *Chapter Five*.

I originally spent time looking through the *Writing Center Journal* Archive covering the last ten years, and searching the *Writing Centers Research Project* for articles about campus-staff and literacy . It was very helpful and informative to then read “Twenty Years of *WCJ* Scholarship: An Annotated Bibliography” by DeShaw, Mullin, and DeCiccio (2002). This bibliography mirrored my own research results in that both this Annotated Bibliography and my own research found articles on the history of writing centers, the art of being a tutor, and considerations of what the writing center’s role on campus is; even going back twenty years, however, there were no articles on working with campus-staff who wish to address their own literacy skills. For example, some articles cover the historical aspect of writing centers (Carino,1995; Harris,1982; Kelly, 1980; Yahner and Murdick, 1991.) There are also many articles and reviews of books that cover the dynamics of tutoring itself, such as Diana George’s 1988 review of “Teaching one-to-one: The Writing Center Conference,” and Steve Sherwood’s 2007, “Portrait of the Tutor as an Artist: Lessons No One Can Teach.”

Additionally, much has been written about the work that happens in a writing center. And there *are* articles on how the role of the writing center has changed. In these articles we also see glimpses that some writing center staff see a shift in who the traditional writing center client is. Harris and Yancy’s, “Beyond Freshman Comp” (1980), was followed a decade later (1990) by George and Grimm’s “Expanded Roles, Expanded Responsibilities.” Identifying some of these new writing center clients, their needs, and how these factors influenced writing center practice, generated further scholarship: Bawarshi and Pelkowski’s “Post-colonialism and The Idea of a Writing

Center (1999); Myer's "Reaccessing the "Proofreading Trap": ESL Tutoring and Writing Instruction" (2004); Cogie's "ESL Student Participation in Writing Center Sessions" (2006); and Condon's "Beyond the Known: Writing Centers and the work of Anti-Racism" (2007). There are a growing, albeit still a minor number of writing center scholars, whose work recognizes that the writing center is expanding; no longer a site primarily for working with freshman comp students, or students who were born and grew up in homes where academic literacy was always used. These scholars see that the writing center is becoming a place where ethical considerations of racism, identity, of valuing white, middle-class, literacy over other literacies—all these issues need to be part of the ongoing dialogue that writing center scholars take part in. There is also growing awareness of the social and ethical responsibilities that are inherent in the context of teaching composition, including the context of writing center work; an exemplar article of this is seen in Victor Villanueva's 2006, "Blind: Talking About the New Racism."

It is also interesting to note that the scholarship found in the *Writing Center Journal* can serve as a prompt for new areas of research; take for example Marilyn Cooper's (2004) "Really Useful Knowledge: A Cultural Studies Agenda for Writing Centers." I found encouragement for my own work in Cooper's vision of the writing center as a natural place for the "critique of the institutionalized structure of writing instruction in college" and her view that "the role of the tutor should be to create useful knowledge about writing in college and to empower students as agents in their writing—these two goals being closely intertwined" (98). In my work with Linda and Beth I was trying to create useful knowledge that would benefit them in their work environment. It

was also one of my goals to facilitate Linda and Beth's ability to recognize the implicit ideology in place when encountering new literacy contexts. It was pedagogically important to me that they could learn during our writing center sessions centered around documents like the *UAW Position Audit Form*, that all forms are generated by institutions for specific purposes. Learning to recognize the implicit ideology contained within a form could then help inform the way they responded to other forms.

Linda and Beth originally wanted to approach all relationships with the institution on a person to person basis, e.g. "He watches what I do all day, why do I have to write it down?" Or "He [the school President] knows me; he knows I'm a hard worker." I would then point out that in the context of an institution, the files were 'separate' from the relationships people had with each other. It required discussions about the purpose of the form, the implicit expectations of the readers of the form, the goals the women were setting for themselves in filling out the form – all these considerations should be informing the responses they wrote on the form. By recognizing that both the UAW employees and their supervisors were bringing different implicit literacy expectations to their encounters with such documents, the UAW staff members were no longer limited by their own implicit literacy expectations. They could also consider the implicit expectations of their supervisors, as I was able to explicitly state what many of these expectations were and we could then discuss how the supervisor's expectations would influence what the UAW workers wanted to write.

Reviewing the *Writing Center Journal* gave me a sense of the history and traditional concerns that writing centers have dealt with. It became apparent that while

some writing center scholars are concerned with expanding the work that centers do, no one is yet writing about working with campus-staff as clients. As reflected particularly clearly in the *Writing Lab Newsletter*, many centers are in fact still training their tutors with the traditional implicit expectation that their clients will predominantly be middle class composition students, as will be the peer-tutors hired to work in many writing centers.

Literature Review: CCC

After becoming familiar with the traditional topics of the *Writing Center Journal*, I decided to broaden my literacy review to the conversation that Compositions were taking part in. In reviewing the CCC's current and back issues, I found this was another area where directly engaging the potential of working with campus staff was not being discussed. Yet, I found it interesting that there were conversations about working *off campus* with working class adults who wanted aid with literacy education.

I came upon three essays that were informative but that also raised a new awareness and concern for me. As I read I began to realize that the off campus literacy work seemed to be aimed as much or more at meeting the goals of university professors and their students as in assisting the 'community clients' in setting and reaching their own goals. I was not finding evidence that discussions were being held about differences in literacy expectations and backgrounds between social classes.

In Nancy Welch's "And Now That I Know Them': Composing Mutuality in a Service Learning Course"(2002), I found Welch talking about classes she taught that had

combined literacy and social advocacy by having students work in an off-campus community facilitating literacy. While part of her student's time was spent assisting people who were acquiring new literacy skills, the remainder of their class time was spent learning about "...community literacy practices and the broader cultural institutions, policies, and trends within which those practices take shape" (244). The theoretical background Welch was teaching her students sounded similar to the writing center theoretical background I had; as Grimm states, "Once we acknowledge that literacy practices are cultural rather than natural, we need to be much more aware of how culture works, making explicit that which we take for granted and articulating that which has always seemed "natural" (33). It seemed clear that Welch was exposing her students to knowledge about the cultural context of literacy; I wondered though if her students were passing this understanding on to the people they worked with? Welch was informing her students about the affects of literacy-contexts, but were her students in turn informing their 'clients'? Were the community participants spoken to about the "broader cultural institutions, policies, and trends" that were creating the contexts they wished to communicate in? I wondered if any of this off campus literacy work was being done to create writers who were "agents in their writing" (Cooper 98).

I then read Ann E. Green's (2003) "Difficult Stories: Service-Learning, Race, Class, and Whiteness." Green explains the common ground that all service-learning and community literacy projects seem to share is that service is provided by white, middle-class academics in poor, working-class communities predominately amongst people of color. Green points out, "Most of the academy is still white and middle class...In the

writing about service-learning, whiteness and middle class privilege are often unspoken categories that define those who perform service and those who write about service-learning” (277). Reading this reinforced my own ethical concerns about the representation of the work Beth, Linda, other UAW staff and I were doing; I was going to be the middle class, ‘educated’ person who would be writing about our work, the filter through whom our shared experience would be made public. For the UAW staff and I it was the difference between class backgrounds that I was particularly aware of, both in our work with each other and in how our work socially placed us on campus. I thus appreciated the discussion Green was opening,

We must begin theorizing how service-learning is experienced differently by those from different groups and look closely at the gaps between our theories of service-learning and our theories of subject positions, of race, class, gender, sexuality, and writing (276).

While the UAW staff women and I shared gender ‘issues’ on a campus where men are in the majority as students, faculty, and supervisors, how we experience these differences is influenced by our socio-economic and educational class standing. There is an unspoken but real difference between working in the writing center, and working in a “service job”; between being temporarily in town and having always lived there; between starting a career and keeping a job. Even though I was living on less money than Beth and Linda, because I was an academic in progress I was part of the academic illusionary middle class “grad student.” Linda and Beth had been born into and remained part of the “working

class”; how people reacted to the position I held on campus and how they reacted to those staff employed in service and support were not the same.

There is indeed a stratification of class with-in the staff hierarchy itself; the most obvious line of demarcation being between those who are supervisors and those who are unionized employees. While it was originally less obvious to me, I soon learned from working with Linda and Beth that the differences between pay-levels and type of job is something the unionized staff members are keenly aware of in their work environment. Beth, Linda and others I worked with could usually tell me the level and pay of each person in their department *and* in other departments. Job postings are actively watched and since these postings list the level and pay of the job it is a matter of public record and memory who is supposed to be doing what and approximately how much she is getting paid to do this work.

Beth and Linda were both trying to work their way “up”; Linda’s goal was to become an office worker (with her own permanent desk), while Beth wanted to stay in her current department but have a raise in “level” that mirrored her experience and responsibilities. This goal on Beth’s part was in turn influenced by the fact that while she had many duties and responsibilities she was the “lowest level” in her workplace. From how she and Linda spoke about it, a person’s level is an aspect of their ethos and authority both in the work environment but also carrying over into the lives they live in the small-town environment off-campus. As time went on and Linda and Beth encouraged more women in their union local to come and see me for assistance with their *UAW Position Audit Form*. I in turn began to recognize that no matter the differences in

level, experience, or age of these women as individuals, as a group “unionized staff” automatically showed me some deference due to my special skills and status as a teacher/professor. I in turn found I could overcome some of this differencing by verbalizing respect for the jobs they did, voicing/writing lists of the many duties and responsibilities they had, and reminding them that without their support their supervisors would often not be able to carry on the work of their particular department. This was and is a literal truth. These women carry so much of the knowledge for accomplishing tasks in their minds, knowledge which comes only from experience, that they are all at least temporarily irreplaceable. It can take months for an office to reorient when one of these women who were key to the daily operations of the office suddenly leaves, taking her acquired knowledge with her.

I was thus already conscious that *difference* could and did play a role in my work and in the lives of the women I was working with, when I read Margaret Himley’s, “Facing (Up To) ‘The Stranger’ in Community Service Learning”(CCC 2004). Himley spends the majority of her space in this article discussing the difficulties with service-learning: un-equal power relationships; un-equal opportunities for re-presenting the content of the meetings; intense but temporary participation in the community of “others”; underlying ethical complications related to all these concerns, including that none of these “problems” have “solutions.” Yet, near the end of this article Himley says,

In the contemporary world, with its brutal geography of increasing inequality, it has become too easy to know others by watching a film, reading a book, sitting

next to them on the subway, wearing another's style of clothes, vacationing in a foreign country, or taking an alternative identity in an online chat room (433-4).

While messy and providing constant challenges to a practitioner's ethics, service-learning still provides an opportunity for encountering members of a different community than the one we study or work in. While I continue to see a lack of unified theory guiding service-learning projects, I certainly empathize with Himley's point that the answer is not to abandon work that presents constant challenges to our ethics, pedagogy, and interactions with others. The concerns raised provide red flags to remind us of how thoughtful we must be both approaching and engaging in literacy work with others.

In Himley's article I heard echoes of my own concerns—and an iteration of why I still found work that was a form of “community literacy” not only viable but necessary. There is no way to perfect the application of any form of case study, or re-iteration/description of a group's work by one work-member of the group i.e. there will always be an *uneven distribution* of power, authority, possibilities for re-presenting the work, and “gains” from the work done. To simply stop discussing this work, however, strikes me as more ethically problematic than continuing the work while trying to address the tensions raised. Basically, just because providing witness to the testimony I heard is problematic for all the reasons already mentioned, not in turn providing witness to what I heard and learned seems even more problematic, as if I am choosing to silence the experiences we shared. As I have told students, peers, and supervisors, I will not take part in the academic community as a gate-keeper; rather I am here to facilitate greater access to those who are trying to move past the gate-keepers. For those who have often been

discouraged by gate-keepers (and I have experienced that frustration) there is empowerment in knowing not only what lies beyond the gate, i.e. the future value of the new literacy one is struggling to obtain, but that other's have also made it past the gate in "non-traditional" ways, a fact which gate-keepers try to hide.

James Paul Gee, in *Situated Language and Learning* speaks about the necessity of users seeing the value in the new literacy they are acquiring. This discussion clarified for me one of the difficulties I found with "service learning"; it was not clear to me that the 'teachers' were trained or given time to facilitate a knowledge about literacy contexts. It appeared that in some cases the clients were being told, 'These are the literacy skills you need' without discussions of why these skills, or how to apply knowledge to new/different contexts, or even to understand, as Gee is pointing out, why some literacy choices are preferable to others, depending on the literacy context.

People can only see a new specialist language as a gain if: (a) they recognize and understand the sorts of socially situated identities and activities that recruit specialist language; (b) they value these identities and activities, or at least understand why they are valued; and (c) they believe they (will) have real access to these identities and activities, or at least (will) have access to meaningful (perhaps simulated) versions of them (93).

Linda and Beth already saw the value of using the specialized work-related literacy they wanted to obtain: that having access to a wider range of literacy skills could help them change aspects of their work lives. They still needed to understand the differences between their own implicit literacy expectations and those of their supervisors. For

example, all the women I worked with on the *UAW Position Audit Form* used non-personal, brief descriptions in writing their “duties” into the job audit form, i.e. “Budget is dispersed.” I would both lighten the tone of our meeting and help them see the actions they were responsible for by asking, “Oh, does the budget fairy work in your office?” and when they smiled and responded, “No, I do that.” I would ask them to tell me more about what was involved in dispersing; did someone just hand them a list of people? Did they just hand over checks...by the time we would be done the brief description might have become paragraphs of steps, contact people, filing systems, computer programs needed, and additional responsibilities that were all involved in this one aspect of their job.

In order to contextualize why we were describing what was done, rather than just listing it, it was necessary to discuss the difference in literacy expectations between UAW staff and the professional staff who were their supervisors. “I know you know the President, but has the President ever spent a day working alongside you?” When I received a negative response I would continue, “supervisors don’t actually watch everything you do either. How many people work in your department? How much time does the supervisor spend in meetings or in his office?” As we discussed all the time supervisors were not actually visually supervising the context started to become clearer for the women.

“He doesn’t know half of what I do,” I would hear, or, “I know he doesn’t see me doing this but who does he think is doing it?” These conversations lead to a clearer understanding of why it was valuable to give details and examples to show the work each

worker was doing. Without details no one else could understand how much work went into carrying out the list of job duties each worker was expected to accomplish.

More to the point, now that they had taken part in the modeling and practice of adopting the form-required literacy skills of saying things like, “I facilitate the expenditure of . . .” they were not only often able to continue working on the form themselves, they then understood that their target audience (supervisors, HR) needed to know all the specific knowledge, computer skills, steps, oversight, and communications the individual in the job was personally responsible for. In our writing center sessions I was not telling UAW staff, “write this, it will help.” Rather, we worked together towards an explicit understanding of expectations in this literacy context and how their own goals, combined with the context specific expectations, made some wordings and ways of writing preferable to others. The pedagogical goal I had set was that the women would leave their sessions with practice and knowledge, so that they could decode future writing contexts and the implicit literacy expectations in those future contexts.

In light of the conversations that were and were not taking place in both the *Writing Center Journal* and the CCCs, Cooper’s *Writing Center Journal* article was now reinforcing for me that I was in a unique position to advocate for writing centers to recognize working class staff as part of their client group. As Cooper writes:

Because writing centers are marginalized in relation to the central institutional structures of writing pedagogy and because writing center tutors are not generally expected to perform the function of intellectuals, the pressure on them to

promulgate beliefs and practices that serve the purposes of the dominant group is less organized and less direct, although it is certainly not absent (106).

I was in a position of less power and authority than a professor, and I was working with people who had no desire for careers as “academics”; perhaps I was, as Linda would suggest and then insist on, the best one to begin writing about these sessions and raising this new topic of discussion amongst writing centers.

Methods and Methodology

As a researcher and writer what concerned me the most about writing a dissertation was the potential loss of the other persons who are part of this work. If “I” can be hidden in distancing language, “they” can be obliterated as both “subjects” and “objects”. This is one reason I wanted voices such as Linda and Beth’s to have the opportunity to be present. Additionally though, I agree with Oliver in that personal stories create new connections for those who encounter the stories. I can re-present the stories of our sessions and perhaps through this re-presentation the reader will make a connection with the women I met. Connecting this way, or even the very knowledge that similar concerns may be present on the reader’s campus, will increase the likelihood that the reader/writing center consultant will judge staff literacy concerns to be worthy of their action. I therefore chose the method of personal narrative as part of how this dissertation is presented. Personal narrative allows some of the ‘voice’ for my participants to be present; simultaneously personal narrative encourages the reader to make an emotional connection with the ‘subjects’. The strategy of using personal narrative to carry forward

the testimony and witness of the women worked with was thus a carefully considered rhetorical strategy. Hopefully, a connection will be made between the reader and the people/stories of this project which then encourage the reader to view staff literacy needs as worthy of his/her own action, time and energy.

The sessions with Linda and Beth had the primary purpose of working towards their self-identified literacy goals. As Linda became clearer about her desire to share our experience and knowledge with others, I adopted what educational researcher Sharran B. Merriam identifies as a “Participant as Observer” case study (101). Given the context of these sessions I recognized my first ethical obligation as being to those participating in the sessions. Any research or further study of the topic would be a secondary outgrowth of our sessions. This ordering of work/research is what separates participant as observer case studies from other forms of case study. Participant as observer also acknowledges that I was in the room first as a participant in the sessions and therefore my observations are not, nor do I mean to represent them as, neutral. The bias I am aware of is that I came to care about what happened to these individuals as persons. Their personal outcomes are not something I am “neutral” about; I was attempting to assist them in meeting their goals.

Each of us also kept a journal; only my journal was used for the purposes of this project. Linda and Beth’s journals were part of the pedagogical framework of our writing center sessions and were also meant to help them become more experienced with writing in detail and writing about things that were implicitly devalued in their cultural background – feelings, private ideas, concerns about personal wellbeing and personal

hopes and plans. From what Linda told me, her journal was used to help her analyze her long-term goals: future changes that she wanted to achieve in her work place; a desire to actively participating with her children's homework; thinking about new goals as they developed. Beth gave me the impression she did not journal as regularly (Linda mentioned journaling every day; Beth would occasionally mention an intense journaling session.) When Beth spoke about her journal entries she spoke about working through struggles she was having where demands from her work life overlapped with her personal life. For example, her boss wanted her to take on a new duty she was uncomfortable with. At the same time, Beth was trying to preparing her son's belongings for his deployment to Iraq. She wondered why her supervisor had to create additional stress over small things when he knew the larger concerns she was dealing with. I was left with the impression that Beth's journal was a safe place for her to vent. She sometimes told me, "I felt better" after one of her journaling sessions.

My journal was a teaching/session journal. At the end of each session I would immediately make notes on what we had discussed and my thoughts related to these discussions. It was where I worked out pedagogical plans that would meet the goals that Linda and Beth had identified for themselves. I also used this journal as a tool to document and analyze interactions between the persons in the sessions and interactions with the form. An example from July 10, 2006:

Reluctance to fill out boxes with personal ID/info[an observation I'd made in that days sessions]. Why? And why is this important?

[Considering from person's viewpoint] Why – personal relationships; “people [I work with] should know what I'm doing. If someone sees me doing then why do I have to write it down? Why aren't they [supervisors] writing it down if writing needed?” [My thoughts about this point of view, and how it impacts what I need to do next] Who is responsible for what – why important. Key understanding – difference between ‘seeing’ and ‘knowing’. Explain that office supervisor/admin. don't know *what* extra [is being done], only know job title. Without explanation will not see *details* of work. Therefore [this is explanation for person] explain actions so they [supervisors and HR] see what is being done. That justifies raise.

The notes, while sometimes cryptic, allowed me to think about what had happened and what I needed to think about, explain, explore or model in order to keep working toward the pedagogical goals of our sessions. These goals included meeting the women's goals, which I felt necessitated that they become aware of the implicit expectations of the form. In other words, it was not sufficient for these sessions to just tell the employees what to write on their form. It was necessary to make explicit the implicit expectations the form contained. This required discussing why the form was designed the way it was; differences in literacy expectations between the professional group of supervisors and the working class employees; and creating opportunities for hands on practice with using the form. These techniques will all be discussed in the chapters to come.

While in some places this dissertation adopts the impersonal tone and distancing language suited to the genre, I want to remind the reader that what is shared here is selected through the final writer, me. Personal narrative is used intentionally to reflect the

tone of sessions but most importantly, to remind the reader that the voices, while often disembodied, belong to real people. Linda and Beth are two representatives of a group of thousands. Every campus community includes staff members who would like to make changes to their literacy knowledge. Their literacy needs and desires are as real and immediate as our own, yet they seldom have the advantages that those of us who read and write dissertations enjoy – neither academically nor economically. This project is arguing that writing centers have a role to play in addressing this community’s literacy needs.

I also hope that the occasional use of personal narrative will remind the reader that this is *my telling* of what happened in *our sessions*. If Linda, Beth or one of the other unionized employees I met with were writing a re-presentation of what occurred in our sessions they would doubtless have different foci, different points of view, and often even different memories of what was happening surrounding the “recorded” words being shared. For example, when I share the story of the day we met immediately after Beth’s son was being prepared for deployment to Iraq, I obviously would have been in a very different frame of mind than Beth would have been in that session, which in turn will be reflected in what struck me as noteworthy during that session. The events were the same but the stories about the events would not be.

Balancing out this personal element there is the analytical, primarily the use of rhetorical analysis methods to analyze the *UAW Position Audit Form*, and in turn point out how the form positions both the unionized staff who fill out the form, and the professional staff/ supervisors as they respond to the employees filed form. This analysis is informed by Foucault’s theory of relationship between individuals and the institutions

they belong to as presented in *Discipline and Punish*. As will be discussed more fully later, Foucault finds foundational elements shared amongst institutions: army camps, prisons, hospitals and schools. Each institution relies on principles of observation, training, and discipline to organize and continue functioning. Forms are used to aid in the observation of work being done by each employee; forms are a way to gather data on what each employee, in each job reports to be doing. These responses can then be compared to the list of duties assigned to that job and level and judgments can be made by supervisors and HR about the effectiveness of the employee in each position. Forms are kept in files and at the same time they collect information about each job/level, they are also collecting information about each employee and how that individual performs in the different jobs they have held within the institution.

In this straightforward statement of the role of forms in institutionalized communication, I reproduce the way forms are usually spoken of. A form is a form, it just records “facts” doesn’t it? In the information a form requests and does not request, the very basis of the communication is pre-formed before the respondent even begins to take part in the process. If one is giving an annual report about himself, yet someone else decides what he will report about, the report has already been “framed” for the respondent. The professional class employees read and review the responses to the form made by working class employees. These two different groups however, do not share the same implicit understandings about what the purpose of the form is or even what the form is asking for. In other words, the position both the respondent and the reviewer are placed in is framed for them. They bring different sets of expectations to the use of the

form as will be shown in later chapters; as a result the form does not measure what it is meant to measure, thus judgments based on the responses to the form are likely to be inaccurate.

Theoretical Framework

My entry point into this discussion has been brought about through seminars, discussion, and analysis related to the theory and practice which are operational in the Michigan Tech writing center. The theory I have been exposed to and deliberated over in the past five years includes diverse sources: in ongoing weekly seminars we have looked at discussions from other fields including business and cultural communication; from writers such as Etienne Wenger, LuMing Mao, Shirley Brice Heath, Victor Villanueva, James Paul Gee, Brian Street, etc.. We have analyzed the history of writing centers, discussed the tone and work of centers, and considered from many different angles how our theory and practices relate, where gaps occur and why these gaps occur. Taking part in these conversations have been conservative and liberal viewpoints, individuals from different fields of study, and different cultural groups. Participants have ranged greatly in age and experience, held a variety of religious/spiritual beliefs and different sexual orientations.

I also brought a diverse background to these discussions and readings. My education includes studies in human geography, philosophy, ethics, theology, English/creative writing, rhetoric, and technical communication. As part of the

discussions I took part in, I incorporate my expectations for what the work I do in the writing center “ought” to be accomplishing and thus the theoretical grounding for these expectations. This theoretical framework breaks down as follows: in the area of New Literacy Studies (NLS) I have been most influenced by the work of Brian Street and James Paul Gee. In Literacy Studies I have been influenced by the home literacy studies conducted by Shirley Brice Heath and the Welsh literacy studies conducted by Kathryn Jones. I also reference Deborah Brandt’s discussion of literacy sponsorship as found in *Literacy and Learning: Reflections on Writing, Reading, and Society*. In order to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the position audit form, I use Foucault’s theory regarding institutions and their relationships with individuals as presented in *Discipline and Punish*. Specifically I focus on his discussion of the observations and judgments each institution makes about the worth of the individual performing each job within the institution. In order to discuss how workers learn their practices for the job I use Wenger’s theory of learning as discussed in *Communities of Practice* and on his current web page. The scaffolding of these theories works as follows.

Using Foucault to conduct a rhetorical analysis of the position audit form, it will become clear that this form—like all forms—is used by the institution for a particular purpose. Building on Bentham’s Panopticon,² Foucault argues that institutions are designed so that they isolate and observe all members within their walls. The purpose of the observation and separation varies depending on the type of institution and the relationship of the individuals to the institution. Foucault writes:

² A type of prison Bentham designed, so that all prisoners could be seen by a central guard/viewer, but would be unable to see each other.

...if they are patients, there is no danger of contagions; if they are madmen there is no risk of their committing violence upon one another; if they are schoolchildren, there is no copying, no noise, no chatter, no waste of time; if they are workers there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of those distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. (200-201)

Chapter Two will argue that the position audit form facilitates observation of the jobs that employees do. As a result of the judgments made based on these observations, a job will be kept at the level it is, lowered a level, raised a level or on occasion, the worker carrying out the job will be let go from the position and replaced by a worker better able to carry out the duties assigned to that job and level.

The argument in this project then incorporates Brian Street's NLS work in order to show that every literacy context – and filling out a position audit form is a literacy context—is shaped by implicit literacy understandings and expectations. As Street says in “What's “new” in New Literacy Studies,” to recognize the nature of implicit literacy expectations we are also led to “the recognition of multiple literacies, varying according to time and space, but also contested in relations of power” (77). The implicit literacy expectations of the position audit form reflect the literacy background of the professional class employees who designed and wrote the form; the working class employees who will respond to the form do not share this background or these expectations/understandings. This leads to *Chapter Three*.

The discussion in *Chapter Three* begins with Shirley Brice Heath's study of the impact of home literacy on an individual's preparation for future uses of literacy as reported in *Ways with Words: Language, Life and Work in Communities and Classrooms*. The observations of working class literacy uses that Heath made in "Roadville" were similar to my observations about working class literacy uses in the Houghton area. While both groups of working class employees will talk about the "value of reading" in both Roadville and working class Houghton, "Talk about writing seems pointless" (219). It will be shown that working class employees at Michigan Tech approach the *UAW Position Audit Form* with a set of implicit understandings and expectations which work against them representing themselves favorably on the form. While the professional class supervisors read the filed form expecting to find details and examples, the working class filers of the form expect to write responses on the form that get straight to the point; they do so by writing a list of duties and not discussing themselves as part of the work they do.

In this same chapter the argument then incorporates James Paul Gee and it will be shown that this difference in implicit literacy expectations leads to economic consequences for the UAW employees. In "The New Literacy Studies: From 'socially situated' to the Work of the Social" Gee points out that in "the new capitalism" a person's status is increasingly tied to the "cult of performance excellence"; when an employee's excellence is based on unmet, implicit literacy expectations contained in the position audit form, the employee can be 'punished' not for their work but the perception of their work given by their writing (189). At this point in the argument it will become clear that working class employees do not have literacy backgrounds which have

prepared them to see the same implicit expectations that the professional employees see in the form.

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of Wenger's theory of learning; Wenger influenced how I made pedagogical plans regarding the best practices to use to facilitate UAW employees learning about the implicit expectations of the position audit. In *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity*, Wenger shows that in each work environment employees learn their job by participating in hands on practice, in other words, 'on the job learning.' Wenger argues:

...educational processes based (like apprenticeship) on actual participation are effective in fostering learning not just because they are better pedagogical ideas, but more fundamentally because they are "epistemologically correct," so to speak. There is a match between knowing and learning, between the nature of competence and the process by which it is acquired, shared, and extended. (101-102)

The chapter then moves on to consider that if hands on learning is usually accomplished by people who are more experienced working alongside those with less experience, how do workers learn to use a document that none of them are familiar with, such as the *UAW Position Audit Form*?

The argument incorporates at this point an example of "literacy mediation" that occurred when Welsh farmers all had to learn to use a new form that none of them were familiar with. Kathryn Jones' "Becoming Just Another Alphanumeric Code: Farmers

Encounters with the Literacy and Discourse Practices of Agricultural Bureaucracy at the Livestock Auction” was published in *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*. Jones shows how a hands-on learning context was created for Welsh farmers using a new form. One person (‘Stan’) was hired to learn the implicit expectations of the form and then work with farmers showing them how to use the form in context. Stan also put a ‘human face’ on a bureaucratic process. As Jones points out, “a literacy mediator mediates more than the immediate process of articulating and inscribing the discursive order of the text” they are also positioned as “a ‘delegate’ of the agricultural bureaucratic order” (88). In the case of Michigan Tech employees working on the position audit form, I was a literacy mediator who both facilitated the explication of implicit literacy understandings and put a ‘human face’ on a bureaucratic process.

Chapter Five pulls the theoretical and practical applications from this project together. During this project it became very clear that the social nature of literacy is something that must always be in the forefront of planning writing center sessions. In order for other centers to incorporate this work they will need to provide continuing education for their peer-tutors that allows tutors to acquire knowledge about the social nature of literacy. Tutors can work with writers who are not familiar with professional class literacy expectations if the tutors themselves understand what is necessary for writers to acquire new literacy practices.

My Expectations Influencing this Work

One of the expectations I brought to the work I was doing was that things on a university campus ought to be just as fair for the staff as they are for other members of the university community. As the work progressed I also became increasingly aware of underlying issues of gender, class, and education as a reflection of socio-economic standing in a community. In *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty says,

The academy has always been the site of feminist struggle. It is that contradictory place where knowledges are colonized but also contested—a place that engenders student mobilizations and progressive movements of various kinds. It is one of the few remaining spaces in a rapidly privatized world that offers some semblance of a public arena for dialogue, engagement, and visioning of democracy and justice. Although these spaces are shrinking rapidly, dialogue, disagreement, and controversy are still possible and sanctioned in the academy. (170)

Writing centers, composition classes and humanity departments already engage in social justice related considerations such as Mohanty is describing. For example, in theory and practice writing centers eschew “correcting” papers and instead focus on aiding the writer in becoming a clearer communicator. We also work with the writer who is trying to find or express her identity. Compositionists have started to carry literacy into the wider community through community literacy and service learning work. Humanities departments are becoming involved in new initiatives like the Peace Corp Masters

program at Michigan Tech. The kind of work we do as writing center specialists, compositionists and humanitarians make statements about the kind of work we see as being worthy of our time and effort. The implicit argument in our current actions is that we value initiatives which move our communities towards realizing greater social justice.

For some writing centers advocacy work takes place in the application of theories about crossing from one literacy practice to another. Consider for example the role of “boundary crossing” as noted by Grimm in *Good Intentions*,

Many accounts of those who have successfully crossed boundaries from one literacy to another are stories of important relationships, of people who remove hidden barriers by making the tacit explicit and who were willing to rethink their own belief system in an effort to clarify their relationships with others. These understandings provide better guideposts for responsible action in a tutoring situation than constant exhortations about what not to do. (19-20)

It is congruent with current writing center practices to make the tacit explicit and aid people in crossing boundaries from home literacy practices to literacy practices for the work environment. It is in keeping with the social justice moves of composition and humanities to increase our sense of “community” beyond the students we traditionally deal with. This project is suggesting a further step in writing center practices that reflects the same values that current literacy and humanities work already has: recognize the entire campus community, particularly working class staff women, as potential users of the writing center. In order to make this part of our writing center practice the final chapter will argue that writing centers need to change their mission statements to reflect

this change in practice. How mission statements will reflect this will vary by institution. Consider the following two examples, each found on the respective writing center's web page.

Michigan Tech Writing Center

At the Michigan Tech Writing Center, we work with students, faculty, and staff to address the challenges of learning & communicating in complex and culturally diverse environments.

Michigan State Writing Center

Established primarily to provide writing workshop support to students and assistance to faculty interested in using writing to engage students in active learning and thereby in improving the quality and range of their students' literacy, the Writing Center in Michigan State University conceives its task broadly. Mindful that literacy is learned through use across contexts and over a lifetime, in addition to working to improve the quality and range of literacy in MSU, the Center has reached out to involve itself in the teaching and uses of literacy in both the communities and schools that send students to MSU and the communities and workplaces that students enter when they leave MSU.

How writing centers express a commitment to their communities does and will vary. The argument I am making is that all writing centers should be reexamining how they define "community" and their definition should include working class employees who work on campus. Centers that do not already do so should consider welcoming these working class writers, particularly when Compositionists are already taking literacy into

working class communities off campus. Why should those who work on campus have to travel out to the community to access literacy education?

Chapter Two

How Do Implicit Expectations in a form Affect form Users?

When Michigan Tech UAW employee Linda originally approached the writing center, she was being proactive, setting goals and seeking out what she identified as “help” for “making my reading and writing better.” I would say she wanted to practice literacy skills for contexts where she was not satisfied with the outcomes she was already obtaining, i.e. writing a cover letter that would allow her access to different jobs, and opportunities to practice the various genres of writing found in an office context. It became apparent over time that Linda was not just a spokesperson for herself; first she encouraged Beth to use the writing center, then she encouraged other women in their union to make appointments in the writing center. Linda knew a number of women who had been working on their *UAW Position Audit Form* for many months and told these women that in the writing center they would find assistance in finally finishing the form so they could file it and proceed with the rest of the review process. As a result of Linda’s advocating for writing center use amongst members of the UAW, I was approached by other women. I have now assisted half a dozen unionized employees with their *UAW*

Position Audit Forms. In this chapter, rather than focusing on one person's experience, I will reference those remarks that at least several people made. For example, when talking about the form sooner or later everyone said the same thing, "This form is terrible; the previous one was even worse." It is my intention to show the tone and context surrounding the initial reading of and response to the form by all or most of the UAW women I have worked with.

Foucault's theory as articulated in *Discipline and Punish* will be used as an opening to a rhetorical analysis of the form. As mentioned in *Chapter One*, Foucault argues that an institution is designed to keep each individual within the institution in view; to keep everyone under observation so that all actions by the individuals can be monitored and kept within the range of acceptable conduct.

Brian Street's writing on the ideology underlying literacy practices will then be used to show that while under an autonomous model of literacy forms are believed to be neutral, it is not possible for any form or document to be neutral – some type of ideology underlies all communication. The position audit form was designed and written by a group of professional class staff who shared implicit literacy expectations for how the form would be used. The form also carries out the institutional function of observation. The position audit form was designed to observe the work being done at each level in each job, e.g. two administrative assistants in the same department might be in jobs that are ranked as a level 4 and a level 6 based on the different duties that each job has assigned to it. Their work is not compared to each other; their job duties are kept comparable to other level 4 and level 6s across campus. The position audit form is

designed to measure work and duties carried out in each position on campus so that all positions ranked at the same level have similar workloads.

What complicates this system of using forms to approximate how much work each job carries out? Working class staff members do not share the same implicit literacy understandings that the professional class staff do. If the working class staff has different implicit literacy expectations and understandings than the professional class staff, they are not going to fill the form out as it was “designed” to be used; they do not share the same literacy understanding as the professional staff and will rely on their own implicit literacy understandings to fill the form out. As a result, the form is not observing and measuring what it was meant to observe and measure. As will be shown by the end of this chapter, judgments about the work being done in a job may result from different implicit literacy expectations between these two groups, rather than being based on the actual work performed.

What does it mean to “frame”?

Evaluation forms are used by an institution to judge and value a job; in making judgments about how the job is being carried out, those who read the form are also making judgments about the individual carrying out the work of the job related to how well or poorly that individual performs in the job. The way questions are asked, the order the questions are placed in, the wording used, all influence the reader/responder and the answers that are possible for her to give. In his 2002 *Moral Politics*, George Lakoff ends

with an Afterward that considers the importance of the “frame” in which a discussion takes place. When an institution creates a form they are creating a “frame” for a process, which in turn defines what is and is not open to discussion. The form/frame dictates what counts as knowledge or work. Framing also defines key terms, as well as the approach and tone the discussion will take, e.g. as will be discussed later in this chapter, a position audit form may appear to encourage brief lists rather than detailed examples of work being done. According to Lakoff, “The facts themselves won’t set you free. You have to frame facts properly before they can have the meaning you want them to convey” (419-20). With a position audit form, the institution is framing the discussion to suit institutional needs and purposes; an unintentional byproduct of this frame is that it does not encourage working class employees to best represent the complicated nature of the work they do.

A form that asks employees for factual details about their jobs is not in and of itself problematic; however, when only certain facts are focused on, then others are left out. If working class employees think the form is asking for a factual listing of “duties” then *how* these duties are carried out is very important information that they will not include. Consider how many details are left out if a professor were to list teaching job duties as: create syllabus, in-class time with students, grading homework. How many things does a reader of this list *not know* about the work it takes to teach a class?

In a university, for example, each department has an administrative assistant who is responsible for keeping track of all students registered in that program’s field as a major/minor or graduate student. To write in a small box, “Maintain student records of

enrollment” does not address that in order to maintain records the admin assistant must first generate a file for each individual, which begins when the individual contacts the department seeking to enroll. That file will eventually generate additional files. In my department I have my original grad student admittance record and accompanying paper work; a file tracking all my classes and grades; a file of my departmental exams; a file of my reading lists; and a separate file of where I am as a graduate student in the program. In order to maintain those files the administrative assistant has had to e-mail me every semester, has had countless in-person discussions with me, has kept both paper and computer records, has had to contact me at particular times for paperwork I was unaware of but which she had to keep track of for *every* student in our department. To properly talk about what she does to track enrollment, how she knows when to do it, where she keeps track of each detail for each student could fill pages. How will professional class staff realize the level of forethought, planning, independent decision making, and interaction necessary to perform this one task from the statement “maintain student records of enrollment”? And this is just one function of a multi-functioned job.

A list of duties then tells only a small part of the context within which a job is carried out. The intellectual work related to each task is left out, as are the abilities needed to work successfully with, and to communicate effectively with peers, students, supervisors, the public including concerned parents, and visitors. The capacity for multi-tasking is overlooked with a list of duties; the list aids the illusion that each action can be discreetly accomplished, with no overlapping encumbrances. Yet, duties are constantly overlapping. While files need to be updated, emails need to be responded to, phones ring,

individuals walk in with questions...an administrative assistant has to be able to set priorities moment to moment, keeping track of underlying timelines as so much of the work is time and date sensitive. Deadlines are imposed by semesters, committees, and sequences that must be followed. The most significant facts about how a job is actually accomplished are thus left out when a working class employee creates a brief list of their job duties. These lists also make invisible the judgment used and the intellectual work necessary to accomplish each duty. When professional class staff read the filed form expecting to find details about the work being done, the lack of detail may be read as a lack of work actually being accomplished.

Foucault and the Form as Observation

All forms have a purpose. Consider several obvious examples: a medical history in the doctor's office and an IRS form. These forms were each designed with particular purposes or goals. The goal of the first is to gather information that will allow for appropriate medical care; the goal of the second is to assess how much taxable income an individual has.

What is the goal, then, of a *UAW Position Audit Form*? In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault discusses that each institution that has resulted from urban development, "working-class housing estates, hospitals, asylums, prisons, schools" were designed to allow for the observation of all members by all members (171). Buildings reflected this goal of the institution to allow "an internal, articulated and detailed control – to render visible those who are inside it" (172). Institutions need to be able to observe their

members in order to “provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them” (172). Observation of each job requires observation of the individual carrying out the job.

Foucault is pointing out that as commercial enterprises institutions are wary for “the slightest incompetence” because errors “if left unnoticed and therefore repeated each day, may prove fatal to the enterprise” (175). The more people that are involved in an institution’s functioning, the more observation that will be required; simply put, logistical possibilities for error increase with each additional action that is carried out by an employee. Punishment, based on observation, is designed to create amongst other things, “an average to be respected...a conformity that must be achieved” (183). In order to function as efficiently as possible the institution wishes to “normalize” behavior by “bringing into play the binary opposition of the permitted and the forbidden” which results in a process Foucault says “normalizes” the workers to the practices of the institution (182). In other words, there is a limited spectrum of acceptable behavior that an institution can tolerate in order to remain viable; it must be clear to the workers what these limits are.

Position audit forms thus have the purpose of examining the work each worker reports to be doing so that judgments can be made about the appropriateness of the level currently assigned to the job. Is the job being performed within the “normal” range of that level, i.e. is this really level 4 work or should this be level 5 work...or have the duties of the job decreased so that this has become a level 3 job? At an institution like Michigan Tech, the judgment about the level of work being done is not based on direct visual

observation. Rather, the report of the work done as written and filed by a UAW employee is the basis of the judgment about the job level. The written response on the form is viewed as actions that are carried out or not carried out according to the expectations for that position and level. As a result, it is not just the job/level that is being judged but also the work that the worker carries out; as Foucault says, “all behavior falls in the field between good and bad marks, good and bad points” (180). Based on the judgment of the professional class supervisors including HR employees, the worker carrying out the job will receive what Foucault calls “discipline”, i.e. whatever the outcome –good or bad—it is a form of discipline that either encourages similar behaviors from other employees or discourages other employees from acting similarly. The discipline that results can be maintaining the job/level as it is; raising the job/level and thus the amount of pay that the worker receives; lowering the job/level and thus the employee’s salary; or dismissing the employee from the job and finding someone who can carry out the work at the level expected.

The purpose of a *UAW Position Audit Form* is to observe the work carried out at different job levels. The judgments made by the professional class staff based on the responses written by working class staff affect not just the job/level but the individual in that job. With each employee dependent on their job for their source of income and social standing, few documents an employee will encounter in their lives will carry greater impact. The form is not neutral in the impact it has on individuals and their relationship with the institution that employs them.

Autonomous literacy expectations are one of many ideological literacy models

Since 1984 and the publication of *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, Brian Street has been developing a theoretical framework which shows that all communication has an underlying ideology. In the 2003 article “What’s “new” in New Literacy Studies” Street continues to draw attention to the prominence of what he calls an “autonomous model of literacy” (77). According to Street, an autonomous model “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin” the model of literacy being presented (77). Every set of literacy expectations has an underlying ideology. Those literacy systems which do not explicitly state or openly recognize the form of ideology underlying the values of the system are autonomous models.

An autonomous literacy model implicitly assumes that the practices of its own literacy model are ‘normal for everyone.’ For example, when Europeans colonized other nations, they believed that their way of educating people to use literacy was the ‘normal’ way for literacy to be used. An ideological model recognizes that every literacy model has its own contextualized expectations; no one literacy model is any more universally ‘normal’ than any other. Each geography, culture, belief system develops their own literacy practices. No one set of practices is more normal or correct than any other.

When it comes to power structures that frame the context of literacy surrounding this project, an autonomous model underlies both the educational and political power structures of our society; A Westernized power structure and literacy model has been used to “educate” those societies which the West “conquered.” Street points out that this

autonomous model of literacy is “simply imposing western conceptions of literacy on to other cultures or within a country those of one class or cultural group onto others” (77). In the case of the *UAW Position Audit Form*, one “class or cultural” group’s implicit literacy expectations and norms were used when creating and implementing the form, while another class, with different implicit literacy expectations, was filling out the form. Given these different sets of expectations and understandings about how literacy works, it is not surprising that the form does not naturally or automatically facilitate communication. In fact, with two different groups’ expectations clashing, the form is facilitating misunderstandings.

Street points out that “literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill” (77). The *UAW Position Audit Form* was designed with a particular goal and intention – to observe and measure the level of a job being carried out. These judgments simultaneously assign an economic value to the work of the employee doing the job. The employee is their job to the institution and the institution assigns plus and minus points to the work done or undone in the job. The professional class staff view the responses to the form based on their implicit literacy expectations, creating a social context for the observation and judgment of responses to the form. This is what Street calls “a social practice” and the outcome of this practice is influenced by “the ideas about literacy held by the participants” (78). In order for the filed form to be useful to the institution, professional staff must read and respond to the form; their reading and responses will be based on their implicit literacy expectations.

As Street points out, “we bring to literacy events concepts and social models regarding what the nature of the event is” (79). If in reading a filed form the professional class staff expect to find details and examples that explain the work, then a form that fails to meet this expectation will quite possibly be judged as “evidence” that the worker in that job is not working to expectations of the job/level. While the form is meant to observe and judge the job/level the judgment made is based on the written responses given by a working class staff person. The working class employee brings to the form a different set of implicit literacy understandings than the professional class employee. The form neither clarifies nor changes either sides expectations, it simply provides a space for misunderstanding.

UAW Position Audit

In the relationship between institution and employee, there is one way for the unionized employees to request a raise in pay and job level – the *UAW Position Audit Form*. The longer a person works in a job, the more likely the duties assigned to the job are to change and increase over time. Even with the support of a supervisor who believes a job/employee deserves a raise in level and pay, the only recourse is to encourage the individual to fill out and submit a position audit form. The version of the form that I have worked with Michigan Tech unionized employees on was created in 2004, after a committee was formed to review and respond to difficulties found with the previous version of the form. The general consensus amongst those I have worked with on the

2004 version is, “This form is terrible; the previous one was even worse.” Everyone in the institution seems to agree that committee generated forms are necessary evils; they are the imperfectable but necessary instruments that allow for observation of work being done by people who are not in physical view. If supervisors at various levels cannot directly observe the work as it is being done, they can at least have a written account of the work from the person carrying out the work.

In what follows, three specific examples of how the form ‘frames’ the questions asked of employees and the implicit expectations embedded in the form will be analyzed. These examples will also reinforce the point that it is not possible for a form to be neutral; all literacy contexts are social contexts, regardless of whether the assumptions present in that context are implicit or explicit. Forms are created by a person or group for specific purposes; the designers may not be aware of their own implicit expectations but this does not prevent these implicit expectations from framing how they will read the responses to the form.

The Guide to the Form

Filling out the *UAW Position Audit Form* is supposed to be preceded by reading the *Audit Guide*. The guide is online for the employees to find – usually this is how it is referenced by employees, “You go online and find it.” No one could remember where they eventually found it other than, “somewhere on the HR page I think”. The guide opens with the following statement:

There are no ‘magic words’ to move a position to a higher level. The purpose of this guide is to assist the office professional in completing their audit form. Use the areas listed in each of the headings as a beginning for the completion of your audit form. Feel free to use other words that may better describe what is required for your position. There is a list of action verbs at the end of this guide. (1)

This opening paragraph contains multiple implicit understandings and while it may read as ‘a very clear paragraph’ to professional staff, working class staff did not share this view. First, the writers of the paragraph obviously are used to reading to learn. While the paragraph may appear clear to a professional, to someone not used to reading to learn there is no immediately clear point. Consider the following points all being made: There are no magic words; the guide will assist you; read the headings; use your own words; there are action words at the end of the guide.

The implicit literacy understandings underlying this paragraph include:

- Everyone learns to do by reading
- Everyone knows the difference between “magic words,” their own words, and action words
- Everyone already knows how to describe with language
- Everyone already knows how to effectively use action words
- Everyone has a complex enough understanding of literacy contexts to “make choices” about how they will write something, e.g. “Feel free to use words that may better describe...”

Another statement from the *Guide* that in this case reinforces the seriousness of the act of filing a position audit form:

Remember that submitting an audit form to Human Resources initiates the audit process and it is not just a ‘test to see what might happen’. If it is determined that your position is actually at a lower level, it will be reclassified as such...(1)

As Foucault noted, behavior amongst employees must be kept standardized. This statement in the *Guide* implies that it is equally clear to all employees when a critical mass of new duties have been achieved that will make it readily apparent that the time is correct for filing a form. As Foucault also noted, an institution needs to keep the employees’ behavior within the range of “good and bad.” While it is not clear what the discipline will be for incorrectly choosing the duty level at which to file a form, there is a warning tone in the reminder that if “your position is actually at a lower level, it will be reclassified as such.” In other words, it can be read as cautioning UAW workers; critically consider if as supervised employees you want to bring the power of the observations of supervisors to bear on your work. There are competing implications present: you are the best judge of when a critical number of new duties have been added to your level; make certain to reflect on your judgment because once supervisors are examining what you do if they should disagree with your judgment they can also lower your level.

Social Context of Filling out the Form

Regardless of why a UAW employee began the audit process, filling out the form was a time consuming task. It became a yoke that the employee carried with them every day; other union members as well as supervisors regularly asked, “Are you done yet?” There is no work time allotted for filling out the form; the partially filled out document could not be saved in the program needed to fill out the form. Each time a person sat down to work on the form she had to start filling it out from scratch. All the employees I worked with on the form carried a file of previous, incomplete drafts of the form and reported they had been working on completing the form for anywhere from six to eighteen months.

Adding to the difficulty of “finishing” the form and handing it in, was that in the six to eighteen month period an employee spent completing one draft of the form, her duties would continue to change. I had more than one person tell me that when she had finally finished the form and sat down to read it over, she recognized that her duties had changed sufficiently that the form once again required updating. Meanwhile, the individual’s relationship with the institution was in a sort of limbo; people might recognize that a fellow employee deserved a raise but no one could facilitate this change without a completed job review form. If one were in the process of completing the form, then they were not in an adequate bargaining place to apply for other jobs in the institution, nor were they necessarily receiving adequate compensation for the work they were doing. Only a completed and filed form could change these circumstances.

In what follows I have excerpted sections from the 2004 version of the MTU *UAW Position Audit*.

Three Examples of how the Form Frames the Review

I. What is the form observing: job/level, person or literacy experience?

This form is a foreign document; it is not a “natural” part of employees’ routine job duties. Even those who wrote the position audit form would not be using it regularly after it was designed and written; the committee was not made up of any one department but was made up of professional class staff from many departments. The only people who would encounter this form regularly would be the staff of the Human Resource Department which has a professional class staff person review each form and conduct an in-person interview with the employee and their immediate supervisor as a later part of the position review process.

The form is an eight page document, with boxes that are either designed to be check-marked, or that visually appear as narrow rectangles. (Fig 2.1) The top half of the first page gathers information that can be used in assessment, for filing, and for other institutional purposes. At the top of the page the name of the university is positioned over the title of the form; the title of the form makes clear that this form is for use by UAW employees. The top half focuses on different ways the job and person are categorized within the institution: by position, by supervisor, by UAW level, by department. The information being requested here is a combination of job related and personal information, which implies that both the job and the person are being observed through

this form. The UAW level, department, phone number and supervisor apply to both the individual and the job they do; the pieces of information that are more dependent on the person in the job and the place in time/space in which this context is situated are “Name” and “Date.”

MichiganTech

UAW POSITION AUDIT FORM

Position Title: _____ Current UAW Level: _____
Name: _____ Phone: _____
Reports to (Title): _____
Department: _____ Date: _____

Employee’s Signature

I certify that the information given in this document is accurate and complete.

Signature: _____
Title: _____ Date: _____

Fig. 2.1 Top of page 1, UAW Position Audit Form

Professional class staff members are used to handling forms, documents, generating reading and writing as part of their job; most will handle contracts and other legal documents as part of their work. They are also familiar with legal requirements to maintain confidentiality, truthfulness, and integrity while handling these documents. It therefore seems “natural” in the context of such an important document to remind the person filling out the form that the process is taken seriously by the institution and the professional employees who organize the process after the form is filed. “I certify that the information given in this document is accurate and complete” is implicitly understood as an accepted standard phrase for asking that someone confirm the document is accurate and that the signer has at least read the form and is aware of the content. This implicit understanding is based on an autonomous model expectation where different kinds of documents are handled regularly and it is expected that certain statements and types of information “belong” on a form. An institutional form is supposed to have a place where the person filing the form verifies that they have read with and agree with the content contained in the form and any claims that the content is making.

The bottom half of the first page is a bullet point list of instructions (Fig2.2). The instructions are immediately viewable for reference by an employee and are a condensed version of the guide.

AUDIT FORM/PROCESS INSTRUCTIONS

- Supervisor Signature/Comments page is a separate document and must accompany the completed position audit form when it is returned to Human Resources.
- When filling out the form, check the box(es) that represent the majority of your duties and responsibilities. Do not check boxes for things you only do occasionally.
- In addition to checking the boxes, you are required to provide information at the end of each section of the position audit form to support the boxes you checked. Feel free to include examples in these boxes. The text boxes will expand as they are completed.
- Both you and your supervisor will be invited to the position audit interview. If appropriate, you may bring samples of your work with you to the interview.
- Check the Position Audit Form Guide for additional help in completing the form. Specific questions can be directed to the Classification/Compensation office in Human Resources.

**Keep in mind that the Position Audit Form focuses on the duties and responsibilities
assigned to the position.**

Fig. 2.2 Bottom of page 1, UAW Position Audit Form

At this point the form is reminding readers of the most important things to be remembered as they approach the form. To professional staff the bullet list appears straightforward and again reflects the implicit understanding that people learn how to do by reading, and is an example of what one group finds to be manageable blocks of text. The form is also reminding UAW staff that their supervisor will have an opportunity to read everything that is written in the form; that their supervisor will ‘sign off’ on the form

before it can be turned in; that their supervisor will be present in their interview with human resources. The form also reminds them that the supervisor is allowed a separate form for “Comments” [this is the signed document that must be included with the employees filed form in order for the UAW employee’s form to be complete.] The first page implies the significance of the supervisor to this process; the understanding that the UAW employee’s responses are as equally important as the supervisors may not be as clear to all readers.

The employee is also being reminded, as Foucault has shown us, that a number of people observe her. Observations of the supervisor means that the supervisor is in a position to either lend validity to the work claims being made on the form, or to challenge that the person is doing everything in that position that she claims to be doing.

II. Who defines the terms being used, i.e. what is “significant change”?

After identifying who she is in relation to the institution, the employee is next required to show that filing the form and beginning the “official” job audit process is in fact necessary. The form (see Fig 2.3) is thus reminding the employee that other employees will be required to read this document if it is filed, i.e. there is no turning back once this form is filed. Foucault points out that institutions value expediency and efficiency; wasting another employee’s time is a corporate sin. Foucault quotes Cournol to make the point that institutions try to ensure “that not a sous is spent uselessly, that not a moment of the day is lost” (175). Filing an unwarranted job audit review is a waste of institutional resources and is an action that can lead to discipline that serves as a warning to other UAW staff about what is and is not an acceptable context for filing a form.

The employee is also being told the institutionally justifiable reasons for a job audit (Fig. 2.3) The form lists those reasons which the institution considers create a context where a position audit is necessary.

Place an 'X' in the appropriate box(es) below.

This reclassification request is based upon changes in the position as a result of:

- Evolution of responsibilities over time
- Reorganization of positions or responsibilities
- Transfer or redelegation of duties and/or responsibilities from another position.

Significant changes in the position are reflected in one or more of the following areas:

- Supervisory responsibility
- Knowledge and skills required to perform the job
- Scope of assignments/responsibilities
- New functions not previously performed in the unit
- Complexity of problems or assignments

Fig. 2.3 Mid-section page 1, UAW Position Audit Form

These checkboxes of justifications reflect an understanding that a worker is working in a context where all duties were clearly laid out when the employee entered the position and that all changes in expectations have also been clearly communicated to the employee. It also assumes that reorganizations of positions and responsibilities are part of a process in which when one employee leaves and another joins the office, all responsibilities remain the same. The listed choices do not take into account that sometimes duties gradually and unofficially change as someone with more knowledge leaves a workplace and fellow

workers take on a few of the duties assigned to the position. This is just one example of the implicit understanding that job duties are always clearly laid out for the employee.

The form does not include an “other” box if the UAW employee should think she has another valid reason for filing the form. For the institution’s purpose there are three possible ways a position can change that make it worthy of auditing and “significant changes” are recognized in the five listed areas. The institution is framing what a “significant change” is. Like all forms, this one has specific purposes and the form designers/writers have attempted to make these reasons as clear as possible. What is not as clear are the implicit literacy expectations that underlie what is “significant” and whose judgment will matter most in this area – the supervisors or the UAW staff member’s?

III. Whose judgments weigh most heavily?

On the second and following pages the UAW employee is asked to divide her “Primary Duties and Responsibilities” from her “Additional Duties and Responsibilities.” The form does not ask for a ‘list of all primary duties’ but rather asks for “no more than six (6) of your primary duties and responsibilities.” The implicit expectation is that the UAW employee carrying out the job is the best judge of what is most important in the work they do. This implicit understanding is at odds, however with the first bulleted guideline found on page one of the document: a supervisor’s judgment will be considered regarding the value or existence of duties being carried out by the worker. If there is a discrepancy between what a worker claims to do and what a supervisor claims the worker is doing, what will count as ‘evidence’ in this context? If there is no evidence, whose

word will weigh most heavily with the professional staff member of HR who makes the final decision?

As Foucault points out, employees are exposed to normalizing behavior as soon as they become part of the institution. The institution continuously values the 'right' behavior and punishes the 'wrong'; thus employees, without even being conscious of this, are constantly adjusting their behavior to 'fit in' with the institution's expectations. Professional staff and UAW staff have not, however, received identical normalization. Professional staff are required to set standards for their work group; to decide on agendas and long term goals; to assign tasks to those they supervise. The UAW staff is normalized to receive input from supervisors about what their immediate goals ought to be. At the same time, employees often also deal with the general public which can lead to delays in meeting the goals set by a supervisor. In many cases UAW employees also deal with students and faculty who may, through requests for work/assistance, impose new objectives for the UAW staff person to also meet. While the professional staff are normalized to define the importance of their own work, UAW staff are normalized to have others impose deadlines and goals for them. What for the professional staff is a straightforward analysis of which duties in the job are most significant, for the UAW staff becomes an attempt to respond to the legitimate question, "Most important to whom?" The designers/writers of the form have different experiences and expectations for assigning value to their own work than do the filers of the form.

PRIMARY DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES – Position's most important tasks and responsibilities.

Describe **no more than six (6)** of your primary duties and responsibilities. Start with what you feel is most important in your job. Please also explain the most complex challenges you encounter relative to that duty in your description.

You may include examples to help explain your duties and responsibilities. **Place an 'X' in the box for the frequency of each duty/responsibility. The text box will expand as more room is required.**

Also indicate if a duty or responsibility is new since your last position review or since you entered the position.

Duty/Responsibility:

Frequency: *Daily* *Weekly* *Monthly* *Semester* *Yearly*

Fig. 2.4, Top half of Page 2, UAW Position Audit Form

The form had two sections for listing “Additional Duties.” The first follows the selection of the six most important duties and is called “Additional Duties and Responsibilities.” The final “Additional Duties” section is separated by several pages of other details from the initial section for listing duties.

ADDITIONAL DUTIES/RESPONSIBILITIES

Describe the additional duties and responsibilities which comprise your regular assignments. Use action verbs as part of your descriptions. *NOTE: If you need more room for your additional duties and responsibilities, there is an extra page at the end of the form.* **Place an ‘X’ in the box for the frequency of each duty/responsibility. The text box will expand as more room is required.**

Also indicate if a duty or responsibility is new since your last position review or since you entered the position.

Duty/Responsibility:

[Empty text box for describing duties and responsibilities]

Frequency: Daily Weekly Monthly Semester Yearly

Place an X here if this is a new duty since last review or since you entered the position

Fig. 2.5, Top half page 3, UAW Position Audit Form

Separating this final page of duties from the beginning of the “Additional Duties” provides a final opportunity for UAW staff to write up any work they do that they also think is significant to their job. By separating it from the previously listed “six most important duties” and the “Additional Duties and Responsibilities” by several pages though, it is possible to read an implication that these are job tasks that are not as significant since that which is “most” significant has already been written and considered several pages earlier. While a UAW worker may think that the final page of duties are also significant, the placing of this information in the ordering of the form

indicates that the readers of the filed form will not see this information as nearly as significant as the “six most important duties.” Again, for the purposes of the institution, not everything can be equally important and part of what this form appears to measure is the individual’s ability to make appropriate decisions about what should be her priorities in completing her daily work. Is she indicating by how she divides her duties on the form that she recognizes which jobs are most important to the functioning of the institution?

I found all employees were responsible for work related knowledge that enabled efficient work environments – information which their supervisors did not share and which their supervisors relied on them to provide. Most supervisors were aware of the dependent nature of their work on the workers who knew how to carry out all the details related to a task. Many supervisors offered to help the employees by reading over the form when the employee had finished filling it out. Even supportive supervisors, however, did not become involved in the process of discerning how to initially approach the form or how to divide duties by their “importance.” Nor did employees ask for this kind of support. Everyone I worked with had labored under the impression that it was not ‘normal’ to ask for assistance with filling out the form. Yet, nowhere is it stated that individuals ought to work alone on their form. Again, this is an indication of differences in expectations regarding implicit literacy and social interactions; to some people it might seem appropriate to discuss the details of the form with others – but this is a socially contextualized sense of “appropriateness” that not all social groups share.

Different backgrounds, Different expectations

Foucault posits that all institutions must observe those individuals who are part of the institution in order to maintain control of the members. This is an essential part of maintaining the institution. As part of maintaining stability and ensuring productivity, each individual worker must recognize what falls into the acceptable range of behavior within that institution, i.e. their behavior must be normalized. A form which has an employee report the work they are doing to the professional staff members of the institution facilitates a level of quality assurance – each level of employees is functioning within approximately the same standard, carrying out a similar work load. The *UAW Position Audit* was designed to guide the working class employee in reporting the details that the professional class employees need to see, to judge if institutional guidelines and expectations are being met. When necessary, changes to a job level or changing an employee in a particular position will be made based on the judgments on what is reported in the form.

Street argues that all communication contexts—this would include the context of filling out and filing a position audit review— have an underlying ideology. In the case of the position audit form the professional class staff shared a background in an autonomous model of literacy that led to particular implicit understandings of how a form should be designed and written. Reflected in this ideology are understandings such as everyone learns by reading how to do and that discussing what one reads is a normal part of work and/or life.

UAW working class staff employees however, have been socialized with different implicit literacy understandings. While they also were educated in a K-12 system

founded on an autonomous model of literacy, their social and literacy contexts did not prepare them for school the same way that the professional class staff members were prepared. This different home literacy preparation will be discussed in *Chapter Three*. It is important to note at this point that there is a fundamental difference in the implicit literacy expectations that the professional class staff bring to the position audit form and that which the working class staff bring to the form. Due to these differences, UAW staff members were often not responding to the form the way professional staff would. As a result, a form which is designed to observe the work being done in a position is more likely measuring the lack of shared implicit literacy understandings between working class and professional class staff.

Chapter Three

How Home Literacy Shapes Implicit Literacy Expectations

Born and Raised Into a Literacy Context

In *Chapter Two* I showed that rather than being neutral documents, forms are written and designed for an institutional purpose. A group of professional class staff at Michigan Tech wrote a position audit form for the UAW working class staff to fill out. The form was designed to enable institutional measures to be used to value each UAW staff position in the university. The form was meant to allow professional staff to evaluate the level of a particular job, and the attached duties being carried out in that position, and to see if the work load had grown to the point that merited a raise in level/pay any time a review was requested. The filed form was meant to enable a judgment about the job level and decide if it should be raised, lowered, or the person working in the job dismissed and replaced by someone capable of performing at the required level. Both groups of Tech employees—professional class and working class—

share at least one element in common in their literacy backgrounds: they were educated in K – 12 settings where an autonomous model of literacy was in place. While each group was bringing an implicit understanding of how to use literacy to the context – what ought to be written in response to the form’s questions – the two groups held different implicit understandings about what the content of responses to the form should be.

Due to differences in implicit literacy expectations between the two groups, UAW staff found difficulties with the form that the professional staff could not have foreseen. Neither group was conscious of their own implicit understandings of how reading and writing are used, or how forms are generally used. At the same time, all individuals in both groups had experienced an autonomous model of literacy in their K-12 education which taught them that there is a correct way of using literacy; the professional class children came from homes where literacy practices were similar between home and school, while the working class employees did not. Thus, the working class employees learned in school that they did not naturally speak, write, or use literacy in the ‘right ways.’ This chapter will more fully explore this background and experiences.

As Street points out the particular autonomous model of literacy that all employees were educated in, “disguises the cultural and ideological assumptions that underpin it so that it can then be presented as though they are neutral and universal and that literacy as such will have these benign effects” (What’s New 77). However, in working class homes the expectations and uses of literacy are often different from those valued in school, while the literacy uses in school are similar to those in professional class homes. Rather than being neutral, the literacy valued in school in effect “teaches”

students that some are naturally better at reading and writing than others. Street and other New Literacy Study theorists have shown that each literacy context has an ideology in place; when an autonomous model of literacy underlies the literacy practices of a context the ideology in place remains implicit and unspoken.

Before beginning the central argument in this chapter—that a person’s previous literacy experiences in home and K-12 education shape how they respond to later literacy contexts—I will provide some background that shows at least part of the literacy experiences I bring to this project. One of the concepts of New Literacy Studies that I find useful is that a researcher should be aware of and share enough of her background so that readers have an idea of any biases or personal point of view that may be shaping the concerns and questions found within the study. This is also a rhetorical move meant to provide readers with a sense of what I am basing my implied claim for ethos on.

The argument will then turn to showing how a person’s responses in literacy contexts are shaped by previous literacy experiences, including their childhood home and school literacy practices. Shirley Brice Heath’s literacy studies of working class home literacy practices will be compared with observations I made about the home literacy practices of local working class people. This will establish the background for differences in implicit literacy understandings that UAW staff bring to filling out the position audit form, as compared to the implicit literacy expectations of the professional staff that will read and evaluate the responses to the form. Finally, this chapter will close using the theory of James Paul Gee to show the connection between literacy skills and the economic fortunes of working class employees.

The Researcher's Background

In the "Introduction" to *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, Street points out that an ideological model of literacy, unlike an autonomous model, acknowledges that literacy contexts cannot be separated from social contexts, "the relation of oral and literate practices differs from one context to another" (9). This is why rather than an alternate to an autonomous model, an ideological model "subsumes rather than excludes" an autonomous model by looking for the ideology present in each literacy context. Street says, "Since all approaches to literacy in practice will involve some such bias, it is better scholarship to admit to and expose the particular 'ideological' framework being employed from the very beginning" (7). The *Introduction* and *Chapter One* of this dissertation discussed the theoretical underpinnings that inform my approach to the topic. I will now disclose some of my personal background that also influences the way I approach this work.

My transition into the conversations, expectations and social understandings of this area were perhaps facilitated by the fact that I was born in the U.P. , in a community also on the shore line of Lake Superior, about two hour's drive from Michigan Tech. Those born and raised in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, or U.P., identify themselves as "Yoopers." Yoopers are very aware of cultural, language and value differences between themselves and those in Lower Michigan. Those who live in Lower Michigan are referred to by Yoopers as "trolls" because they live "below the bridge" (on the other side of the Straits of Mackinac). Most of the UAW employees I worked with were of the same generation I am – at the tail end of the Baby Boomers. As children in the U.P. we

took part in social events like “the smelt run” – when smelt (a very small fish resembling trout/salmon) would return to spawning areas in such great numbers that they could be netted up and people would gather to have huge “smelt fries” with family and friends. The smelt no longer run so profusely and being able to remember smelt fries is one of the cultural markers that place one historically in the U.P. context. Yoopers tend to be clannish; family is always in the innermost circle and close friends who have gone through years of similar experiences are in the next circle. Yoopers are generally friendly – to a point – and it can be a very difficult environment for people from outside to ever feel welcomed in as if they are “home”. My family’s connection to places where family names and their familiarity make a difference doubtless played a role in the kinds of personal access I was given in some cases.

While Heath’s work is classic ethnography, as mentioned in *Chapter One* this study is an example of a Participant as Observer case study. In a Participant as Observer case study the work that was originally being conducted – in this case the writing center sessions I had with UAW workers—was the primary purpose of our sessions and work. I was first a participant in the writing center sessions. Observing, making notes and writing down sections of discussion were part of my pedagogical practice, practices which accompany all teaching I take part in. It was thus as a secondary project that the dissertation grew with a focus on these writing center sessions. I noted that something interesting had happened in these sessions and I wanted to analyze the form and the sessions to learn more about the process we had gone through and if warranted to provide information about this work for others. My desire to share this work with others was also

largely influenced by one of the session participants, Linda, who charged me to talk about our work in a way that would make my writing center peers care enough to try doing similar work in their own writing centers.

As part of contextualizing my position in this work, it is also important to note that according to those who talk about such things – particularly the ‘old timers’ who can be found sitting around coffee in any of the local diners on any given morning, including some of my own cousins – I am not a real “Yooper.” When I was about to turn 12, my family moved to Canada and while they eventually returned to the U.P. I was gone long enough to have finished growing up elsewhere. Part of my reference then for what it is to be a Yooper come from family stories, Christmas and summer visits, and a network of relatives who are also my friends and who never left the area, or who left only long enough to get an education that would allow them to return and work in the area. My status as a Yooper lies in part in the company I am in; to outsiders I am, to old locals I am not, to same age peers I share many childhood memories that shaped who we each grew into.

Shirley Brice Heath and the Literacy Practices we Enter School With

In *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, Shirley Brice Heath reports on her ground breaking literacy work. Heath discloses in her work that she is from an area similar to that which she conducted her studies in, “I had grown up in a rural Piedmont area in a neighboring state” (5). She found that there were

“shared experiences and unconscious habits of interactions” that “eased” her transition into communities and relationships with people. She suggests that this familiarity with habits and ways of interacting helped her fit in and be accepted into the communities she interacted with.

Heath conducted her literacy research amongst three communities – two rural and one “townspeople” – and identified differences in how each community prepared their children for school literacy contexts. The working class communities, both of which were more “rural” than the town community, typically produced children who did not do well in school. The town’s people Heath focused on were professionals and their children were in all ways “better” – better prepared, better mannered, and better at getting ahead in class and in life ... at least according to the observations of other professionals like school teachers. Heath’s study showed that this was not a coincidence. The children of the white collar townspeople were being raised with the literacy and social practices at home that were also appropriate in school. The children of working class rural families were being raised in literacy contexts that did not always successfully translate to school literacy practices.

The primary reason that I am referencing Heath’s work is due to the similarity between her observations about working class literacy practices in the Roadville community of the Piedmont region of the Carolinas and my observations about working class literacy practices in the Keweenaw region of the Upper Peninsula (U.P). Located on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Michigan Tech is on yet another Peninsula – the Keweenaw – which juts out into Lake Superior. This is a geographically isolated area that

was originally developed due to copper mining. The working class descendants of miners continue to live in the area. Heath describes Roadville as a “white working-class community of families steeped for four generations in the life of the textile mills” (1). Both the Keweenaw and the Piedmont area developed around industry that provided great wealth for a few and rows of company houses and physically demanding, labor based jobs for most.

There are a number of similarities between the preparations of children for school and for life between working class people in the Keweenaw and Roadville. What people talk about, who they talk to, who counts as an authority – the similarities suggest that part of what creates a tradition of generations of working class people is similar to what creates generations of professional class people. Each group’s adults implicitly and explicitly teach their children the literacy practices that are ‘normal’ for their group. These literacy practices include a set of values surrounding how ‘useful’ different types of literacy proficiency are, particular ways and contexts for using literacy, and the group’s social traditions surrounding literacy usage. These practices in turn create contexts for children from infancy onward that prepare them to write, speak, and read the way their parents do. This in turn influences the work they are prepared to do and expect to do. Their literacy background also teaches children expectations for how and when literacy will be used. Sometimes these differences are notable: is college a natural expectation or something only a few aspire to? Sometimes they are more subtle: does your family have a bookshelf of cookbooks or a box of family recipe cards?

Examples of Implicit Literacy Expectations in Roadville

What counts as success in school is not the same for all social groups. For example, in order for a professional class student to be successful they might be expected to have high grades, while a working class student's family may be more interested in good civic conduct. And while a professional class family might expect that all their children will go to college, a working class family might expect their children to go into similar areas of trades and apprenticeships as the family has traditionally held. Heath points out that the difference in expectations between the two social classes are apparent from preschool but that by high school working class children have come to identify school as irrelevant to their futures, "The jobs they want seem unrelated to the tasks school sets up for them" (47). School, which has always been separate in language and social practices from home, never becomes a 'natural' setting and the practices that take place in school, including literacy practices, remain 'unnatural'. This is beginning to change with members of the younger generation, more of whom see college as a possibility. What has not changed is that even by the time they enter college, working class children and professional class children do not share implicit literacy expectations.

"Roadville parents expect their children to be good students, and they accept C students as good" (45). Good behavior means showing respect to authority figures; being quietly respectful counts as being a good student in a working class family. Children are also expected to show respect for authority; the authoritative sources Heath identified were ministers, teachers and older members of a child's home community. The ministers would often preach "the duty of parents to be strict and to raise children in the right way"

(139). The right way includes not questioning authority. As one young woman explained to Heath, “They always taught us to respect the preacher, the teacher, and older folks” (142). To be ‘good’ in this context is to be observant, obedient, and respectful. A good student is one who *listens* in class and acts with respect towards the teacher. This means that students from working class homes start out “well” according to teachers but do not move successfully beyond what Heath calls the “listen and learn and repeat” practices in school (226). Tasks which require the children be imaginative or write creatively are more difficult for working class students because this kind of “story telling” or “lying” is frowned upon in the home context, “ In Roadville, the absoluteness of ways of talking about what is written fits church ways of talking about what is written. Behind the written word is an authority....” (234).

In fact, home life reinforces the idea that home and school are two different arenas that may have little overlap; as Heath points out, “the domains of school and home are kept separate by both child and parent” and both parties expect that there are things that have a purpose only in school (230). In Roadville learning to write ‘creatively’ or with imagination is not considered valuable in regular life. Roadville residents for example, “use writing only when they have to and view it as an occasional necessary tool” (231). In home contexts writing is useful for making a list to take to the store, or writing an advertisement to sell something; writing has very practical applications that are immediately useful. Writing however, is not an essential part of home life; if one forgets their grocery list one walks up and down the aisle and remembers what is needed, while word of mouth will often sell something as quickly as an advertisement will.

Writing well at home means making a list or advertisement that someone else can read and understand; you may need to send a spouse or child to the grocery store with the grocery list. Writing well according to what their K-12 teachers would have identified as “good writing” was key to success in school and included activities like writing short stories or personal narrative essays. These two concepts of “good writing” were implicit and divergent. Parents expected teachers to teach writing while teachers expect students to have literacy support at home – including parents who read and write. Both sides’ expectations were implicit.

To better understand the implicit literacy expectations that working class students were raised with, four areas that influence a group’s uses of literacy will now be shown: Who and What counts as a source of Authority; Dialect as an Indicator of Intellect; Communication Style and Content; Work has Tangible Value. In each category first an example from Heath’s study will be shown, then an example from the Keweenaw will be shown. Implicit literacy understandings will be shown to have commonalities between working class families in two very different geographical regions, supporting the contention that working class implicit literacy values are handed on in such a way that does not favor working class employees when they approach a position audit form.

Who and What Count as Sources of Authority

What counts as ‘knowledge worth having’ and who counts as an ‘authority’ on any given matter is established in childhood – how does one’s family teach/learn, who

does one's family accept as an authority figure and why? In her work Heath found that in working class Roadville, once children begin school parents see their responsibilities as making sure their children "attend regularly, bring their books home, and stay out of trouble" (45). Teachers, not parents, are the authorities in the school environment; parents and elders are authorities in home/life skills and they make sure the students take the books back and forth to school. It is an implicit expectation that what students learn from the books is up to the teachers, not the parents; the teachers, not the parents are the authority on what counts as good school literacy practices.

For the working class employees Heath observed – working predominately in the mills—reading and writing are not central to the work they do. Heath noted for the mill workers that reading "is limited to information on the bulletin board" and reading signs (234). With the written word not used regularly in the work context, workers do not see a strong connection between having literacy skills and doing well at work. For professional class supervisors reading and writing are essential to their work; for the working class employees the two had little to do with each other. When professional class employees tried to pass knowledge on to working class employees through writing which they expected to be read, both groups became frustrated. Executives and supervisors found their employees did not find reading and writing a "natural" way for "organizing and talking about transferring knowledge into action" (262). The written word in a work context does not carry authority for working class employees; it is not the way they expect to learn to do things.

Amongst the working class, people are not given respect simply because they are well educated. Heath noted one respected woman from a rural working class community referred to the professional class town's people as "all the 'big heads' – 'folks that have forgotten where they come from or what it's like to have to keep up with all those rules' " (236). Both professional and working class people have implicit ideas about who ought to be respected and why—their implicit understandings are not the same and are reflections of the class background they come from. Heath found that working class people value those who show by doing that they know how to work; those who are mature and show they have learned from their life experience; those like teachers and preachers who work in the community to 'improve' those areas of life where working class people identify themselves as needing guidance or "improvement."

Professional class people Heath observed gave more authority to written sources of knowledge and "view continuing education at the advanced-degree level in ways similar to service in a voluntary association: a social occasion which helps one's self and public image" (245). They also teach their children that education grants authority and is to be respected, "An individual's assertion of formal credentials – either university degrees or public awards and distinction – makes him an authority" (237). What one knows and where they learned it are implicitly valued and influence the authority one has in a professional class community.

While the administrative assistants on Tech's campus do far more reading than do mill workers, unlike the professional class they are primarily reading and writing on behalf of agendas set by their supervisors. Independent literacy decisions are less

required for writing and more required for personal communications and interactions, i.e. how to make things happen through personal interactions, or knowing when and to whom written communications must be sent. If as a graduate student I wanted to know what I needed to do ‘next’ in the process of meeting the graduation requirements, I went to the administrative assistant who referenced not just forms but the names of particular people in particular departments and offices, explaining who I needed to talk to as well as hand my paperwork to. Reading and writing by themselves did not allow me to complete the process, personal interactions were necessary. For the administrative assistants this is true of all aspects of their job; reading and writing alone are never sufficient and they often rely on who they know and their relationships with people in other departments of the institution to get work done. Written communication in and of itself is not necessarily authoritative; knowledge of personal interactions and relationships is usually more vital.

The Keweenaw residents also share a similar understanding of what does count as an “authoritative source.” As in Roadville, here children are taught to respect their teachers, Pastors, and elders in the community. A good student is a respectful, listening student. As in Roadville, working class children in the Keweenaw are not raised to challenge the ideas presented in class or to write creatively outside of class.

In the context of the *UAW Position Audit Form*, working class employees have a different set of implicit literacy expectations than professional class employees. The working class carries implicit literacy understandings; reading and writing to learn or teach are not part of their expectations, or usually part of their work. The reading and writing work they do engage in is usually a formalization of someone else’s words or

thoughts, e.g. typing a letter or sending an email that has originated with a supervisor. Even when a working class employee is the originator of a written document, for example sending an email related to work, the content is largely shaped by institutional needs and goals such as dates, times and places of meetings or the steps of a process that a student needs to complete. What/who counts as an authority and the place of personal relationships as part of the work environment are also matters of different implicit understandings and customs between working and professional class employees.

Professional class supervisors carry an implicit understanding of the purpose and uses of the chain of command within an institution. Working class employees have a different implicit understanding of relationships, authority and respect. If a supervisor is younger than the workers he supervises and less experienced in the work environment, then he will take longer to establish himself as an authority. While professional class employees expect educational background to be respected, working class employees do not necessarily see a value in having spent so many years reading and writing in school. “Book knowledge” and “common sense” are observed to seldom go together according to many working class people, something which both Heath and I have observed in our independent projects. Authority for the working class is not usually found in written documents outside of the Bible.

Dialect as an Indicator of Intellect

Heath noted when working with teachers that the dialect of the working class people of Roadville was considered something that children needed “education” to overcome. As she writes, “numerous subtle and covert norms, habits, and values about reading, writing, and speaking” were present in the dealing of teachers and students in the classroom (262). Teachers motivated by an autonomous model of literacy and implicit understandings of what correct English should sound and be written like, wanted to help the Roadville children learn how to read and write correctly. When Heath began teaching a class for teachers about literacy and the effects of home/community/culture on implicit literacy knowledge and expectations, teachers started looking back at their written comments about students. They found “they had recorded primarily attitudes or activities which centered around patterns of responding to and using oral and written language” and as one teacher confessed, “We knew that their spoken language was different, but we always assumed these differences were from ignorance and lack of education” (270-1).

One of the implicit teachings the working class children were receiving was that they were naturally bad at reading and writing, just as their professional class peers were naturally good at reading and writing. This innate knowledge or lack of knowledge extended to knowing how and when to use reading and writing to learn, to express creative ideas, to express personal thoughts and feelings. This sense of lacking is something that working class families internalize. Heath noted that both students and parents “feel language is power, and though they may not articulate precisely their

reasons for needing to learn to read, write, and speak in the ways the school teaches, they believe that such learning has something to do with moving them up..." (265). This belief is reinforced by the observation working class people can make for themselves: professional class children do better in school and seem to end up with better jobs. What is not visible to the working class is the difference in implicit literacy expectations between their home lives and those of the professional class families.

In working class homes, parents' reading interactions with their children end by the time children are in the first grade. Parents "do not ask about homework" and if the child needs either knowledge or store goods not readily available to them in their home in order to complete homework or a project then "most Roadville students do not complete [these] assignments" (45). The professional class parent such as a mill executive "repeatedly moves from labels to discussions of the features of the items labeled, to questions about the reasons for and uses of these. Through preschool, school, and work these seem natural, "logical" ways of proceeding..." (261). Thus a professional class child enters school with implicit literacy knowledge that matches the implicit literacy expectations which teachers have.

As children the professional class also learns about writing genres in a more complex way than their working class peers. Children learn "they should not interpret some oral and written texts literally" and that when a story is written down it is no longer necessarily reflecting "a strict adherence to real-world rules" (256). Professional class children learn implicitly that reading is contextual; a science text and a science fiction novel allow for different kinds of exploration of similar topics. Professional class

children thus implicitly know from an early age that genres may not carry the same ‘truth value’ in a classroom context but they are both valued ways of discovering new ideas, another implicitly valued literacy goal.

In the context of the *UAW Position Audit*, it can be seen how working class adults are still influenced by their literacy background and the implicit value of a strict interpretation of “truthful” statements in written documents. The suggestion that an employee give more information about how she does her job was usually met with the statement, “But I don’t want to exaggerate” or “I don’t want to sound like I’m making things up.” There was an implicit understanding that it was not desirable to move beyond a bare-bone listing of ‘facts’ or a list of duties. When we began talking about an honest person being able to trust her own telling of what she did in her job, another level of implicit knowledge became apparent. Heath had noted the experience Roadville students had with teachers thinking that students were ‘ignorant’ because of how they spoke. Keweenaw residents had also “learned” as children that their ideas were not valued because of the way they were spoken and written. This implicit knowledge left working class adults reluctant to write in long or detailed sentences; the more they wrote down the more there was to be criticized and the more likely they were to make mistakes.

In the Keweenaw many lifetime residents speak in a dialect that is particular to the U.P. and perhaps most strongly still alive in this region. The Yooper dialect is Midwestern, influenced most noticeably by French Canadian and Scandinavian cultures. This dialect is generally considered rough sounding and nothing makes it more obvious that one is an ‘outsider’ than to attempt to replicate the speech pattern. Teaching

professionals, guided by an autonomous model of literacy, shared the implicit belief that there was one correct way of reading, writing, and speaking. The Yooper dialect is not correct according to this viewpoint. Yooper children become accustomed to having their speech and writing corrected by teachers; in effect these students could not express an idea without being told it needed modification to be acceptable. The implication left with most people I have spoken with is expressed as, “I know my supervisor thinks I’m stupid ‘cause of the way I talk” or “I feel like people don’t take me as serious in meetings because of how I sound.” Those who are not familiar with the dialect, including some K-12 teachers from the UAW employees past, or current managers newly from elsewhere are most likely to be catalysts for self consciousness or discomfort about sounding “too Yooper.”

More than one UAW employee said to me, “If I wasn’t so bad at English, I wouldn’t have so much trouble with this form.” Operating within the particular autonomous model of literacy that their K-12 education had taken place in, it was the person who was flawed if they did not ‘naturally’ speak, read and write correctly. Operating within an ideological model the problem becomes a difference in implicit literacy understandings, usages and applications when using the position audit form.

Communication Style and Content

In Roadville there was one practical reason for writing that was longer than a grocery list; writing letters to family members no longer in the area. These letters open

with “Dear” and the first paragraph is always we’re fine, hope you are too. The next paragraph is a commentary on the weather. This is followed by “news” of the family and neighborhood. The letter closes with love and a reminder to write in return or visit soon. Heath says, “Roadville letters are conversations written down” (213). The point of such communication is to maintain contact with people who cannot drop by the house to sit in the kitchen for coffee and talk. In letter writing or verbal communication there is the expectation that the reader or listener will know what the writer or speaker is talking about. The letter, Heath reminds us, is part of an “unbroken chain of linkages between relatives and/or friends” (214).

When a letter or note arrives, the rest of the family is informed of the occasion. When other family members arrive home the mother of the family shares, “We got a letter from Aunt Margie today” followed either by a recap of the letter, or by a reading of the letter to the family (215). These are family communications that are shared. Maintaining connections with family and close friends is the reason to write or call and thus the ‘news’ belongs to everyone. Letters are family documents. Personal writing was not a facet of life in Roadville.

The letter format Heath describes is similar to the occasional letter my family received from my aunts once we moved from the U.P. to Canada. With the increasing availability of phone service such letters are becoming icons of a previous era. Now, quick phone calls to say hello and pass the phone around so each person can basically say, “Hi, how are you?” are replacing the letter. Personal letters would usually only exist between a couple before they are married, otherwise letters are always shared, family

communications. The information is contextualized and to the point, i.e. ‘this person is sick, this person has a new job, this person had a baby.’ In the Keweenaw the one time letters are still expected is when a member of one’s family is out on active duty in the military. Mothers particularly are most likely to write down family news and send it to their child in the service, although fathers will sometimes send a quick note particularly about fishing and hunting activities that are carrying on while their child is away.

In the context of the *UAW Position Audit* a professional class group that is used to reading and writing as part of their daily work and home life designed and wrote the form based on their implicit literacy understandings. Professionals write about themselves and their work regularly; they deal with forms regularly; as a group they share implicit expectations for the kind of information a form should contain and the level of details which should be included; they have grown up with practice in using description and “action verbs.”

The UAW staff have different implicit literacy understandings than those of the professional staff. Writing about one’s self is something most workers have not been required to do since they finished their K-12 education. Writing about one’s work is completely unnatural and something there is little or no experience with. From the UAW staff’s point of view such writing is closest in experience to writing to keep in touch; yet who is a UAW staff member supposed to be maintaining contact with? Is she “informing” the supervisor who watches her doing her work of the work she does; the Human Resource people who should be able to ask the supervisor what work they have seen done? The point of the position audit form – to allow the institution to observe the

work being done at the level the job is currently classified at –is not clear to the UAW staff. I was often asked, “If the university wants writing of what I do in my job, why doesn’t my supervisor just write it down. Isn’t that part of his job?”

In order to move beyond their own implicit understandings of how literacy is and is not used, UAW employees would benefit from an opportunity to discuss the implicit literacy understandings of the professional class staff who will evaluate their filed forms, e.g. “Human Resources can’t see you working and they want you to tell them how you do what you do.” UAW employees also benefit from support in learning how to talk about the work they do in a descriptive manner. Coming from home literacy contexts where talking about one’s self is viewed as “bragging” a discussion about the difference between “bragging” and using “action verbs” and description to show their work would also be beneficial. In the working class home literacy context “bragging” – which includes most forms of giving details about what one has done—is considered socially unacceptable. Discussions with the UAW staff during writing center sessions regarding differences in literacy contexts and implicit expectations changed the way the form was framed for the UAW staff.

Implicit Expectations for Writing in the Work Environment

Heath observed that a strong work ethic was valued in Roadville, where “work equals money” and therefore “if there is not enough money, someone is not working hard enough” (41). Work is important both for a sense of personal value and because it

provides the resources necessary to raise a family and live. Work is part of daily life and when one isn't "at work" then one is working at home on projects that need to be done.

How one learns to work is also different between professional class townspeople and the working class Heath observed in Roadville. In Roadville adults did not tell their children how to do things, "but they encourage and invite children to practice skills frequently" (229). Children learn to do by working alongside someone who has already mastered a skill. Boys work alongside their fathers maintaining lawns and camping equipment while girls are given real ingredients to "play" cook with. Heath writes that "The same silent demonstration of how-to-do-it occurs when children learn to hold a bat, wear a catcher's mitt, make jello, sew a doll's dress, or plant a watermelon seed" (229). Trial and error are a valid way to learn and the implicit value of learning to do by doing underlies all aspects of life—home, school, and work.

Professional class children are raised to value academic work which will lead to professional jobs. In some families teaching itself Heath noted, "has been in the family for three generations" and teaching or working as an executive in the mills were both implicitly understood to be worthy careers (239). Extracurricular activities provide important "opportunities for learning what it means to be a member of a group and to choose, work with, and strive to be a group leader among those with whom one has voluntarily associated oneself" (242). School, home, and social activities all provide possibilities for group work, leadership, and competition and what one does in school and in a social group matters because these both are written about on college application letters. Accomplishments matter because they influence future educational opportunities

which in turn influence the level of career one can expect to obtain. As previously mentioned, continuing education is also implicitly valued both for career and social status reasons; the more education one has, the more respect in the professional class community one can expect.

In the Keweenaw while both professional and working class staff have a strong work ethic, how work is talked about and how one expects to learn are different between the two groups. Professional staff are used to using reading, writing, and oral presentations to talk about what they know, how they know it, and who else they are teaching their knowledge to. Professional employees invariably give presentations about their work and themselves as part of obtaining their jobs within the institution. They write personalized CVs which are usually a minimum of three pages and always include professional accomplishments. At Tech open forums are held when a professional job is being filled; each finalist for the job will come to campus and give a presentation about themselves and their accomplishments. Talking about one's self and career accomplishments are both normal and necessary in professional fields.

At Tech UAW staff originally obtained a job within the institution by: demonstrating what they know through a one page resume; filling out a standardized form from the HR department; and personal interviews with the supervisor for the position. UAW staff work does not require people to talk about what they do unless they are training someone into the job they perform or a new hire will be working alongside them. When job training is required, it reflects the implicit understanding of how learning is accomplished – demonstration (sometimes silent) by the experienced employee and

hands-on practice by the new employee. Unionized staff members do not typically pass written documents on to each other as part of transferring knowledge. At most, a technical manual may be kept in the work environment that describes the operations and troubleshooting guide for pieces of machinery like photocopiers or generators.

Despite sometimes attending K-12 in the same classes, working class and professional class employees share little in the way of implicit literacy understandings. Talking about work and relating that work in any way to themselves and/or their knowledge violated the implicit literacy understandings that UAW staff brought to the context of responding to the position audit form. Given time and practice through writing center sessions UAW staff members became more comfortable with providing the kind of details and examples that professional staff were expecting to find in response to the form's questions. There was however, one further layer of difference in implicit literacy values between the two groups: those of their cultural contexts. Many members of the professional staff came from areas outside the Keweenaw and from a range of cultural groups and experiences. Residents of the Keweenaw were influenced by the social tone brought to the area by Scandinavian settlers. The geographic isolation of the area and the cultural isolation of Scandinavians from those already in the area – the Ojibwa – means that the reserved tone of social interactions remains intact, despite the increasing number of 'outsiders' to the area. Those from somewhere else or from underrepresented groups in the Keweenaw all find themselves affected by this larger set of implicit social understandings, e.g. no matter how many outsiders frequent a local Finnish diner, the owner continues to close mid-afternoon so that the employees can go home and have

dinner with their own families. In the context of this café the cultural understanding is ‘everyone should have dinner with their family,’ including those who work in diners. While it is socially acceptable to eat breakfast, lunch and take coffee breaks outside the home, raising a family requires family dinners—this is a social value that I am very familiar with from my own life. The wait staff in this context are primarily women born and raised in the area, including the daughter and niece of the owner; when I have spoken to these women they have expressed appreciation at being able to have dinner with their own families and at least one has told me she sees this as one of the benefits of working in the local café over working in one of several chain restaurants in the area.

Culturally Contextualizing the Form

Class values related to work, communication, knowledge, and authority create a large part of the context that unionized staff members are in when filling out the *UAW Position Audit Form*. It is not uncommon for professional staff from outside the region to experience a kind of cultural shock when moving to Houghton. Other northern regions may share some similarities but the geographic isolation, juxtaposition of ‘outsiders’ and ‘locals’, and a feeling amongst some locals that outsiders will ruin the way of life traditionally valued, create a fairly unique context. Differences are more visible and consciously present when so many locals are working class while so many outsiders are professional class. Economic differences underscore differences in social choices and differences in implicit values between the groups: how/when do you talk about

economically related topics; what is the difference between stating a fact and bragging; what are one's obligations to communities outside the immediate community?

Similar to Northern Minnesota and Northern Wisconsin, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan attracted a large number of Scandinavian settlers; people used to working hard for limited results. Unlike other areas of the Northern Mid-West where farming provided a humble but sustainable life, the Keweenaw developed primarily due to mines. Like all mines of the time, the mines of the U.P. required hard physical labor of the workers, with the profits going to the mine owners. My maternal great-grandfather worked as a miner in the U.P. until the day he was leaving the mine and the shift entering the mine was buried in a cave-in. My great-grandmother is reported to have said, "You're not going back to the mine" and with no reports of further discussion between them the couple relocated from Ishpeming to Sault St. Marie and eventually returned to subsistence farming, the traditional survival method for all branches of my family.

There are a number of family stories which point to the taciturn nature of the people I and many of the UAW workers come from. In fact, the Keweenaw has more settlers of Finnish decent than the Swedish communities I grew up in; although they share many Scandinavian values Finns make Swedes look positively chatty. When my Swedish paternal great grandfather was not receiving his mail because of the similarity of his name to other Scandinavian names – Oleson—he did not argue that the postmaster should just stop throwing all the similarly named mail onto a table for the residents to sort out. Rather, he legally changed his last name to a name not common in the new country – Oslund—and announced the change to his family and the Postmaster. This and other

family stories taught me from childhood that communication was meant to be used for very specific, important reasons and overall, the less said the better.

Communication is a practical matter which allows for sharing information like, ‘we’re moving’ or ‘when you were not in view this happened.’ If one is attentive, socially well behaved which includes listening, then one can absorb from what is happening in their immediate presence what is happening and what needs to be done. This is the same way learning is accomplished, watching, practicing and repeating. Not only is communication often brief and to the point, but it seldom requires writing anything down. Others either see for themselves what is happening, or they are given updates of events that happened outside their view such as ‘our family name has changed to...’

It may be hard to understand but one of the most formidable challenges the local UAW employees’ face is with this form’s requirements to talk about themselves. In traditional Scandinavian culture—especially Swedes and Finns— talking about self is not done; we talk about others. We talk about family, children, friends, weather, health, recipes, meals we have had elsewhere, things that have not gone exactly right. Only the very young and elderly are allowed the otherwise culturally viewed conceit of talking about themselves. Think about the strain placed on people from this culture who wish to study and continue in post-secondary education; culturally everything from a C.V. to a public presentation is seen as a form of bragging about one’s self and one’s knowledge.

Culturally, home life and literacy uses have observed, trained, and disciplined most of the unionized staff to have a world view that frowns on the very skills they will

need to successfully approach a position audit form, skills like fluency in academic literacy, and an ability to extol one's own virtues. Consider the following common wisdoms of the culture and how these wisdoms directly contradict the frame of mind one needs in completing a job review form:

- ❖ It isn't natural to talk about work; work is something you do
- ❖ If someone asks directly about you, be brief in responding
- ❖ Anyone with common sense can learn how to do by doing

UAW employees, because they view themselves and the form through the lens of an autonomous literacy model, think that they as individuals are 'lacking' something or just not 'smart enough' to complete the form. UAW employees usually come from working-class families, their home literacies have not prepared them for responding to the implicit expectations present in the form. Culturally they have been taught to value learning by observation and doing; they often do not see a connection between what is written down and learning; they do not consider writing or education as authoritative unless directly applied to (culturally) valuable areas such as K-12 teaching. What writing center sessions showed, as will be discussed in *Chapter Four*, is that when given opportunities to begin exploring the difference in implicit literacy expectations between themselves and their supervisors, UAW employees could see more effective ways to respond to the *UAW Position Audit Form*. These realizations only came about after the differences between these two groups implicit literacy expectations *were made explicit and discussed*.

James Paul Gee and the Worth of the Worker

James Paul Gee identifies himself as part of the group working on New Literacy Studies (NLS), and like Brian Street has been working in this area since early in its inception in the 1980s. As Gee explains in *Situated Literacies*, “NLS is based around the idea that reading, writing and meaning are always situated within specific social practices” (189). NLS theorists began with the intention of making these implicit social practices explicit. Gee states that those involved in NLS “assumed that focusing on the social would unmask the workings of hierarchy, power and social injustice,” making visible the power structures at work in different literacy contexts. For example, pointing out the implicit literacy expectations of a form like the position audit form would be an NLS strategy that helps make more evident the power that is at work through the form.

Making this knowledge explicit was in turn expected to make people rethink their assumptions about autonomous models of literacy. If people, particularly compositionists, became aware that there are always ideologies present in literacy contexts, then the work of compositionists could move towards identifying the ideologies in any particular context; ideally the composition community would stop replicating an autonomous model in the teaching of writing. Those in the early NLS movement wanted to “create more humane, because less elitist...institutions (e.g. schools) and communities” (184). Part of being less elitist is recognizing that all uses of literacy are contextualized; what is appropriate or successful in one context may not work in another. Heath noted for example, that the way professional class people talked, spoke, and made use of writing

impressed a working class woman as making them “big heads” who forget where they came from.

In making literacy contexts more explicit Gee worries that NLS ideas have actually been co-opted by institutions to create the “most important form of sociotechnical designing” which involves ““designing *new work-places* and *new workers*”[emphasis original](185). Rather than moving away from what Foucault described as an institution that observes and judges the value of how each person does their job for the company, what Gee calls the “new capitalism” is even further invested in gaining as much production value from each worker’s knowledge and skills as possible. Institutions now want to turn personal knowledge into a commodity that the corporation can own. Gee suggests that through the use of “communities of practice,” individual knowledge becomes group knowledge and group knowledge stays with the institution after the individual worker leaves. Knowledge resides in the community “which belongs to the company not the individual” (186).

While Foucault pointed out that institutions did not want to waste “one sous,” Gee notes that now “no fat” means “no excess, no person, practice, or thing that does not directly ‘add value’ to the final service or product” (185). If knowledge can be written down then a company can hold onto the knowledge as individuals come and go. Once the knowledge belongs to the institution and does not require the individual, then the individual’s value to the institution changes. Position audit forms can potentially observe what knowledge each individual is responsible for; the form can also be used to gather information about how/if the knowledge is being effectively shared with others in the

work environment. There is a potential for the form to measure if an individual is redundant in their function once their knowledge is shared with others in the community of practice. The form can also observe if an employee is adequately sharing their knowledge with others in their community of practice. While this was not the original purpose of the form, Gee reminds us that original intent does not stop an institution from co-opting knowledge for institutional purposes.

Observation, as Foucault noted also leads to “normalizing” behavior. This is particularly true, as Gee notes, for groups like the UAW whose home literacy and cultural context has taught them that learning is made up of observing and practicing alongside others with more experience. As Gee points out, in a community of practice, “all members pick up a variety of tacit and taken-for-granted values, norms, cultural models and narratives as part of their socialization into the practice” (186). While becoming socialized to ‘visible’ behaviors is common, a job audit review form is a hidden, private, individual practice that workers are left to carry out in their free time – it isn’t permitted to work on the form during work hours. Workers share the mythos, their beliefs and attitudes surrounding the form, but not the knowledge or practices necessary to be successful with the form. Workers do not actually see each other working on the form and usually do not see other people’s answers; the form is completed on-line at home in ‘free time’ and then taken to the HR office to be “turned in” a term the women I worked with all used. “I need to turn this in as soon as possible” and “If I can finally finish this and turn it in then I might finally get a raise” were common ways of talking about the

form. I observed in these statements the same tone that people used to talk about homework from their K-12 experiences.

Workers are not only on view at work but more and more of their personal life is perceived as belonging to the institution. Gee says that what companies want is “nothing less than total responsibility and over-the-edge loyalty” and that by always being in view “the line between work and play, the line between public and private” is “fuzzy” (189). For example, I was in attendance at a presentation for all new employees in one division of Michigan Tech; the workers present included unionized and non-unionized employees. One of the leaders of the presentation noted that he encouraged everyone to think of their new work “not as a job, but as a lifestyle” with choices that should bring them to spend non-work time volunteering to mentor student organizations, attending campus activities and sporting events, and making sure to wear “Tech Gear” every Friday to show support for the school and the student athletes. At another group meeting the subject of work time and private time came up and one woman said, “Well, it’s all the same now, there is no separation anymore.” The man sitting next to her agreed, “I get calls in the middle of the night, my phone went off at 3:00 the other morning.” When someone suggested that he turn his phone off he said that a coworker had set up some kind of call forwarding/ring feature that he didn’t know how to turn off.

At the same time that employees are expected to be even more devoted to the institution, the context for workers is one which finds “fewer workers, working longer and with less supervision, and amidst fast-paced change that often outstrips individual knowledge” (186). Each worker is expected to give more, more often, and with less

support. At the same time, employees are subject to ever more critical observation by the supervisors representing the institution. How quickly is one picking up the newest knowledge in their community of practice? How committed is the individual to the institution's goals? In small communities like Houghton where Michigan Tech is set, being in the view of the community becomes almost inescapable for all workers. To be in public is to be in view.

The home literacy and culture background that UAW employees come from teaches them that work is often of a social nature; they have not been prepared to respond to a position audit form. When UAW workers find themselves in the one context where they could directly *show* their value to the institution, they also find they have no social or educational background that has prepared them to recognize the implicit values underlying the form; rather they bring their own implicit literacy practices to filling out the form. In "new capitalism" the ability to show one's self well is even more vital, particularly when as Gee points out, "Large numbers of less fortunate souls must be exploited...in order to make a company, region, or country 'hyper-competitive' in our global economy" (188). Workers at Tech are regularly reminded that they are in competition with other institutions, particularly the "benchmark" institutions which exemplify the levels that Tech is aiming to meet and surpass. As one manager here is known to say, "You have to figure out as quickly as possible who's a team player and who's dead weight and then – get rid of the dead weight." Without the insight into different implicit literacy expectations UAW workers are in danger of being labeled "dead weight" due to their literacy background, rather than due to their work ethic and

actions. A limited set of non-applicable literacy practices endangers a working class employee's position within the institution when filling out and filing the form; there is room for great discrepancy between how the employee writes about her work and the work she actually does at her job level. The opportunity to work with a mentor or literacy mediator could allow working class employees to explore and learn about the implicit understandings that they and the professional class employees bring to this context. This was part of the work undertaken in the writing center sessions I had with UAW employees.

Chapter Four

Learning Work Related Literacy Practices: Literacy Mediators and Literacy Sponsorship

Chapter Three focused on the sources of differences in literacy backgrounds and expectations between professional and working class employees at Michigan Tech University. Working class employees often come from home literacy contexts where learning how to do a job involves working alongside others. Reading and writing are skills used primarily for school and are not directly associated with learning the practical tasks of “doing”, e.g. from baking to banking one learns ‘how to’ from more experienced community members. Professional class employees on the other hand, often come from home literacy contexts where reading and writing are essential parts of the learning process. The style of learning which is found in school, with an emphasis on reading and writing, matches the professional class home literacy practices; from learning a recipe to choosing an investment account, reading and writing inform the learning process. Working class children grow up to become adults who expect to learn their work through hands on practice with mentoring from more experienced people in the work environment. Professional class children grow up expecting that they will learn much of

what they need for work through further formal education; they view part of their value as employees being reflected in the nature and level of degree(s) they hold.

I have in the last chapter established that the differences in literacy expectations between the two groups is both longstanding and impacts the way each group expects to acquire new knowledge. As mentioned in *Chapter Three*, one of the points that this chapter will be making is that once UAW employees came to have a clearer understanding of the literacy expectations of their managers, they were better able to respond to the position audit form the way their managers expected. How I realized that discussions of the intent behind the form were necessary, and how I developed pedagogical goals needed to facilitate new ways of looking at and using the form, was a somewhat complex process and will be the focus of this chapter.

I began from the point of thinking about how working class employees were used to learning. Although separated by time and geography, the observations Shirley Brice-Heath made in her studies and those I made in mine showed similarities in learning styles between working class communities (see *Chapter Three*.) Learning happened while practicing a new skill alongside someone who already knew how to do it; observation and personal practice were essential in learning the task; unlike learning amongst the professional class, reading and writing were typically not part of the process of learning for working class children or adults.

The theoretical model of learning developed by Etienne Wenger and known as *communities of practice* shows these same practices are in place when workers are learning job related skills and forms: learning by working with more experienced

practitioners; learning by doing; observation and practice privileged over reading and writing about the practice. By the time I had begun working with UAW employees, I had already taken part in writing center seminar readings and discussions of Wenger's book *Communities of Practice* Wenger's theory and the writing center seminars had decidedly influenced my thoughts on how working class employees were used to learning on the job; this in turn affected the pedagogical goals I set for the writing center sessions with UAW employees.

Wenger provides the theoretical explanation for how a community of practice teaches new members how to. With the addition of the model of "literacy mediator" as articulated by Kathryn Jones I was able to think more productively about how workers can learn to use an unfamiliar literacy—in this case a form—that is necessary to their work but previously unknown to their entire community of practice. In her observations of Welsh farmers adopting a new work related form that none were familiar with, Jones noted the importance of a "literacy mediator." A literacy mediator becomes familiar with the unfamiliar document and with the expectations of the institution which created the form. The mediator is then able to facilitate the process of new users learning how to fill out the form in a way that meets the expectations of the institution. Jones' observations of how a successful literacy mediator works overlap with Wenger's theory of learning: workers have a more experienced mentor to learn from; they have opportunities to learn how to use the form as it applies to their work; they have hands on opportunities to practice while asking questions.

The writing center seminars I participated in also included reading and discussion of Deborah Brandt's writing on literacy sponsorship. As Brandt has discussed (*Literacy and Learning*), the **source** of literacy sponsorship affects what a writer will be taught. In other words, who pays for – or sponsors – the teaching will also be reflected in what the student is taught. A teacher is hired to teach specific knowledge; job trainers are to teach job related knowledge. The *UAW Position Audit Form* was not part of any job. The form had no literacy sponsor or mediator to introduce it to the different communities of practice. And no community of practice included learning about position audit forms as part of their work. For example, while the HR department could have sponsored sessions that explicated the kind of answers that were being looked for on the form, neither they nor any other department did so.

Wenger: A Theory of Learning

In *Chapter Three* I introduced the term “communities of practice” through the work of James Paul Gee. The theory of learning and term “communities of practice” originated with Etienne Wenger and Jean Lave in their 1991 work, *Situated Learning*. Wenger continued to work with the concept and in 1999 published *Communities of Practice*. On his current web page Wenger explains the foundational principle underlying his work: “The basic idea is that human knowing is fundamentally a social act. This simple observation has profound implications for the way we think of and attempt to support learning” (<http://www.ewenger.com/>)^{vii}.

Learning takes place according to Wenger within a community of practice. Wenger explains that communities of practice “are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (<http://www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm>)^{viii}. A “shared domain of human endeavor” could be maintaining the life of a tribe, or of administratively assisting a department in a college. In agreement with Wenger, I would argue that learning, including the learning of work related literacies like forms, normally takes place within a community of practice where new members learn from experienced members. For example, when I was new to the writing center, I learned as I worked and part of that learning came from interacting with and questioning more experienced coaches. Once I had been in the writing center for several semesters, newer coaches would question me about practices. Wenger’s argument is that this process of learning by doing and interacting is how people “know” how to do their job once they have the opportunity to join a community of practice; people learn how to do by doing, by putting their working knowledge into practice and developing new knowledge as work requires new duties.

To observe a sample community of practice Wenger did ethnographic field work inside a major American insurance company (Alinsu^{ix}) and specifically observed the “claims adjustors” community of practice. Wenger gives an example of a newer member of the community learning from the experience of others in her work group, by showing how she can pose a question as she works, and thus learn as she puts the knowledge into practice:

[Newer worker] “Transco is ‘end of month’ or ‘date of termination’?”

[Experienced worker] “I think it’s ‘end of month’.”

[A third adjustor then interrupts] “No, they just changed it. It was in a memo last week” (31).

The newest member of the community has a question which is growing out of the work she is doing in that moment. She receives a response from a more experienced coworker at the moment that she needs information, meaning she is able to learn as she works by immediately applying her new knowledge to the work she is doing. A third processor is also able to contribute contextualized knowledge that is important to know both in the moment and for future work applications.

When Wenger asked processors how they learned to do their jobs and specifically asked if their learning was primarily in the training class [using reading and writing] he was basically told, “No.” What workers considered “real learning” began when they left the training room and joined other workers “on the floor” (99). Workers told Wenger they learned, “Actually from doing the claims” and “Doing it, and then if you don’t understand, you talk to somebody about it and they can explain it to you” (99). For new claims adjustors it is not until they join the community of practice on the floor that Wenger says, “their integration into the community of practice really begins” (99). Wenger identifies another new challenge trainees face, “they have to get enough attention and create enough relationships with busy old-timers to gain access to the community and its practices” (100). As with the earlier quoted interaction between adjustors regarding “end of month or date of termination,” part of learning the practices of a community takes place as the work is being done, e.g. as one fills out forms questions about the work are

raised and answered which allow the practice to carry on. Consider that if no one had responded to the question, “Transco is ‘end of month’ or ‘date of termination’?” then the adjustor asking the question would not have been able to proceed with carrying out her part of the practice within this community. She would have needed to reference training material or perhaps sought out her supervisor. She did not at that point know enough about this particular part of the job to carry out the work independently.

Workers are perceived by the managers of the institutions they work for as needing enough knowledge to function in their job. As a result their learning is sometimes limited to knowing just enough to carry out their specific job functions. The Alinsu adjustors need to know just enough medical terminology to facilitate the information they need for the forms they process. This means they do not need a medical understanding of terms; they need to know if the terms are referring to procedures that are covered by particular insurance plans.

“Maureen, do you know what’s ‘incompetent cervix’? The insured put this as a justification of ultrasound.”

Maureen replies: “I’m pretty sure that it’s eligible, but we should have this from the doctor, not just the insured” (28).

For the claims processors community of practice what the medical term is referencing is important in terms of coverage or lack of coverage related to insurance policies. What is learned about the term is related to the terms place within the work context. No one has learned what the term would mean in a medical context because these workers are not part of the medical community of practice, rather they belong to the

insurance adjustors' community of practice. Again, management in institutions generally limit teaching/training resources to what the workers need to know to perform their job functions. In *Chapter Two* I used Foucault's theory to note that institutions have both economic goals and internal rules for correct conduct. Maintaining economic profits can be used as a reason to limit the resources put into training and educating employees; managers also maintain more control for the institution if workers are told just enough to carry out duties they are given. A worker who does not possess knowledge about larger processes is less likely to criticize and offer alternative ideas for how the job they carry out could be changed in light of the larger goals of the institution. A worker who does criticize without knowing this larger process is thus open to the judgment from management that his 'criticisms' are inappropriate/ill-informed. The institutional focus will not be on the criticism itself but on the employee's behavior and words. The practice of restricting knowledge to what is directly related to work function reinforces the likelihood that the workers have will simply perform their work as they are instructed to do. Claims adjustors do not learn medical meanings of words just as no one outside an HR department regularly handles performance review forms. This system works well for educating workers in the literacies specific to their work; literacies that are not related to the job are not likely to be learned in the work context.

The Alinsu claims adjustors do not understand the fuller context of "incompetent cervix" they just know how the term fits into the vocabulary used for discerning covered vs. uncovered procedures. Similarly, the processors were given a new form and told how to find numbers to plug into the form. Alinsu did not explain to them the larger process

that this form was part of. The final numbers the lines of the form would generate in turn reflected the money customers would receive for coverage. When angry customers called to question why they were receiving the amount they were, the processors could not answer their questions. Wenger says that in response to their complaints workers were told to tell callers, “that benefits were calculated as aggregates in order to ensure ‘fairness’ ” (38). Rather than explaining the larger process to the employees, supervisors eventually held a meeting where they talked about “aggregates” leaving workers even more frustrated. As one told Wenger, her supervisor, “never went into it, just that it was an aggregate thing for the whole year” (38). Workers did not refer to the form by its name but ended up calling it by the lines on the form: “The C, F, and J thing.” The Alinsu workers were given just enough knowledge to carry out their work and were not able to learn how that work related to larger parts of the institution’s work. Wenger notes that using the form remained a “disjoint” practice for the Alinsu claims processors, “There was no discussion of what aggregates did in this case, of what kind of “fairness” they created or how the form “implemented the principle [of fairness]” (38).

Wenger makes a distinction between the kind of learning employees can take from a training session, and the kind of learning that takes place once immersed in a field of practice. Similar examples of learning while doing can be found on the campus of Michigan Tech. The administrative assistants in the Dean of Students office for example, need to know the difference between “suspension” and “probation” forms. Equally important from the student’s point of view is the appeal process; administration assistants need to be able to efficiently explain the two different appeal processes and remember

which paperwork is needed for each. And because the administration assistants have made this part of their ‘knowledge’, the department has not had to create a written guideline that is immediately available for reference. Those who work in the Dean’s office “know” which papers and processes belong to each appeal process; this knowledge was gained hands on by asking questions of the more experienced workers in the department. So when a new employee was learning the process the following exchange took place:

“An appeal – is that the green or the white one?”

“Is it suspension or probation?”

“Probation.”

“Then it’s the white one.”

In this context the newer worker begins to learn the process by learning to associate the color of the form with the form’s function. Unfortunately, as was shown in the Alinsu case, knowledge is often limited and pertains to the work at hand, rather than an understanding of where the procedure fits in the overall institution. Just as an “incompetent cervix” is covered or not covered, “probation” is white, not green. In this case the new employee in the Dean’s office has not learned what the form means in the larger institutional practices—or what the difference between suspension and probation is—only which color of form to look for when a student identifies the procedure they want to begin.

When the *UAW Position Audit Form* was introduced, it was not explained what the role of this form was in the institution. Supervisors and/or Human Resources did not discuss their own expectations for the form because they implicitly expected everyone to look at the form as they did; they thought the expectations for the form were self evident, because for the professional class workers they basically were. They did not realize that the working class employees could pick up the same form and have an entirely different set of implicit understandings about how to respond to it; the purpose and the use of the form within the institution generated different expectations based on the literacy backgrounds of the two groups. The form was to UAW employees a necessary but resented document; professional class employees were trying to use the form as a measure of fairness. Also, with workers expected to work on the form during their own time, at home, there are no coworkers they could turn to in the moment and ask questions of. The Alinsu example shows that it makes a difference if workers can turn to each other and ask questions as they are working. The isolated context of filling out and filing a position audit form removes this possibility of learning in the moment of doing. In addition, because the form is filled in online at home and only printed off when it is ready to be handed in, employees tend to not see other people's responses to the form. Usually this is a 'private' process, meaning learning from each other's experience and ideas is unlikely to happen.

With the *UAW Position Audit*, employees sometimes asked during their writing center sessions why they were being required to fill out a form to report the work they did; they had supervisors and wasn't filling out this form a supervisor's job? This

question in and of itself shows that employees did not realize the purpose or possibilities of the form. The form was not seen as an opportunity to ‘show’ managers the work that an individual did. Rather the form was often seen as a responsibility that made the supervisor’s job easier. There were rhetorical possibilities for showing the value of the work done that the workers did not see, as a result their responses were not aimed at informing the reader about the significance or detail of the work performed.

Wenger’s community of practice theory of learning provided a model which guided some of the pedagogical goals I had for writing center sessions: I wanted to provide hands on learning experiences; I was in a position to be a mentor to the working class employees in this new work related literacy form; I planned opportunities for us to work side by side on some tasks so that I could model skills that were necessary to complete the form. I was able to analyze and draw from Wenger’s theory of learning successful techniques for teaching workers new literacy skills. Yet Wenger’s theory of learning by itself does not account for teaching workers literacy that is unfamiliar to the whole community of practice. The theory and pedagogical ideas for this aspect of our work is better modeled by that of literacy mediation.

How do workers learn to adapt their practices to incorporate changes in documentation and processes when no one in their community of practice is familiar with the new procedure? In “New Literacy Studies” Gee suggests that when new knowledge or forms are introduced, someone has to first get “in sync” with these “other elements” not just by “controlling (coordinating) them, but adapting to (getting coordinated by) them” (191). Gee identifies the best way to incorporate new knowledge into a

community of practice is for someone to become familiar with the new expectations, form, and/or way of doing things. That person can then become a resource who can assist others in learning; a kind of temporary expert/teacher who also continues to learn/teach as the new way of doing is adapted into actual practice.

Kathryn Jones' article in *Situated Literacies* "Becoming Just Another Alphanumeric Code," provides an excellent example of how what Gee is proposing can actually work. When Jones refers to the process of one person helping others to learn a new work literacy she calls it *literacy mediation*. Jones' New Literacy Studies research was on the literacy habits of Welsh users; in the case of this article she focused on her experience with Welsh farmers. Jones observed how a literacy mediator was able to assist farmers in learning to incorporate a new form into their practice of selling cattle at auction. I would suggest that *literacy mediation* is an appropriate way to also refer to the work I did with women filling out their position audit forms during writing center sessions. In fact, it can be argued that all writing center sessions are a form of literacy mediation. Coaches and tutors with more experience in the expectations and 'norms' of academic writing act as literacy mediators for those who are newer to the context. Less experienced academic writers have yet to internalize the literacy expectations in academic contexts, or have not yet learned the literacy of a particular academic community of practice. The literacy mediation these 'new writers' can potentially receive in writing center sessions can create a transition process into the academic writing community. *Chapter Five* will discuss what differences in writing center theory and practices either help facilitate this transition or short circuit it.

Literacy Mediation in Practice

In her fieldwork focused on “literacy practices of Welsh users” Kathryn Jones worked and talked with people in “the agricultural industry in north-east Wales” (71). One of the comments she heard repeatedly in this context was that agricultural work had “gotten dreadful with forms now” as a result of both greater restrictions on livestock shipping and of Britain joining the European Union (72-74). For these reasons a “system for identifying all cattle with a unique alphanumeric code and keeping records of the movement of each head of cattle” was put in place (75). This development however, was not relayed directly to the farmers by the government and no one from the government stepped forward to show anyone how to document this information. The government was interested in the end process of gathering the information of where each individual cow came from and ended up; how the farmers were to keep track of this information was not made explicit.

Farmers learned of these new requirements when they arrived at the auction barn to sell their cattle. In order to facilitate their business practices including gathering the mandated information for the government, auction barns, on advice from the Livestock Auctioneers’ Association, “produced a form of their own to serve as the farmers’ written declaration about the animals that they brought to market” (76). The form however, was not a bilingual form; written in English, it was to be used in the context that Jones’ observed by native Welsh speakers. The auction barn in this case was not just implementing an unfamiliar form; they were additionally using a form that was not written in the local language.

When Jones began her fieldwork, the auction house had already employed “Stan” who had grown up and worked locally, had his own smallholding, and was retired from an agricultural corporation. He was hired “because of his long experience of dealing with farmers, his ‘meticulousness’ with paper work, and the fact that he was a Welsh-user” (76). Stan was hired to mediate the process of the farmers learning how to use the form; this was a new work-related literacy that no one was yet familiar with. Stan’s job was to become familiar with the form and the government’s expectations for information being gathered and to introduce the form and its expectations to farmers. The form was designed by the auction barn to be incorporated into the farmers’ literacy practices to gather government mandated information.

Stan’s status as a native Welsh speaker allowed him to speak to the farmers in Welsh while discussing what the English language form ‘needed’ in order to be accurate. While he discussed the information needed for the form, Stan had the form in front of the new users and showed them where their responses fit into the form.

(Bold – spoken in Welsh; Regular text –spoken in English; Italics – English translation)

Stan: **y** number ‘**I chiust**’i? (*er, her ear number?*)

Farmer3: ‘**dachchisio**’r herd **neu**’r **llall**? Herd number **dach chi isio ia**?

(*d’you want the herd [number] or the other? The herd number you want is it?*)

Stan: **y, ia.** (*er, yes.*) (80-1).

While the conversation was going on Stan wrote on the form actually filling in information so the farmer could see where each response fit. The farmer was able to watch the form being filled in and see where Stan was placing the different kinds of information. While a farmer read a cow's ear tag number Stan recorded the number on the form and then showed the farmer where this information was to be written. Stan would send farmers home with more forms so "in the future, they could fill them in themselves before coming to the auction" (78). While the form was new Stan was there to collect them and "checked that they [farmers] had completed them [forms] properly." As a literacy mediator Stan was using teaching methods similar to those Wenger identified in his theory of learning: opportunities for hands on practice; learning while working; having a more experienced mentor to show the steps; questions naturally being raised and answered in the work context. I am not suggesting that Stan was familiar with Wenger; I am suggesting that these same practices are recurrently found in successful instances of teaching workers new work related literacies.

Jones references other examples of literacy mediation in her endnotes:

Other accounts of bureaucratic mediation by Mike Baynham (1993) and Liezl Malan (1996) describe encounters between 'lay people' who have little understanding of the bureaucratic discourse of the bureaucratic system they are dealing with and have to depend upon literacy mediators or cultural brokers to interpret and explain for them. (89)

The regular practices at work in writing center sessions are further examples of literacy mediation; literacy mediators explain "bureaucratic discourse" to new users. I

implemented these insights into what creates a successful learning context through pedagogical goals and practices. For example, in sessions I made sure I wrote out possible responses to a question on the form at the same time the UAW employee was writing out possible responses. We would then discuss the content, word choices, and impact we were hoping to have on the audience with our responses; each UAW employee was able to adapt responses to the form as she worked on it and took home new ways of thinking about what she was writing.

Not only were working class employees able to work hands on with the form but as a literacy mediator I was present during sessions to discuss potential responses to the form. Stan's role was similar to the role I took on; we each learned about the expectations of the form, made ourselves familiar with the form, then assisted those unfamiliar with the form in filling it out. Through a rhetorical analysis of the *UAW Position Audit* I first learned about the implicit expectations of the form. Then I was able to discuss these expectations with UAW employees, making explicit what expectations for the form were. For example, when in one place the form asks for a "most important duty" and employees asked, "what does my manager consider important," I was able to model how to look at other places on the form that suggested what counts for managers as "important." The reoccurring questions about how many people outside the department a worker's actions affected was one 'clue' that contact with those outside the department was something supervisors valued. Just as farmers were not the ones who were deciding what information the government needed, the UAW employees have arguably not been positioned to report what they think is most important to their job's function. It is the

managers and HR who will make judgments about the responses on the form and will also judge if the employee seems to have an ‘accurate understanding’ of what the key duties of a particular position are, or if the employee is –in the eyes of a manager— placing undo emphasis on “less important” tasks.

Although we worked with different forms, Stan and I were both literacy mediators. As Gee suggested, we first had to get “in sync” with the form and the implications of the form. *Chapter Two* contains examples of the rhetorical analysis I conducted of the position audit form so that I could better understand the implications of responses to the form’s questions. Being a literacy mediator in this context is more complicated, however, than being able to analyze the document. One must then be able to aid others in understanding the implications of their potential answers.

At this point it has been established that workers best learn new work related literacies and forms when they have opportunities for working alongside a mentor; opportunities to have questions answered by a mentor; learning how to use the form while filling the form out. In other words, the UAW employees at Tech *did not have* any of the resources that would benefit them in learning to respond to a new work related document prior to coming to writing center sessions. It has also been established that literacy mediators can take on the role of first familiarizing themselves with a new form and then assisting others in learning how to use a form. There is still one more important point to consider. As has been briefly mentioned, learning new literacy practices requires a literacy sponsor. In the case of the UAW employees, before writing center sessions the primary literacy sponsors they had encountered were their families and the institutions

that provided their K-12 education. Deborah Brandt has written and theorized about the difference that sources of literacy sponsorship make; her 2009 book *Literacy and Learning* contains her most current discussion of literacy sponsorship as of this writing. Brandt's discussion about the possible goals of literacy sponsorship and the outcomes of different kinds of literacy sponsorship helped focus some of the pedagogical practices I employed. Perhaps most importantly Brandt reminded me that literacy sponsorship can focus on the goals of the sponsor or the writer. Fortunately I was working in a writing center that valued the goals of the writer and balanced this with the need for the writer to be positioned to make decisions informed by knowledge of the sponsor's goals. It was pedagogically necessary to discuss the expectations of the managers as receivers of the completed form in order for workers to successfully represent their work in their responses on the form. The point I am making here is that it is not enough to have pedagogical goals which allow the writer to 'set their own goals' for what they are learning and writing; the literacy mediator is also responsible for providing a source of literacy sponsorship that assists the writer in understanding the different possible outcomes of a choice. It would not have been adequate for me to tell a writer, "You can either make a list of your duties or you can explain your duties, and explaining the duties is better." The literacy sponsorship of this writing center encouraged teaching the writer why there was a difference in the outcome their responses could be expected to generate.

Literacy Sponsors

In the first chapter in *Literacy and Learning*, “Sponsors of Literacy,” Deborah Brandt revisits ideas that she has been working with for several decades. In this chapter her focus is on the differences that it makes for learners when the sponsors of literacy have their own agendas. Brandt is pointing out that literacy sponsors always have their own agendas; literacy sponsorship is one more literacy context in which an ideology underlies what might appear to be an offer of ‘free education.’ Brandt refers to “literacy sponsors” as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (25). One’s parents are usually the first literacy sponsors that one encounters in life; the discussion of Shirley Brice Heath’s study in *Chapter Three* showed some of the effects of different kinds of home literacy sponsorship. For most people the next literacy sponsor they encounter after their family is the school system that educates them from K-12. As *Chapter Three* showed, literacy sponsors are often large institutions, including the institutions that one works for.

As Street, Gee, and Foucault have already been used to argue, Brandt also argues the strong connection between literacy and socio-economics. Brandt posits that literacy is generally tied to commerce and/or ideologies that a sponsor values, as she notes, “people throughout history have acquired literacy pragmatically under the banner of others’ causes” (27). She uses the example of pre-public school education in England where, “Protestant Sunday schools warily offered basic reading instruction to working-class families as part of evangelical duty” (27). Brandt also observes that “to the horror of

many in the church” working-class people began to demand literacy that would include math and other education so that they might become eligible for better jobs.

The point of the literacy sponsorship provided by the church had not been to change the class or social system in place; the church’s literacy sponsorship was a ‘Christian Duty’ owed by those of higher social standing to those ‘beneath’ them, i.e. the upper class felt a social obligation to the illiterate working class. Literacy sponsors often wish to maintain the social status quo; as Brandt says, “literacy takes its shape from the interests of its sponsors” (27). In the case of teaching reading through Sunday school, the sponsors were not intending to change the social status of the working class, thus the “horror” at finding the working-class trying to demand greater access to literacy sponsorship and education. A member of the upper class might feel it is their ‘Christian Duty’ to facilitate the most basic literacy amongst the working class; this duty is not aimed at changing the social order which places the better educated, wealthier members of society ‘above’ others. In this context there was a difference between the goal of the literacy sponsors and those receiving sponsorship. The sponsors were meeting their own sense of moral obligation with basic literacy offerings. They were surprised when the working class receiving the sponsored literacy wanted to seize the opportunity to increase their social mobility and job skills by gaining a larger degree of literacy. As Brandt notes, the literacy sponsors were “horrified” by the responses their offering of basic literacy were met with. These goodwill offerings from the upper class predated the availability of public education; apparently it had not occurred to the upper class that the working class actually wanted educational opportunities beyond basic literacy.

Brandt also draws awareness to the link between childhood literacy sponsorship and the literacy and economic opportunities an individual will have as an adult. Brandt points out that “people have grown increasingly dependent on their literacy skills for earning a living and exercising and protecting their civil rights” (33). Literacy is affected by the changes in the society in which it is situated; technology and world trade move quickly and workers are expected to keep up. Those whose literacy skills become ‘outdated’ –as well as those who never have the opportunity to develop specialized literacy skills—are economically left out. Brandt makes the point that despite “democracy in educational chances” the reality remains that “stratification of opportunity continues to organize access and reward in literacy learning” (28). The type of literacy sponsorship one receives, including access to technologies that literacy sponsorship provides a child/student, continues to influence work and income potential as a person matures.

To demonstrate this point Brandt offers an example of a woman from a minority, working class background and a white male from a professional class background, both of whom grew up and work in the same city. Throughout their lives their access to literacy including the type of sponsors and access to education they received have been significantly different, e.g. as a girl the woman taught herself to read and write Spanish, with some monetary relief for buying books from her mother’s employee discount; as a boy the man’s father, who was a professor, gave him access to university computer labs and bought him personal computers for use at home. Brandt summarizes her analysis of the differences in early literacy sponsorship and the attendant opportunities by noting that

this example shows how in different groups “social literacy practices are operating in differential economies.” Brandt also reminds us that people have “different access routes, different degrees of sponsoring power, and different scales of monetary worth” in relation to the literacy sponsorship they receive (32). These differences in literacy sponsorship during childhood affect where the person ‘ends up’ as an adult; what opportunities are available or expected related to education, work, and social standing.

Although both individuals Brandt discusses had access to public education, the man’s home literacy sponsorship gave him access to technology both at home and through early access to a college setting. The woman’s home literacy sponsorship left her dependent on receiving technology exposure through her K-12 education. The man owned and worked with computers from early childhood. The woman “was exposed to computers for the first time at the age of thirteen when she worked as a teacher’s aide in a federally funded summer school program for the children of migrant workers” (30). The differing types of sponsorship followed them into adult life/work. The man graduated from university and was “a successful freelance writer of software” while the woman transferred from university to a technical college and “was working for a cleaning company, where she performed extra duties as a translator, communicating on her supervisor’s behalf...” (31). Brandt is offering examples of how the source and type of literacy sponsorship available in one’s youth continues to influence access to technology and career development later in life. The education and job options one has usually result from the preparation for education/work that one receives earlier, beginning with one’s home literacy context. Note that those few individuals who “rise” from a life of

homelessness to an Ivy league education are notable because such cases are so uncommon.^x As Brice-Heath's study and my study have observed, more people follow their family's traditional routes to education and work; if the family has no tradition of college education then their students will face a series of unknown challenges which may prove insurmountable in obtaining a college education. The resistance that families themselves may provide in the face of unexpected proposed changes in class/educational standing amongst their students is not limited to working class families. How seldom we encounter the children of doctors, professors or CEOs choosing careers as brick layers, short order cooks or UPS drivers.

As was discussed in *Chapter Three*, UAW employees on Tech's campus often come from working class home literacies with limited access to technology. The work of the family focused on hands-on work that provided income or consumables for the family; home computers are considered a luxury and if there is a computer in the home it is predominately used by students to complete homework. The literacy sponsorship that UAW employees had received often prepared them to remain working class, the "layers of sponsoring influences – in families, workplaces, schools, memory—carry forms of literacy that have been shaped out of the ideological and economic struggles of the past" (Brandt 39). Most of the UAW workers I talked to never considered a future other than as working class. Linda briefly attended college in the liberal arts area aspiring to a bachelor's degree. After the first year she experienced so many of what she identified as "learning problems" that she transferred to a program that led to a two-year certification. Linda's parents were working class, her brothers and sister were working class – in the

way she spoke about the experience I was left with the impression that there was no support from her family to continue towards a bachelor's degree but a tone of approval when she started studying towards a certification that would "get a job."

The literacy sponsorship that Linda found at home was reinforced by the literacy sponsorship she experienced in her K-12 education where she said she was identified as "having learning problems" and where she "had a tutor for writing until high school." In a similar vein Brandt notes that such a "layered history of sponsorship is also deeply conservative" and this was certainly true of the memories of literacy sponsorship that Linda and I shared from our childhoods. Young women in the U.P. – who were predominately working class in both our school systems—in our generation found literacy sponsorship at home and at school that emphasized their futures as wives and mothers. Work outside the home would help support the economic survival of the family. In elementary school for example, both Linda and I had as our primary readers *Dick and Jane* — in these stories the mother stayed home and cared for the children while the father went to work every day; pictures showed that girls wore dresses and learned to cook while the boys wore jeans and t-shirts and helped their fathers wash the car. As early as first grade Linda and I were being enculturated into social expectations for our class and gender. Even my grandmother, who had returned to school as a non-traditional student to complete her teaching certification, encouraged me to set my sights on being a "secretary" because I struggled in school and did not appear cut out for academic pursuits. She informed me that once I had a husband and children I might stop working

altogether; if I had secretarial skills I could return to work once the children were in school.

The literacy sponsorship that the working class women of the Keweenaw had received at home and in their K-12 education did not raise the possibility of “career women” or usually of further education. Linda was the only UAW employee I worked with who talked about considering attending college for the purpose of a four year degree; Linda saw past the boundaries that society had set for her but had no support system when she faced difficulties pursuing culturally non-traditional goals. Working class women in the U.P. and Keweenaw often grew up with the understanding that they would get a job that augmented their husband’s salary. The literacy sponsorship the UAW employees found in the writing center was often the first encounter of literacy sponsorship which encouraged them to analyze the capacities they had and see the value in what they did; to realize that speaking truthfully about their hard work could be seen as “stating facts” rather than “bragging”; and to see and represent themselves as individuals who were thinking agents who both created and carried out action that otherwise was not enacted. Each woman I worked with had enriched her work environment through creating and implementing new systems, or streamlining a process, or taking on work responsibilities because “it needed to be done and no one else was doing it.” It was due to these individuals that some departments ran on schedule, or that large budgets were accurately dispersed and accounted for. As workers these women had not limited their work to the list of job duties they received. They used independent thinking, decision making, and implementation of improved ways of carrying out the practices that made up

their work. If they had not done so then the work would not have been done as thoroughly or effectively. Some of the work would not have been done at all.

The literacy sponsorship of K-12 education these women received had also been limited in technological access. What access they did have to technology was always related to classrooms educating for work related purposes, with the school deciding the most likely work applications their students would need knowledge for. For example when Linda and I were in our respective high schools we were taught typing so we could become secretaries; the focus of teaching in typing class was to be quick and accurate in typing letters and memos for bosses. There were no business classes that taught us how to manage or be team leaders; the skills we were being taught were slanted towards specific support roles in business settings. This remained true as limited access to new technologies arose – learning to use word processors as typewriters were phased out—and education/training was designed to keep women productive in their support roles at work. The women of the UAW were not taught the wider uses of computer programs or given training in software applications that would give them greater knowledge of the computer program as a whole. They were always taught just what they needed to complete a specific job duty. This fact combined with their cultural upbringing meant that when updating their resumes they would often list the specific tasks they could carry out with a computer program, rather than claiming knowledge of any computer program as a whole.

Contrast this with the professional class who often list expertise in any computer program they have worked with on their resumes. The latter group has been taught to

imply that having had some access to many computer programs they will quickly learn new uses and software; the former's specific listing of familiarity with particular functions of a computer program implies to managers that UAW workers may be harder to train in new applications of programs even when they already have functioning knowledge of the program. It should be increasingly apparent at this point that home literacy and literacy sponsorship in K-12 education can play a strong determining role in where a child will end up in their educational and work future, to the point that even how one talks about the knowledge that one does possess varies according to socio-economic, home literacy and school literacy sponsorship experiences.

Identifying the current literacy times as “destabilized” with literacy no longer as centralized as it once was, Brandt suggests the time is “ripe” for literacy models of “reappropriation” which would allow people to mold the literacy opportunities and sponsorship available to meet their own needs and goals (41). Think in this case of the British working class who demanded more than basic literacy from the church; a sponsor may have one goal but Brandt is suggesting that if literacy is being offered, people can use it to meet their own, self-identified goals. At this point I would suggest that writing centers that have not previously seen their potential user base as including all members of the campus community might reconsider. They can do so without having to truly “reappropriate” their literacy sponsorship; rather they can look at the possibility of increasing their current user base and adapting their mission statements to reflect this change. In the writing center, literacy sponsorship is already available to some members of the campus community. By adding or including “all members of the campus

community” in their mission statements all writing centers could include sponsorship of literacy for working class staff. A re-visioning of who the writing center works with could provide literacy sponsorship that is focused on the goals of a wider range of writers. This re-visioning is already happening in some writing centers such as Michigan State.^{xi} MSU’s writing center acknowledges the interconnectedness between an academic institution and the community:

Mindful that literacy is learned through use across contexts and over a lifetime, in addition to working to improve the quality and range of literacy in MSU, the Center has reached out to involve itself in the teaching and uses of literacy in both the communities and schools that send students to MSU and the communities and workplaces that students enter when they leave MSU. (<http://writing.msu.edu/>)

MSU’s writing center is an example of “local change” that is potentially possible in all writing centers. Local change in the writing center has the potential to be quicker and more effective than individual instances of literacy reappropriation such as Brandt suggests. Writing centers already have a mandate to work with writers. It is not necessary to “reappropriate” literacy sponsorship in writing centers; just broaden the definition of those writers that each center will work with.

As argued in *Chapter One*, the writing center’s potential users ought to be made up of all those who are part of the campus community, “students, faculty and staff.” If resources permit there are additionally many members of the wider community who

would also welcome literacy sponsorship that places the writer's goals first, rather than fore-fronting the goals of the literacy sponsors. Brandt writes of the Protestant church literacy sponsorship which was limited to what the sponsors – the upper class – thought that the working class needed. Those receiving the literacy sponsored by the church – the working class – had different ideas about what they needed to learn. This to me is an important feature of writing center based literacy sponsorship. Writing center sessions begin by asking the writer what the writer would like to work on.

Every writing center has the potential to recognize campus staff as prospective users. The writing center thus may become the place where working class writers first encounter literacy sponsorship that allows the writer to set her own goals, rather than responding to the goals that literacy sponsors have identified for her. Writing centers are already focused on the writer. I am calling for this focus to include a wider range of writers: all members of the campus community – employees as well as students.

Chapter Five

How to Prepare Tutors to Work on Work-Place Documents

At this point a reader may be asking herself: How can I prepare the peer tutors in my writing center to become literacy mediators for the working class employees on our home campus? Directors themselves may find this work challenging because it has the potential to be uncomfortable. This work requires acknowledgment of social class differences in a nation that prides itself on equality through democratic representation. Literacy that recognizes social differences reminds us that despite our ideals, there remain inequities in how social groups are prepared or not prepared to meet the demands of a global, technology driven future where professional class literacy practices are necessary to obtain certain types of jobs. I am using “professional class literacy” here to refer to those literacy practices commonplace in families where the employment is white collar and the ‘normal’ home literacy practices help prepare a child for school and academic literacy expectations. It may be uncomfortable for some of us to realize we have enjoyed a privilege from birth that we were previously unaware of; we were raised with literacy

practices that better prepared us for school and academic pursuits and in turn better prepared us for professional class jobs.

For those directors and professional staff already aware of this dichotomy in American literacy experiences, there may still be questions about how to prepare tutors to be literacy mediators for people who will often be their elders. Regardless of a tutor's age, I would argue that there are steps that can be taken to prepare him to be an effective literacy mediator for working class employees. This chapter will explore the importance of educating tutors about the social nature of literacy. Without understanding the social basis of literacy usage a tutor may not even understand why she has to do some of the things that are necessary for this work. If a tutor does not understand that literacy is a social practice, she may not understand why a client-writer needs to learn and practice different types of writing and that there are no "natural" or universal literacy practices.

Before moving on to a discussion of how to prepare tutors, however, I would like to share a few details of the outcome of writing center sessions I had with UAW employees. I will particularly focus on the worker I have been calling Beth. She had been working on her position audit form for a number of months before coming to the writing center; she told me she remained doubtful after these months of writing about her responses. She said she was not sure what her supervisors or other administrators were looking for in the form and therefore did not know if her responses were saying "what they're supposed to say." As a result she would not turn her form in, insisting that, "It isn't ready yet." This same refrain was echoed by other staff I worked with. They continued to struggle with the form, suspecting that it did not meet HR's expectations but not sure what "else" to do

with the form. By the end of the summer when Beth handed-in her completed form, she had acquired sufficient professional class literacy practices through her writing center sessions to successfully complete her position audit and received a raise of two levels in job and pay. Additionally, she told me she felt “more prepared” for her work. Stopping by her work environment in the time since this project has been completed, I have noted that Beth is an employee that others in her work environment now ask opinions of. The student-staff appear to go to her for all their questions and assignments. Beth not only continues to train all student-staff but now is publically acknowledged by coworkers as a source of work knowledge. I have heard her coworkers ask “Beth, what should we do here...” even when Beth is not the closest worker in the situation.

Of the six UAW staff that attended writing sessions that summer all received their raises in pay and level with the exception of one woman. Her supervisor successfully argued that duties were changing again in their department and her workload was being reduced. As a result this woman left the department she was in and moved to another department, which hired her at the level she had been trying to obtain in her previous job.

My argument is that in order for tutors to plan sessions for clients who are responding to a position audit form or similar literacy demands, the tutors need to understand that literacy is acquired in social contexts. This means preparing tutors in ways that are not currently typical in writing centers. Changes and additions to traditional tutor preparation include adding several new readings/discussions to be included alongside standard handbooks; preparing tutors to explain the difference in implicit social and literacy expectations and values between classes; and teaching tutors techniques to

ensure they balance their personal and professional time when working in high stakes sessions.

Tutor Education that Promotes an Understanding of the Social Nature of Literacy

At this point I would like to draw on the work of a colleague who also worked in the Michigan Tech writing center, Dr. Steven K. Bailey. Dr. Bailey's graduate research focused on a little studied area of tutor preparation – writing center handbooks.^{xiii} Bailey notes that there are currently six handbooks on the market and all but one are widely used amongst writing centers for tutor education (102). Some centers, like Michigan Tech's, do produce their own in-house handbooks. Commercial handbooks, however, are still kept on hand for tutors to reference; Michigan Tech's center has a selection of reference material available for tutors to use and tutors are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this material during their scheduled prep times.

After conducting a rhetorical analysis of these six handbooks Bailey identified the implied "typical user" that the texts' writers recognized as their audience: "female," "academic insider," "skilled writer," "monomodal composer," "monocultural," "monolingual" (114-5.) The writers of these handbooks are all experienced in the field of writing center studies, "all six handbooks are written or edited by academics specializing in writing center theory and practice, including a number of scholars who are well known

³ *Writing Center Handbooks and Travel Guidebooks: Redesigning Instructional Texts For Multicultural, Multilingual, and Multinational Contexts*. ©2010. Available online through Michigan Tech's J.R. Van Pelt and Opie Library. ><http://www.mtu.edu/library/><

in the field” (102). In other words, these are not assumptions about a “typical” writing center coach that are being posited by people from outside the field. Rather, in the experience of those familiar with the field these are the “markers” of a typical writing center tutor; handbooks are aimed at the majority of tutors, not all tutors. Yes there are males who are coaches as well as male directors and professional staff in writing centers—as well as multilingual coaches and coaches from other countries. They are, however, minorities in the field and handbooks go beyond reflecting this by usually speaking directly to the majority. Bailey’s work also points out other trends in handbooks.

I will now focus on one of the points Bailey’s work clearly makes, as this specific point is related to my dissertation. Bailey’s work shows that traditionally writing center handbooks talk to their audience with an implicit tone that the majority of tutors and writers are “mainstream” – white, middle class. Bailey notes while handbooks do sometimes discuss client-writers who come from “non-mainstream cultural and linguistic backgrounds” handbooks do not value these differences; “this outsidership is typically portrayed as a disadvantage for students to overcome” (120). Tutors are not being taught about home literacies differently preparing individuals for literacy work. If the topic of difference is raised in handbooks the implication is that the client-writer will be the one who is not mainstream, and the tutor’s role is to help non-mainstream, not academically prepared writers to “overcome” their previous literacy acquisition. It is not productive to start literacy mediation with the implicit assumption that literacy differences equal

literacy deficits. Yet this implicit assumption is often reinforced rather than challenged in writing center handbooks.

There are a number of readings that directors and professional staff could incorporate that would provide insight into the social nature of literacy preparation. I will mention two here. Shirley Brice Heath's "What no Bedtimes Story Means: Narrative Skills at Home and at School" points out the significance to a child's later literacy uses when she grows up in a home that primarily values practical and factual writing. James Paul Gee's "The New Literacy Studies: From 'Socially Situated' to the Work of the Social" argues that the literacy practices we are born into are directly tied to our family's socio-economic standing and predict where we are likely to end up economically as adults.

Both these articles make arguments that counter the handbook and writing center implicit understandings that literacy is individual, neutral, and universal. Both articles show that literacy is not only socially constructed, but far from being universal; literacy varies from home to home and particularly varies between different social classes. Juxtaposing readings like these with traditional handbooks not only will help problematize for tutors the assumptions they are familiar with, these readings also provide a jumping off point for discussions about the social nature of literacy and how writers are differently prepared for literacy practices.

Heath's article shows that bedtime stories are an early introduction for children into the value of literacy as a way of using stories to teach and learn. Stories also begin to teach a child how to construct narratives, something that school will expect them to do as

students. Many tutors in a writing center may have grown up with bedtime stories; if so it becomes even more important for them to consider the impact on a client-writer when bedtime stories are not part of his childhood. Not only is a child who is raised without bedtime stories less prepared to write stories; he may not see any value in this kind of writing outside of the school classroom.

In *Chapter Three* for example, Heath's work showed that working class children in her study only had bedtime stories read to them for the first few years. After that the only stories they encountered were Biblical stories in church; the children were also taught that these stories were literally true and that a primary function of writing was to convey literal truths. Similarly, the working class culture in the Keweenaw values truthful writing; any story that includes information other than a literal truth is generally called "bullshitting" which would not be an appropriate literacy for a position audit form. Given these two ways of thinking about writing – literal truth or tall tale – the working class staff see the position audit as a context where literal truth is appropriate. Additionally, one of the most common uses of writing amongst the working class in the Keweenaw is for making grocery lists where 'truth' becomes even more abrupt and to the point. This greatly influences the way UAW staff approach filling out the position audit form – it is often treated like a grocery list of job duties.

As my experience with Beth shows, grocery lists or even report writing are different from the kind of writing necessary in a position audit form. Beth and other UAW staff did express concern that in writing more details about their jobs, they could be perceived as exaggerating or even lying. This is an example of one way their home

literacy taught them to think about writing; this would be a different way of thinking about writing than the way the majority of writing center tutors would think about writing. Tutors have usually grown up practicing different genres of literacy. When educating tutors these differences in literacy preparation need to be explained to them.

Gee's article makes clear that having opportunities to learn new literacies has implications beyond a person's school performance. Having the opportunity to acquire new literacy or not acquire it will impact an adult's social and economic prospects. As the work place increasingly values the ability of a worker to adapt new literacy and technology, those who lack opportunities for literacy and technology acquisition will be further economically disadvantaged. Such workers will be the most 'disposable' and the lowest paid in the work force. Gee draws a direct connection between providing opportunities for writers to acquire new literacy and the writer's economic future. He also points out that it is the usual lack of opportunities to acquire new literacy which limits a worker's ability to become more valuable to potential employers.

Again, Beth's experience is a real life example of a worker being devalued due in part to her lack of familiarity with the expectations of professional class literacy. Beth herself recognized that there was a disjunct between how she was prepared to fill out the position audit form and what her supervisor and HR would expect to see. Knowing that this difference existed however, did not automatically inform her about what was expected in this context. She needed access to someone who was already familiar with the professional class literacy expectations in this context, who could in turn explain the expectations to her.

A writing center tutor who is an “academic insider and skilled writer” needs to be aware that his own social literacy knowledge has been embedded for years and probably over the course of his lifetime. Without this knowledge a tutor may even question the validity of assisting a writer with a position audit form. “Academic insiders” unaware of how they have come to have their privileged status through socialization may believe that all writers are capable of accomplishing similar writing goals as long as they “try hard.” This leaves a tutor open to forming the opinion that only a writer who is not working hard enough on her position audit form will have difficulty with it; the client-writer may be perceived by the tutor as not deserving of a raise. The assumption in writing centers can be that if a client writer would just ‘spend some time reading the assignment more closely, and writing more carefully she will figure it out on her own.’ The current status quo in tutor education does not challenge a tutor’s understanding that he figured writing out for himself, so other writers can figure “it” out for themselves. It is critical for tutors to understand that none of us have figured literacy out for ourselves; we have each been socialized into the literacy practices we have and we can create literacy socialization contexts for client-writers in writing center sessions.

Explaining Differences in Implicit Literacy Expectations between Social Classes

Those of us who work in writing centers have either been raised in homes that used professional class literacy, or we have since acquired academic literacy. Part of our literacy socialization has led to the internalization of professional class literacy

expectations; we understand unspoken rules of when to use certain genres of writing and we have practice decoding what professors are looking for in assignments. These practices and understandings place us professionally and academically ahead of writers who have not had opportunities to acquire this experience and knowledge. Writing center tutors usually already share the implicit understandings that are common to academic writing (as discussed in the previous section). The argument I am making for changes in tutor education are in line with Brian Street's call for "bold theoretical models that recognize the central role of power relations in literacy practices" (NLS 2). A revised theoretical model of tutor education can still though make use of traditional knowledge that tutors bring to the writing center. In educating tutors we need to value the knowledge they do bring to sessions. To do so productively we must help tutors understand the importance of explaining to clients the differences in expectations between professional class writing and the expectations for writing that the client brings to the session. Rather than teaching tutors that they need to help writers "overcome" their literacy background, tutors need to be able to explain what the literacy expectations in a work environment are. One way to do this is to have tutors think about how they learned to 'know' what a professor expects in an assignment and help clients see what an employer expects in a position audit.

A tutor who knows how to read a professor's expectations through the syllabus and assignment given in a class can become prepared to read a position audit form for clues that indicate audience expectations. It is first necessary, however, for the tutor to realize that this is specialized and implicit knowledge. A tutor who does not understand

the specialized nature of this knowledge will not understand that in order for client-writers to learn this information they will need explicit statements of the implicit audience values that the tutor is seeing evidence for in the writing assignment. Beth for example was originally frustrated with having to fill out the form at all because she thought of her job as a series of personal relationships. I pointed out the very beginning of the form and what it was 'telling' us. "Do you see the information the form requires here – not just your name but your supervisor, your level, your position title. This is telling us that people who do not know you or what you do will be reading this form. If someone has never seen you work, how are they supposed to know what you do? And do you want your supervisor to be the only one who tells someone else how you do what you do?" After discussing how HR would learn about her job through what she wrote, Beth saw a reason for filling out the form that she had not considered previously. And the more she thought about it, the more she wanted her own statement of the work she did to be heard. Tutors need to be educated and prepared to similarly point out the expectations that they see in a work based writing assessment and other forms, so that the client can also see these expectations.

In teaching tutors to explain expectations, we are again breaking with the traditional way handbooks imply that tutors should work with clients. Traditionally a tutor would be given the impression that they should as much as possible only ask clients questions, for example, "Why do you think you're being asked for your level and supervisor at the beginning of the form?" Such questioning is very frustrating when clients have no background that has prepared them to answer the question. They are left

to try to guess what the tutor is looking for in an answer. Street reminds us that “the acquisition of literacy involves challenges to dominant discourses” (NLS 9). In the changes to tutor education that I am advocating for, I am challenging the dominant discourse of writing centers. I am arguing that we become conscious of the dominant implied expectation that literacy is natural and neutral, that we both acknowledge and teach tutors about the socially constructed nature of literacy. Part of this education is encouraging tutors to be as explicit as possible when clients are encountering literacy expectations they are unfamiliar with.

Beth and I dealt with questions that required me to explicitly state the differences between her own expectations of what the work of writing was and the expectations of professional class managers and HR. This included me showing Beth how I read the position audit form for clues about what the audience was valuing in the response, or the kind of answers they were looking for. If a writer knows how to read for the clues, these clues can be found in a written classroom assignment; a syllabus; a position audit form; and in the *Guide* to the position audit form. Tutors can teach client-writers how to look for these clues in written documents. Tutors need to first recognize that knowing how to read for these clues is not innate, natural, or universal knowledge. It is specialized knowledge that they need to be explicit in passing on to clients.

Professional class readers expect a position audit to show them aspects of a job they are not familiar with; they expect the writer to indicate that the writer recognizes which elements of their job are most important; they expect the writer to include specific details that “show” the work that is done. In the case of HR representatives, the form is

describing the work of a worker who may not be personally familiar to the reader; there is no other relationship or context for the reader to draw knowledge of the writer from. Beth and other UAW staff had no similar writing experience before filling out a position audit. They had no similar experiences to draw from and therefore were drawing on the writing experiences they did have – which were for very different contexts.

I explained to Beth that we were going to look at the form for clues that would tell us what the readers of the form valued and thus what they would be looking for in responses. I showed her how I would begin this task by reading each section of the form. “I start by looking at headings and sub-headings,” I explained as we read through the form. We made note of the headings: “Decision Making,” “Scope of Judgment,” “Independence of Action,” “Scope of Supervision,” “Scope of Contacts/Customer Service,” and “Software (Or Other Technology) Skills.” We discussed that just by looking at these section titles we could begin to see what the supervisors found to be important work, including the abilities to work with customers, supervise others, and make decisions and choices without having to go to their supervisor.

I knew that Beth was beginning to also “see” what the readers expected when she summarized some of the audience’s expectations. “They want to see if you can do your job without someone holding your hand and they want to know what you do all day. They want to know what kind of face you’re putting on the university when you deal with customers and what kind of face you’re putting on your department when you deal with other departments.” Tutors should be educated to look for such signs from the client that the client is beginning to see some of the implicit expectations a form contains. First a

tutor should demonstrate where they see the evidence they see for several specific expectations. Only after this demonstration and explanation does it become appropriate to ask a client, “Do you think the audience is expecting anything specific from the way this section is worded?” Such questions should be followed with at least a brief discussion between client and tutor about the evidence seen and any expectations that the tutor is reading that the client does not yet see.

After looking at section sub-headings, Beth and I looked in more detail at the sections under each sub-heading. Under “Independence of Action” there were check boxes which the employee was to use to indicate how independent their decisions were. Originally Beth read the choices as equal choices. In her home literacy experience where all family members work together to accomplish goals that sustain the family, jobs are not talked about as being more or less necessary to the final outcome of the family’s well being. For example, if one is canning vegetables for the family is it more important to be the person who grew the vegetables or to be the person who makes sure the vegetables are properly canned and sealed for the winter? With either job not suitably carried out, the final goal of having vegetables to feed the family that winter would not be accomplished. In the work environment Beth and other UAW workers tended to think about the work production of their unit – what their office or department was accomplishing and what they were expected to accomplish. An individual who did not share in the labor was resented but if all individuals were visibly working, their UAW co-workers did not assign them status as more or less necessary.

I pointed out to Beth that I was reading these check boxes as a ranking of value; based on what we were learning about audience expectations from reading the form, I did not think the audience viewed the check boxes as equal. “Based on what we see elsewhere in the form, I think this first one will be read by the audience as the lowest level and less important – ‘*Supervisor is present and assigns and reviews work...*’ is a way of saying that you don’t have to make independent decisions. Your supervisor decides everything and you are just taking orders and reporting back. But this last one, ‘*Employee independently establishes goals and objectives. Job responsibilities involve recommending policy and significant policy exceptions.*’ That shows the readers that you’re just below your supervisor in making choices and that your work is very independent. I think supervisors value an employee most when that person can work as independently as possible.” Beth responded with her own summary. “The more work we do, the less they have to do.”

As we discussed these expectations we agreed that both supervisors and other staff got tired of a worker who could not or would not pull his or her own weight, or who was otherwise incapable of working independently. Once Beth understood how the audience would read her responses and what the audience valued and expected, she had a clearer understanding of the kinds of details she needed to include in her description of a duty. She also adapted to reading the form to see the audience’s expectations rather than responding as she would in a home literacy situation.

For example, Beth was working on the form section that included “Significant Duties.” One of her original responses was to write the following for a duty, “Student

worker contact.” This was a response that would be applicable in her home literacy context. In Beth’s home literacy it is expected that answers to questions about work will be short and to the point. As discussed earlier in *Chapter Three*, both in Heath’s study and in my sessions with working class writers observations were made that the working class in the Piedmont region and in the Keweenaw expect people to learn a job by working alongside someone who is experienced in the job. Reading and writing are not part of learning a job or talking about work; if one is writing one gets straight to the point. Writing is factual and brief because most people have other things to do and do not expect to spend much time reading for any reason once they have completed their K-12 education. Tutors need to also be educated therefore to explain the difference in the audience’s expectation to use reading and writing to talk about work and the client’s potential expectation that one does not write about work. I once pointed out the significance of something that Beth was already aware of but had not yet thought about in relation to the position audit. “You know that the supervisors all have at least a Bachelor degree and most have a Masters. When people spend that much time using reading and writing to learn they expect to use reading and writing to learn about everything. They expect to be able to read about the job you do in order to learn about it. Even if you told them what you do, they would still want it written down so they could look at it again and re-read it to remind themselves of what you said.” Beth was able to connect what she witnessed – supervisors who seemed to rely on reading and writing – with an expectation that would affect how she responded to her position audit. Her audience *wanted to read* her description of the job she was doing.

As Beth learned about professional class literacy expectations and values, her responses became more descriptive and the details she included relied on specifics. Her one line statement “Student worker contact” became a working title for explaining how she worked with students. She incorporated the following information into her answer: she interviewed and made hiring suggestions regarding each student hired; she supervised approximately six student workers each semester; she had designed the scheduling system and did all the scheduling for the student workers. Knowing what the audience expected, Beth could then see the value of putting more facts together in her responses. This was an audience that did not expect short answers; they expected content driven answers. Explicit discussions of differences in literacy expectations combined with opportunities to practice new ways of writing allowed Beth to write responses that met both her own literacy value of being factual, and the audience’s implicit expectation that her response demonstrate that she understood how to work with others, prioritize competing demands on her time, handle sensitive information appropriately etc.

Balancing Personal and Professional in High-Stakes Sessions

It is important to realize that when we as literacy mediators are working with clients the outcome of our sessions will not be of equal importance to all clients. One of the differences between working with UAW staff compared to working with student writers is the final impact in the client’s life of the work being done. Directors and professional staff will find that sessions involving work related writing provide new

opportunities to teach tutors about balancing their personal and professional lives. My reasoning for this point follows.

The average student writer comes to sessions in order to get through a particular semester, or a particular course of study. Their goal is generally to achieve a better grade than they would achieve without using the writing center. In fact, most centers use this as part of their persuasive argument to draw in clients. Most of us as writing center professionals eventually comment that writers who work with us achieve better grades than their peers who do not work with us. I am not suggesting that this is either untrue or without value. Why should writers work with us if we have nothing they value to offer them?

When a worker who is filling out a position audit form comes to the writing center, the form is going to be more significant to her immediate life and socio-economic standing than a grade in a single class will be in a student's life. I am not arguing that working on a position audit is more important than working with a student on their class paper. I am pointing out that for the client there will be greater financial and emotional impact resulting from working on a position audit form and often this will create a greater emotional impact on the tutor as well. We need to help tutors be prepared for what may prove to be psychologically more charged sessions.

For students, a last minute walk-in session may appear to be a matter of life and death two hours before a final paper is due; this same session will shortly shift emphasis and may even be a basically forgotten experience in a client's life. As tutors we know this. One of the reasons we are able to maintain a balance in our own lives is that we

learn not to buy into our client's sense of desperation over a single paper, project, or deadline. We know that one paper, or even one class, will not make or break a student's college career or their life afterwards. Position audit forms are much more central to a worker's socio-economic outcome and position in the community than are individual classes in a student's academic career. An individual's socio-economic position influences where they will live; what they will eat; what they will wear; what transportation they will have access to; how they will be able to help their own children prepare for the future.

In turn, tutors may be tempted to give even more of themselves to sessions where a person's socio-economic status seems to hang in the balance. This has the potential to create a sense of urgency in sessions that tutors have a harder time keeping in perspective. Directors and professional staff can use these tutor struggles as an opportunity to teach tutors how to develop a balance between work and personal time. Tutors must be encouraged to keep to their work schedule and not start volunteering all their 'spare' time to continuing to work on a position audit form with a client. Ongoing discussions between directors, professional staff, and tutors about how tutors are balancing personal time and work time are important. Tutors can also be encouraged to keep personal journals as a way of both venting frustration that they may be experiencing and of helping them to be aware of how much time they are devoting to work. Tutors also need to learn the importance of focusing on session preparation during prep times, so that prep does not spill over into their personal time.

Sessions related to position audit forms have the potential to create contexts where tutors can learn valuable lessons about separating their professional lives from their personal lives. This is not a lesson that school generally teaches. Some students do manage to create their own balance; many others either become devoted to studies or devoted to social activities. Tutor education that takes place in a writing center context and is centered around position audits is also uniquely positioned to create ‘real world’ education about balance and professionalism in the tutor’s life.

Preparing in New Ways for Writing Center Clients

A significant element of educating tutors about the social nature of literacy begins with teaching the difference that home literacy makes in how an individual is prepared to use literacy. Everyone uses literacy; we do not all use it in the same way and *written* literacy is not prominent in all cultures or in all contexts. Some home literacies teach people that the primary use of writing will occur in their K-12 education. Others are taught that reading and writing will be a significant part of their daily lives. And these are just two of many potential viewpoints that a home and culture can implicitly teach a person about the uses of literacy.

Traditionally, in part because of handbooks and in part because of commonalities in literacy background amongst many writing center professionals, tutors have not been taught about differences in home literacies. Tutors have been taught through implicit shared expectations and examples—often not intentional but lived examples they witness

from mentors—that as writing professionals they are supposed to be the expert and the client the novice. While the shift I am suggesting in how what we teach tutors may seem only slightly different, it is a pedagogically significant difference.

In educating tutors to do this work, we need to teach them that how and why we use writing varies according to culture and home literacy. Some groups learn and teach through reading and writing. Other groups rely more heavily on apprenticeship and do not use reading and writing as part of the educational process related to work, i.e. I can learn to do many jobs without reading or writing anything, or by reading and writing a precise, limited amount. For example, when learning to bake a particular type of chocolate cake in my great-aunt's kitchen, I learned by watching and doing. My great-aunt did not even reference an ingredient list. From her I learned the implicit value of knowledge growing from doing. Her niece, my grandmother, did use recipes that she wrote down on index cards and kept in a black metal box that she had painted flowers on. The measurements were not always accurate as written; successfully using recipes from the box meant being able to 'see' when a mistake or transcription error had been made when writing or copying a recipe down. Nor were corrections ever made to the cards, the implicit message being that these recipes were not for novices. A level of experience was needed to be successful with these recipes.

On the other hand, this same grandmother would write changes into the recipes in her red and white checked Betty Crocker cookbook to indicate permanent "corrections" she was making to those recipes so they would suit her taste. Although she never explicitly taught me this, I learned from baking with her that a person is the authority in

their own kitchen. I grew up believing it was appropriate to take personal liberties with adjusting recipes or creating new dishes based on combining recipe elements. Other people have been taught in their home literacy that there is value in being able to recreate a recipe exactly, as if the originator of the recipe had prepared the dish himself. I was not taught that there was any particular value in this ability yet I do enjoy watching cooking shows where this is a test that chefs are given – to exactly recreate a dish based on taste and visual examination of the ingredients. Different contexts value different uses of knowledge.

Rather than perpetuating the implicit expectation of expert tutor and novice client, I am suggesting we educate tutors to think of themselves as literacy mediators for new-to-the-client literacy contexts. Tutors have had opportunities to acquire literacy skills that clients have not had opportunities to acquire. Client-writers have none the less acquired literacy skills and these skills have allowed them to be successful in many contexts including their home, community, and in obtaining jobs. The role of a literacy mediator is not to create literacy in another person; it is to show another person how to adapt to literacy expectations in contexts the person is not yet practiced in.

I am suggesting that directors and professional writing center staff become like the best chefs. If a cook is going to become a chef, first they must understand how key ingredients like flour, baking soda, and water interact. Tutors must first understand how home literacy and socialization have prepared each of us to use literacy the way we do. Like cooking, tutoring begins with the basic understanding of how elements are combined to achieve particular results; if tutors are going to become literacy mediators

for workplace documents, they must first be taught how to explain the fundamental expectations that they can find in a document to client-writers and why these explicit statements are necessary. Then, once the fundamentals are mastered, both cook and tutor are ready for apprenticeship that allows them to learn as they work.

No one would expect someone new to a kitchen to whip up a soufflé. Neither should writing centers expect tutors to immediately be prepared to lead sessions centered on workplace writing. Tutors first have to learn the social nature of literacy acquisition before they can be expected to create contexts that foster the acquisition of new literacy practices. Whether in the kitchen or the writing center even cooks and tutors with ‘natural talent’ find this talent is only a starting place. Talent needs to be nurtured, educated, and guided to grow in appropriate ways. Asking tutors to rely on handbooks insufficient for their education will not prepare them for this type of literacy mediation. Deliberate effort and thought about educating tutors for literacy mediation related to workplace documents needs to be brought to tutor education; thought must be put into changing those implicit understandings and expectations which are counter-productive to creating contexts for literacy acquisition. Tutor education can prepare students to write over the problem sections in their handbooks so that they create a new tradition of socially situated literacy acquisition in writing centers.

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- ⁱ Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. 2nd Ed. Trans. Walter Kaufman. New York: Freepress. 1971
- ⁱⁱ Irigaray, Luce. *I Love to You*. Trans. Alison Martin. New York: Routledge. 1996.
- ⁱⁱⁱ At Michigan Tech those who work in writing center sessions with clients are called “coaches”; other institutions may use the phrase “peer-tutor” or “consultant.”
- ^{iv} Kearney, Richard. *On Stories: Thinking in Action*. New York: Routledge. 2001.
- ^v Michigan Tech. *Institutional Analysis: 2008 Total Employee Profile*.
<http://www.admin.mtu.edu/ia/faculty/totemp08.html>. Total Unionized Employees (hourly workers): 656: Men – 271, Women 385. Total Exempt Employees (salaried supervisors) 565: Men – 335, Women – 230.
- ^{vi} Michigan Tech Writing Center. “Michigan Tech Writing Center Tutor’s Manual.” 2004.
- ^{vii} “Welcome to my home page: Etienne Wenger.” Viewed 5-12-10.
- ^{viii} “Communities of practice.” Viewed 5-12-10.
- ^{ix} Wenger explains, “In 1989-90 I did some ethnographic field work in a medical claims processing center operated by a large U.S. insurance company, which I will refer to by the pseudonym of Alinsu. The claims processors handled health insurance claims of the kind many of us are familiar with, sent in by people who were covered by a plan purchased by their employer” (17).
- ^x “She finally has a home: Harvard--Khadijah Williams, 18, overcomes a lifetime in shelters and on skid.” June 20, 2009. Esmeralda Bermudez.
>LosAngelesTimes<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/20/local/me-harvard20>< viewed 5-18-10.
- ^{xi} “About Us.” Michigan State University Writing Center. ><http://writing.msu.edu>< viewed 5-18-10.

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