

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Literacy projects can lead to community empowerment, particularly when roundtable discussions initiate goals and students draw on their experiences and strengths to serve as “literacy ambassadors.” In the two following linked manuscripts, I make my case for a literacy ambassador model of literacy service learning project that engages communities and educators in synergistic enterprises that combine the goals of pedagogy and social justice. I incorporate key principle indigenous literacy narratives, a service learning literature review and the Oregon Writing Liaison project propose a structure for community writing projects that is non-hierarchical, motivated by collective community consciousness of shared needs and goals, and based around the work of student literacy ambassadors who serve as liaisons to their communities in order to make real changes in their own lives and the lives of those they love.

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Community Literacy Projects as Vehicles of Change:

An Analysis and Application of Indigenous Community Empowerment Strategies to
Create Self-Motivated and Effective Composition Service Learning Projects

by

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Rachael Cate, Author

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Community Literacy Projects as Vehicles of Change:

An Analysis and Application of Indigenous Community Empowerment Strategies to Create Self-Motivated and Effective Composition Service Learning Projects

Introduction

As a high school student in southern Tennessee, I was lucky enough to have been encouraged by my English and history teachers to join my school's Model United Nations team. I had been having some trouble with a hard situation at home since my father had passed away and my step-father (at the time) ruled the house with an iron fist. I was openly rebellious and was looking for ways to empower myself to defend my autonomy. Further, because I had always enjoyed English classes and considered myself a capable writer, I jumped at the chance to be heard and to make a positive difference in the world of politics and to help defend others against what I saw as tyrannical conditions. Even if it was only in "mock" sessions, I had the opportunity over three years to travel to Princeton, NJ, Boston, MA and Washington, DC, in order to give a voice to my experience and my beliefs about ethical behavior and to develop clearer views about the concept of social justice that I was beginning to feel so strongly about.

At the time, I felt that writing was becoming a vehicle through which I could empower myself and others, and I decided that cultivating multiple literacies in my community could become my means for creating change. Specifically, I focused on the importance of globalized social justice values that include the universal right to healthy food, clean water, and sustainable land, as well as, fair treatment and freedom from all forms of violence, especially torture and murder. Because of these interests, I began to research oppression throughout the world and the realities of life in communities where basic needs and human rights have gone unfulfilled. I found instances of this shared experience of oppression as close to home as my community

church, my Puerto Rican *abulela*'s home, and my own classrooms, where immigrant families and their children regularly arrived without legal documentation or access to social services. As I continued my education beyond high school and a college degree in English, I traveled to Latin America, where I worked in a rural mountain school in Ecuador and an urban girls' home in Bolivia. Everywhere I went, I took with me my personal conviction that literacy within political discourse was a key element to promoting of access to human rights and social justice for "at-risk" communities. Specifically, these literacies include the ability to become conversant in a political scene, to organize, to give voice to communal experiences of oppression, to gather support from broader communities and, finally, to mandate change. However, I was also frustrated by the inherent disadvantages experienced by students and their predominantly low-income communities where the dominant mode of discourse is not academic English, and the primary effective mode of action for improving life is not academic work. Instead of a skill set to be used as a vehicle of change, literacy and writing are often seen by such students as irrelevant and unhelpful practices owned and administered by a disconnected social elite that does not experience life in the community or know what it means to want to improve the conditions of people's lives without wanting to change who they are or disrespect their way of life.

For many of my own peers and the students with whom I've worked, the disconnect between the classroom and the realities of life has evidently contributed to a lack of motivation to study language, literacy and writing in the classroom setting. As a result, children have become young adults, and young adults have developed into mature community members without realizing their full potential as political agents to fight oppressive circumstances and to make change. The disconnect between perceived educational goals and real students' interests has become a roadblock in paths, paved with literacy skills, to better schools, improved

healthcare, and better paying jobs that would mutually benefit all supporters of holistic community health initiatives.

The current research project is my attempt to seize the potential that I recognize in community literacy projects and service learning curricula to initiate stronger, more synergistic and motivational educational situations than those which exist currently. In particular, I want to be respectful of the concrete needs and self-selected goals of real communities while enabling individuals to empower themselves and each other. Therefore, the research presented in this thesis focuses on the following question: How might the principles of ethical and socially just pedagogy and consciousness-raising best be applied to literacy projects in order to address the disconnect that students in at-risk communities experience in order to provide them with more authentic, meaningful and effective educational environments? In order to address this question, I turned to two successful examples of literacy projects in indigenous communities that were used as tools for political empowerment and egalitarian pedagogy. These examples have been particularly informative because the motivation to read, organize, and publish meant the difference between sustenance and starvation, health and illness, land ownership and homelessness, and life and death. The immediacy of these narratives provides enough transferable lessons that I believe that they can inform the work of compositionists who are working toward truly expedient, synergistic solutions to authentic problems of community literacy. Drawing from the principals demonstrated in these narratives, educators can more effectively match the joint work of social engagement and motivational education that the service learning movement strives for in the fields of language, composition, and literacy studies.

In the following manuscript, I have compiled two semi-independent articles. The first is a critical analysis of ethnographic testimonials of successful community literacy organization to

identify the three key principles underlying their success. First, it is essential that communities self-identify a sense of mutual benefit in any project that they take on. Second, the motivation for literacy learning projects must be based on participants' real needs. Third, an important component of successful literacy projects is that one or more participants become "literacy ambassadors" who teach and learn from each other. In complement to this work, the second chapter is an informational and analytical article that synthesizes principles of composition service learning from both current research and discourse in the field and, additionally, draws lessons from the indigenous literacy narratives of the first chapter in order to demonstrate the practical values of non-hierarchical organization; mutual identification with shared goals; and a "literacy ambassador" model in which students, instructors, and community members contribute to active and reflective processes of learning to create community service writing projects that instructors can be implement effectively and ethically.

Theoretical Influences: Paolo Freire's "Praxis" and Socialist Feminism

As a basis for my own understanding of ethical and socially-just philosophies, my interests as a feminist and Marxist researcher, as well as a cultural studies critic, have led me to explore theories about the cultural underpinnings of patriarchy and hegemony and to uncover suggestions about ways to deconstruct hierarchical binaries and inequalities that permeate dominant social and cultural structures. These studies have afforded me the opportunity to identify and gravitate toward the ideas of feminists like Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Gloria Anzaldua, whose methodologies not only guide efforts to deconstruct patriarchy and hegemony but also open the door to revised constructions of identity politics. These theorists

base their visions of what “identities” are in appreciation of unity as well as diversity, uniqueness and equality. Their constructions of what it means to be an individual also honor a holistic vision of community health by creating a more inclusive, accepting and caring culture. While research, analysis and theory largely ground these strong social justice values, a strong commitment to justice also ties them to the work of all community activists. These activists use real life experiences of socio-cultural realities to motivate their efforts and to put ethical philosophies into practice. Socialist pedagogical theorist Paulo Freire used the term *praxis* to describe this dialectical dynamic between analysis and action. Similarly, this same kind of activist imperative motivates the present study’s goal to effectively combine and accomplish the goals of literacy education, critical pedagogy and service learning (84). My work as a cultural critic and a composition instructor, including my conclusions based on the study of literacy narratives as well as time spent with English language learners—students for whom academic English is not a primary mode of discourse—and with low-income indigenous communities has caused me to believe that projects in literacy and composition have the potential to accomplish some uniquely effective and empowering educational goals. Particularly in these communities, a strong foundation of literacy skills and praxis can enable individuals to strengthen community organizations, achieve political empowerment, and take steps toward social change. In the second half of this study, I contextualize feminist theories of identity politics in order to enact them as practical bases for community organizing and collective literacy education projects. In this way, I hope to demonstrate the applications and utility of social justice campaigns not only as engines to promote social equality but also as pedagogical tools that instigate a holistic approach to collaborative education and community empowerment.

Because I identify as a multi-cultural woman growing up in the southeastern United States in a climate of sexism, racism, classism and hetero-sexism and because my own experiences have led me to develop a strong opposition to oppressive forces within culture and society, I have searched not only for modes of social relations that promote equality and justice but also for ways to describe myself that are more accurate and less restrictive than the dominant exclusive modes. Adding to conversations about what constitutes a socially-just model of identity politics and a way to create relationships in a culturally-diverse world, cultural theorists like Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa have worked to develop feminist cultural lenses for reading inter/intrapersonal identity and relationships that reflect the ways in which individuals and communities exist, grow, and learn with one another. Their models also point toward the kinds of learning relationships that can most effectively promote both individual autonomy and mutual dependency and in turn encourage healthful and socially just environments based on mutual respect and understanding in a constantly migrating world characterized by intercultural dialogue and exchange.

My search for an ethical philosophy of social action and relationship has been most fruitfully informed by the study of the theoretical tradition of socialist-feminist critics and their search for a perspective and methodology from which a feminist, non-domination-centered identity politics and mode of collective organization can emerge. The coherence of the term ‘women’ as a social category that can facilitate the implementation of social change and justice for a specific segment of the population has been called into question by these critics as the adherence of language itself to the moorings of a concrete, unchanging reality has disintegrated into the uncertainty and flux of the ‘postmodern’ situation. At the same time that the delineators of human, race, gender, national, and all forms of identity politics are giving in to processes of

cultural and theoretical deconstruction, feminists continue to identify the incongruities and injustices inherent in a culture which marginalizes non-dominant social ‘others’ or outsiders and favors masculine values as a rule. As an active answer to these injustices, they have also been looking for ways to bridge the divides inherent in social organization based on identity politics in order to bind together coalitions of individuals who would work collectively to affect positive social change.

Donna Haraway and “Cyborg Feminism”

Because I see the concepts of self-identification, community organization and collective work toward political change as essential elements in the struggle for social justice and the development of ethical relationships, I have seen the scholarship and texts of Donna Haraway as a pivotal influence for me in finding a methodology of praxis as consciousness-raising and organization or *affinity* within the context of a deconstructed, fluid, and hybridized system of identity politics. By envisioning and engaging with key biological and material metaphors, she reconstructs marginalized identity to become a “cyborg” body—a metaphor for consciousness which accounts for the infinite variation and diversity inherent in individual subjectivities. She shows readers how we, as cyborgs operating within a world based on the principles of the organic metaphor, can engage in a process of cultural re-envisioning by relating ourselves to one another in a union into which our individual identities do not dissolve, and through which we can work together to continue our struggle toward a just and ethical society.

Haraway’s frameworks for understanding the ways that the projects of cultural studies and feminist theory map onto one another are largely informed by post-feminist theorist Judith

Butler. Butler explains in her essay, “Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of ‘Postmodernism,’” that “to refuse to assume, that is, to require a notion of the subject from the start is not the same as negating or dispensing with such a notion altogether; on the contrary, it is to ask after the process of its construction and. . . political meaning” (Butler 4). Butler’s feminist interpretation of the subject category of ‘woman’ or ‘women’ is post-structuralist in its ways of exposing the composition of the subject in the fashion of theorist/historian Michel Foucault. She focuses her attention on gender difference, and in so doing creates an example of a methodology by which gender and identity politics might be deconstructed. “To take the construction of the subject as a political problematic is not the same as doing away with the subject. . . to deconstruct is not to negate or dismiss, but to call into question, and, perhaps most importantly, to open up a term like the subject to a reusage or redeployment” (Butler 15). It is this reusage or redeployment to which Haraway enlists her deconstructed vision of woman, human, nature, culture, science and technology. Through the window of organic biology, she pieces together a metaphor for what a deconstructed and then reconstituted identity politics might look like, and it strongly resembles a life system in which individual parts work together and are defined not only by their unique characteristics but also by fluctuating relationships with each other and also the unique whole which they create in common. In order to realize this self and community awareness, though, communities and individuals must together undertake a process of consciousness-raising, starting with the deconstruction of the myth of patriarchy and dominance, and they must learn to read and recode the stories which have been told about life, its origination, and its engendering. The lines that have been drawn must be exposed. Only then can a new myth be built.

This practice of literacy and action (or praxis), I believe, can be the basis for a true marriage of social service and effective ethical education. In order to come to a realization of mutual identity within communities, individuals must be ready and willing to join forces and work together to understand themselves and each other in ways that change how they relate and act on a daily basis. As Haraway explains, “My cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (*Simians* 154). The potent infusions and dangerous possibilities to which she refers are the materials that can be appropriated by theorists, activists and citizens who seek to enact change and growth in their communities by putting Haraway’s political re-envisioning and ethical principles to practice into effect in their own lives.

Post-colonial feminist Chela Sandoval, in her essay “Cyborg Feminism and the Methodology of the Oppressed,” articulates the theoretical and discursive influences that activists can take from Haraway’s work (and those which I hope to employ as the definition of ethical identity politics in my own research and demonstrate in my examination of indigenous literacy narratives). For instance, she explains that “Colonized peoples of the Americas have already developed the cyborg skills required for survival under techno-human conditions,” (Sandoval 408). According to Sandoval, the kind of subversive or oppositional consciousness to which Haraway refers has already been a commonly-employed strategy of oppressed peoples who have taken up the struggle for justice in a globalized system of identity politics. “This oppositional ‘cyborg’ consciousness has also been identified by terms such as ‘*mestiza*’ consciousness...the metaphor “cyborg” represents profound possibilities for the twenty-first century” (408-9). By applying Haraway’s modes of deconstruction and reconstruction (or ‘methodologies’) as in the practice of cyborg self-identification, Sandoval argues that third world

feminists have opposed colonialist domination by utilizing the many technologies for self-realization and self-determination at their disposal (411). As I will argue, that is exactly what the communities of authors Rigoberta Menchu and Domatila Barrios de Chungarra have done. In addition, they have illustrated the potential dynamic that can be created by truly synergistic utilization of communal resources for collective empowerment that can be transferred to educational situations where project facilitators are looking for ways to tap into authentic and meaningful motivation for literacy learning and social service.

Gloria Anzaldúa and “Mestiza Consciousness”

Building on the works of Haraway and Friere, Gloria Anzaldúa’s ideas about “mestiza consciousness” have also heavily influenced the following study because they offer an explanation and presentation of a theoretical methodology for how individuals can achieve awareness of mutual identity and community through processes of praxis. A body of scholarship at a crossroads, Anzaldúa’s texts and theories take their roots at the intersection of postcolonial, ecofeminist, and queer cultural studies theoretical discussions of identity politics in writing, and they have broad-reaching implications for studies in composition, literacy, and critical pedagogy. In multi-voiced texts and interviews, Anzaldúa’s texts, like the collectively-authored indigenous literacy narratives which I will compare them to, enact the “alternative” or subversive rhetorical forms that her ideas engage with, and, in that sense, these texts might be considered constructions of a kind of plural identity politics that forms itself along the lines of an alternative system of meaning production. Anzaldúa’s collective works assert that it is important for writers to write from their own “minority” perspectives, and because her compilations, essays, and

interviews embody a mixed cultural discourse in which identity politics are played out in both discussions of ideas within a site of dialogue that corresponds with Mary Louise Pratt's idea of the "contact zone," as well as a plurality of voices and genres, they rhetorically create a vision of a system or "mythology" of identity (such as a multiple, intersectional *mestiza* consciousness) that is both more authentic and less totalizing than more finite or restrictive, univocal constructions.

Anzaldúa's theories are important to this project because they offer a suggestion for ways to construct the self as an author and to discuss the identities of others in terms that recognize and respect difference both within and between different discursive communities. "Identity," in this sense, means the constant creation and re-creation of a self that is reaching out to and merging with its audience through shared understanding at the same time that it is signifying individual subjectivity. When authors who fashion themselves with an awareness of alternative rhetorical styles such as Anzaldúa's construct their identities for readers, then, they perform the act of engendering themselves as *both* unique individuals and as parts of many different and overlapping shared communal consciousnesses. Anzaldúa, an example, identifies both with Mexican and American culture, with the queer movement, and as a woman, and she writes as a member of all of these communities and also as herself. It is this kind of both/and reaching out and looking within that characterizes Anzaldúa's primary contribution to the quest for ethical ways for education and politically active individuals and communities to share literacies by simultaneously relating to, learning from and teaching one another.

Specifically, Anzaldúa's texts present applicable metaphors for and constructions of alternative identity politics that can be enacted by rhetoric: the *nepantla* or *mestiza consciousness*, the bridging of identities, and the "*path to conocimiento*" (or pathway of learning

to accept difference between and within individuals and communities). In 1987, Anzaldúa published her perhaps most widely-read collection (and also her only single-authored text of its length), *Borderlands/La Frontera*. In *Borderlands*, Anzaldúa continues her bridging-out geographical metaphor for bringing *nos* (we) and *otras* (others) back together to form *nosotras* (us), and she expands on and explains her idea of *mestiza* consciousness as a feminist and postcolonial concept. In the chapter “Towards a New Consciousness,” she suggests that “the new *mestiza* copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity...She has a plural personality...Not only does she sustain contradictions, she turns the ambivalence into something else” (79). The something else that Anzaldúa seems to refer to here is an alternative way to see one’s own identity as not only able to absorb and “sustain” contradictions but also to take on (and construct in writing) a self-conception that becomes a testament to the invalidity of the mutual exclusivity of terms such as Mexican/Anglo and virgin/whore. In this way, Anzaldúa breaks the oppressive system of binary logic to yield space for a plurality of identities.

In the forward she writes for *this bridge we call home*, Chela Sandoval explains well the methodologies for spiritual consciousness that Anzaldúa’s metaphors of “bridging out” and “path to *conocimiento*” stand for as the blueprint or framework that I will use for my own analysis of the work being done by Menchú and Chungara’s communities:

This method provides cognitive and emotional maps necessary for guiding internal and collective external action. Briefly put, the technologies of this method are (1) reading power, as in radical semiotics, *la facultad*, or ‘signifyin’; (2) deconstruction, or *coatlicue*; (3) meta-ideologizing; (4) differential perception, or *nepantla*, and (5) democratics, the ethical or moral technology that permits the previous four to be driven, mobilized, and organized...this methodology provides passage to that unfastened, differential juncture of being—*la conciencia de la mestiza* (24).

Reading power, deconstruction and meta-ideologizing, then, must necessarily come before the awakened state of *nepantla* or the mobilization of social action can take place, as Sandoval sees it and as she interprets Anzaldúa's ideas. In fact, the reading power quality could be seen as the ability to interpret any text, including socio-cultural and political practices. Deconstruction, then, could, in other words, be likened to the ability to not only see false masks, but to understand the politics of how they've been placed atop real faces—and perhaps by whom or why it was done. Meta-ideologizing, then, corresponds with both Haraway's and Anzaldúa's ideas of counter myth-building, the strategic construction of an alternative signifying system often illustrated through metaphors like cyborg or *metiza* consciousness upon which subversive and non-oppressive meanings for identity can be founded.

In a world of ever-broadening globalization, cultural mixing and diversification, there are increasing numbers of individuals who, like Gloria Anzaldúa, have found themselves excluded and marginalized by monolithic expressions of identity. As differently-identified cultural groups encounter and relate politically with one another, the potential for oppression and marginalization grow as socially/economically elite peoples seek to dominate and/or render obsolete those (arguably most people) who identify as “other.” Besides finding ourselves excluded by the dominant practices, many are experiencing the profound loneliness of a life on the margins. By following Anzaldúa's example of alternative myth-building and bridging out to connect to one another across the myth of separation, though, I find that we can discover the flip-side of the potential homogenization and oppression of globalization—increased diversification and the opportunity to learn from, understand and respect one another more fully. The concept of *mestiza* consciousness is a “way of seeing” that we can put to work in our lives in order to heal the wounds of fragmentations and enact as a philosophy of education and learning that

honors both individual uniqueness and the power of collective effort. As feminists, as writers, as teachers and as richly and deeply interconnected individuals, we can begin to see each other and ourselves for the first time, perhaps, for what we are. I posit—and I believe that Gloria Anzaldúa would agree—that when we are able to do this, we will finally be able to give ourselves and each other the respect and love that we all intensely deserve.

Working Towards Applications of Social Justice Theory in Community Literacy Projects

My goal in this project has been to think about how these powerful ethical philosophies stemming from experiences of oppression can be best put into motion to serve activist principles of social justice promotion in society. I have found in my work to accomplish this goal that it has been most beneficial to employ theories as a lens through which to interpret textual and cultural practices. Specifically, perhaps because writing and literacy have been such vital tools for self-empowerment in my life, I have sought to explore the potential for literacy and composition studies to play a supporting role in the process that feminists like Haraway and Anzaldúa identify as “de-mythologization” and the construction of alternative, egalitarian and liberating cultural consciousness and social orders. In order for groups of people united by their affinity for one another to interpret and process the politics of their own situations within a system of oppression, for them to “re-myth-build”—or build or re-affirm frameworks of identity politics and relationships within which they are empowered and plural meanings of self-hood and community are included—and in order for them to teach others from their experience in order to counter oppressive forces in a dialogic way, there is a necessity for the development of specific skills of

reading, interpretation, composition and understanding— elements of praxis and the collected practices that I define as *literacy* within the discourse of social justice.

In the auto-ethnographic community literacy narratives of Guatemalan indigenous organizer Rigoberta Menchu (*I, Rigoberta Menchú*) and Bolivian Domatila Barrios de Chungara (*Let Me Speak*), which I analyze in Chapter 1, I found testimonials of the collective struggle to self-educate as an essential piece of social justice projects undertaken within models that exemplify the key philosophies of Marxist feminist theorists like Haraway and Anzaldúa. Both narratives are communally-authored and multi-voiced texts and both focus on projects of social justice and anti-colonialism through cooperative education and publication. It has been beneficial to study both cases, as each has its own unique contributions as an example of community literacy and composition work. Menchú's narrative is useful because of the way that the author acts as a kind of ambassador of literacy to her community through her acquisition of skills and knowledge of outside cultures as she helps to organize and serve as a learner, teacher, and communicator in the collective struggle of her people. In *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the diversity of strengths within individual community members enables each of them to contribute most effectively by utilizing their prior knowledge, and this specialization and collective contribution simultaneously empower individuals and the group on the whole. Barrios de Chungara's text is a particularly powerful example, as well, because her case specifically highlights the challenges of sexism and the potential for cultural inequalities to undermine the unity of community organization and also because it presents a model of the dialectical nature of collective learning and the opportunities for increased understanding present when communities are faced with the challenges of answering antagonists by developing advanced analyses and discourses within their own situations. Perhaps most importantly, in the case of both Menchú's and Barrios De

Chungara's communities, literacy projects were of paramount importance because the survival of communities depended on them; and this motivation pushed individuals to succeed in growing, learning, and teaching as their love for each other and themselves was the prime mover. This situation of extreme, breaking-point oppression worked as a catalyst to create a momentum of change, consciousness and positive development based on the works of literacy ambassadors to push back on and reverse the cycle of ignorance, violence, and exploitation. Because of the conditions of mutual respect and identified common (urgent) needs and goals within their communities, these literacy ambassadors could take full advantage of collective power of their peoples to come together to utilize the skills and resources at their disposal for literacy promotion.

It's true that service learning composition projects, unlike grassroots political responses to unendurable circumstances, are initiated most commonly through institutions and are part of planned curricula. Therefore, the catalyst that breaks up the cycle of oppression must come not from the pressures of a breaking point, but from the efforts of project facilitators, students, and community members to act collectively and identify common, pressing goals before situations of oppression and violence have reached such a point. After all, that is the larger aim of this project and its pedagogy: to fight oppression holistically and synergistically in order to prevent tragedies like those experienced by Menchu's and Chungara's peoples from happening again in the future. I believe that service literacy project facilitators can be catalysts by listening to the changes that their own communities need and then sponsoring their own students as potential literacy ambassadors who can serve as both learners and teachers of empowering literacy skills. Some of the most important lessons for instructors to take away from a careful analysis of Menchu's and Chungara's communities as models for literacy projects and service learning writing program

and ethnographic research are their demonstration of non-hierarchical modes of cooperative education-as-political empowerment. Perhaps most practically, these lessons can be used by teachers of writing and literacy organizers to help ensure that their projects will be ethical as well as effective. In order to illustrate these practical applications, in addition to an analysis of indigenous Latin American literacy narratives and a review of current community service composition literature, I also suggest that it will be helpful to consider my own personal experience with community writing projects and the lessons I identify as the most significant results of that work. To this end, in Chapter 2 I'll briefly outline the Oregon Writing Liaison (OWL) Project, which I engaged in as an assistant coordinator and graduate student at Oregon State University. I'll then discuss the impacts of the OWL Project on my own thinking about how community service writing pedagogy and social justice theory pan out when they are applied to real basic writing classrooms and project situations.

In the following sections, I will present analyses of the two literacy narratives by Rigoberta Menchu and Domatila Barrios de Chungara, accompanied by connections to both their relevance as effective models of social justice organizing and literacy pedagogy. Then, in a second chapter, I'll offer a background of community service writing projects and practical applications for instructors in underprivileged communities that are organizing for social change. In the end, I hope to present what I've found as a way to utilize the possibilities of community service writing to help promote social justice and community empowerment as well as effective pedagogy. Non-hierarchical community service writing based on a literacy ambassador model can do this by dissolving binaries between the 'self' and 'others' and working from a truly egalitarian and authentic motivation that unites the goals of all toward community health. Theorists Donna Haraway, Paulo Freire and Gloria Anzaldúa have informed my perspective that

individual and collective realization of mutual goals and benefit must be achieved through a process of action combined with reflection that is self-initiated because of real stakes and utilizes the skills and resources of unique individuals to bring about individuals' authentic desire to connect with each other. Through these connections and relationships, I believe, a cycle of learning, teaching and growth can be set spinning that runs contrary to cycles of oppression in order to bring about a continuous loop of social consciousness and education that will encompass students, instructors, and wider communities along with their efforts to build circumstances of social equality, justice and respect for themselves and their families.

Key Principles of Community Justice Literacy Narratives:
Literary Analyses of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *Let Me Speak*

Introduction

This analytical review asks how community literacy projects can best be initiated and utilized to serve the goals both of an effective, authentic and motivating pedagogy and the pursuit of social equality, a higher quality of life and justice for all co-existing members of communities. To do this, I will work off of the assumption that work to reverse cycles of social violence and oppression through social activism and work to change ignorance into consciousness through literacy education campaigns are both engagements with a larger enterprise of promoting community well-being. During the past few decades, composition scholars like Linda Flower and Thomas Deans have identified the value of community-based service learning projects because they foster both active learning and reflective analysis of education. In response, instructors have been exploring ways to initiate projects that motivate students to learn in real-world situations and to help their communities at the same time. They have also been exploring the nature of the link between service to communities and more effective pedagogical philosophies to find out what it is about service writing projects that brings about progress in composition and literacy learning for language students and to find a way to build more successful project models and to avoid creating inauthentic contexts that do not accomplish either educational or service goals because they do not meet community goals or not motivating to students.

In search of discovering more about this link and the basic essentials that are needed to create more successful projects, I have reviewed two auto-ethnographic narratives that exemplify ways in which alternative identity politics and consciousness have been employed within the joint projects of social justice struggle and community literacy education. These narratives are

testimonials (or *testimonios* in Spanish) that fall within the Latin American tradition of accounts recorded to bear witness to the hardships of oppression suffered by low-income (often indigenous) worker communities who have been exploited by corporate and government interests. Being exploited and undercompensated, these workers and their families have experienced living conditions that do not meet international human rights standards. Their lives have been threatened by famine, environmental toxins, and agents who wish to silence their protest. Under these conditions, as well, access to literacy and language education has been scarce at best, and individuals have remained locked in cycles of inaccessibility of resources and oppression caused by low literacy levels. But, as I will discuss in the following sections, in the case of the following testimonials, that cycle of oppression was broken. A new cycle and process of learning, organizing and consciousness-raising was initiated out of the necessity of do-or-die situations that created snowball effects of literacy and empowerment. Community members became aware of their absolute dependency upon teamwork and solidarity as well as complete utilization of all of the skills each individual had to offer in a synergistic way in order to accomplish their mutual goals. These skills included language learning, writing, publicizing, speaking, and organizing. Further, individuals whom I call “literacy ambassadors,” including the authors of the testimonials analyzed below, act as catalysts, leading grassroots initiatives that are oriented horizontally rather than hierarchically in order to make literacy more accessible within their communities. In the narratives analyzed below, an important key to the authors’ success as literacy ambassadors—indeed, perhaps the most essential catalyst to breaking the cycle of oppression—was the collective realization of interdependency, mutual benefit, and the need of the community to work together to liberate and empower themselves.

By enacting a system of relating to one another, recognizing common goals, and organizing to take political action that I identify as “organic identity politics,” the communities represented in the grassroots political literacy narratives by Rigoberta Menchu (*I, Rigoberta Menchú*, 1983) and by Domatila Barrios de Chungara (*Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domatila, Woman of the Bolivian Mines*, 1977), presented below, take charge of their own potential for action, empowerment, and education as a group of bonded individuals who can make change happen together. Their testimonials are histories of political struggle and literacy/language learning that serve as examples of what the ideas about truly egalitarian relationships and conceptualizations of identity that feminist social justice theorists like Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa write about can look like when they are put into practice by real people in order to pursue real victories. As autobiographical chronicles of the authors’ lives, education, and political hardship rooted deeply within their communities and with identities that are situated in a communal web, these texts both illustrate the interconnectedness and political awarenesses within and between communities as well as give a history of individual and communal identity as socially-constructed, ever-changing and multi-valenced. They both also offer illustrations of the relationship between meaningful community service and highly effective literacy education as non-hierarchical justice projects in which skilled individuals act as literacy ambassadors to their communities in order to connect them with the discourses of power and social analysis and open up possibilities for literacies to be acquired and utilized by highly motivated groups as survival tactics. Within their narratives, Menchú, Barrios de Chungara and their communities not only give accounts of what happened to them, but they also engender themselves as political agents whose struggles and triumphs are experienced in common and whose interconnected identities are central to their collective power. The collective power of literacy and education

exercised by testimonials such as these has been researched in the field of Latin American and post-colonialist studies as a mode of teaching outsiders, bringing them into “the circle” of community, and undertaking self reflection at the same time. As Latin American studies scholar Sharon Navarro points out, “Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means of fashioning identities” (134). Within these identities are the blueprints for political organization, the shaping of more just communal histories, and, potentially, the key to building community education projects that are both pedagogically viable and socially responsible.

Menchú and Barrios de Chungara fashion not only themselves as political subjects; they also create an awareness of their whole communities as collective agents. In his *Latin American Perspectives* article “*Testimonio* and Postmodernism,” George Yudice writes of the collective authorial voice in testimonies which “have contributed to the demise of the traditional role of the intellectual/artist as spokesperson for the “voiceless” (15). He goes on to explain his view that:

As in the works of Elvia Alvarado (1987), Rigoberta Menchu (1983), and Domitila Barrios de Chungara (1977), that personal history is a shared one with the community to which the *testimonialista* belongs. The speaker does not speak for or represent a community but rather performs an act of identity-formation which is simultaneously personal and collective. (15)

It is this alternative identity formation, this action performed by collective authors, to which I would like to turn my attention in readings of both Menchú’s and Barrios de Chungara’s texts. Specifically, I will argue that identity formation along these lines enacts the kind of plural, fluid, and socially-just model of identity politics that Donna Haraway suggests is an ideal ethical ideological framework in her organic metaphors for the relationship of individuals to communal groups. This enactment, which follows the methodology for practical application of alternative consciousness that theorist Gloria Anzaldúa has contributed to feminist social justice discourse,

is a path intended for realizing and implementing the idea of organic identity politics (or “*mestiza* consciousness,” as she calls it) that calls for action and experience as the gateways to self-actualization.

Another way to look at what testimonials have to offer social justice and service learning composition pedagogy is to recognize their engagement with both theory and practice that embodies pedagogy philosopher Paulo Freire’s idea of *praxis* as a dialogic interchange between experience and reflection that is necessary to produce learning (87). By effectively acting out these theories in real-life situations, these testimonials have served as a kind of successful experiment in community literacy projects. As such, they offer prospective participants in social justice-focused service learning literacy projects a real-life precedent with which they can formulate models and forecast the possibilities of their own projects.

Because Barrios de Chungara’s narrative comes directly out of a workers’ movement in Bolivia with pre-existing socialist values, the collective consciousness that gives rise to the communally-authored testimonial in that case is perhaps more pronounced and overtly politicized than that of Menchú’s indigenous village in a capitalistic Guatemala of the 1980’s. Likewise, Menchú’s community must take on more in the area of consciousness-raising and identity reconstruction from the beginning. On both accounts, though, a consciousness of individual identity as existing only in relationship to community and a common well-being is the driving force in the struggle to gain survival skills. What’s more, the process through which both communities come to realize their mutual benefit and educate themselves to create change is instructional and illuminating to those hoping to meet similar success in their own work. Further, a reading of the *testimonios* can be used to demonstrate how this key element of mutual identity awareness can become a cornerstone of meaningful literacy service projects across a

wide variety of community contexts. Particularly, when this awareness of identity applies to communities in authentic, motivational situations (such as struggles for justice), it can bring about the utilization of existing community skills and resources and create space for leadership of learning ambassadors.

Some Theoretical Background: Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa

In her works, including *Crystals, Fabrics, and Fields: Metaphors of Organicism in Twentieth-Century Developmental Biology* (1976), *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), and *How Like a Leaf: An Interview with Thyrza Nichols Goodeve* (2000), Donna Haraway hopes to draw a picture of alternative identity consciousness through the metaphor of the organism, the deconstruction of myths about similarity and difference and the re-envisioning of identity as found in relationships between individuals, usually shifting and drawn by the fluid lines of behavior and affinity. Through the window of organic biology, she pieces together a metaphor for what a deconstructed and then reconstituted identity politics might look like—individual and community—and they strongly resemble a life system in which individual parts work together and are defined not only by their unique characteristics but also by fluctuating relationships with each other and also the unique whole which they create in common.

In addition to Haraway's theoretical construction of an alternative system of identity, I likewise value Gloria Anzaldúa's vision of feminist identity politics that speaks about the significance of a plurality of identities within and reaching out from the self. In her 1999 text, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, she argues that this process should also be taken into account in order to paint a useful picture of the ways that seemingly disparate communities at cultural

crossroads can begin to recognize mutual bonds. Anzaldúa develops strategies for understanding and exchange to help “bridge the gap” between broken or fissured facets of the cultural and psychological self. She not only articulates a unique theoretical perspective on the way that cultural exchange and co-evolution create individuals and communities with fragmented consciousnesses who belong to one and many cultural worlds at the same time (*simultáneamente*), but she also composes those texts themselves out of a diversity of voices and languages (incorporating stories in English and Spanish, from the old, young, men, women, natives, whites and *mestizos*) so that they might embody her envisioned plurality. They construct authors and address readers whose identities are fragmented, but these fragments come together to constitute a discourse that is richly diverse, inclusive, communal and holistic (although it is ever-changing). Anzaldúa seems to construct herself in her text and to discuss the identities of others in her representations in terms that recognize difference both within writers and between discursive communities. “Identity,” in this sense, means the constant creation and recreation of a self that is reaching out to and merging with its audience through shared understanding at the same time that it is signifying individual subjectivity. When authors who fashion themselves with an awareness of alternative rhetorical styles such as Anzaldúa’s construct their identities for readers, they perform the act of engendering themselves as *both* unique individuals and as parts of many different and overlapping shared communal consciousnesses.

Anzaldúa’s texts will be significant to my analysis of Menchú’s and Barrios de Chungara’s narratives because they present specific metaphors for and constructions of alternative identity politics that can be enacted by rhetoric: the *nepantla* or *mestiza consciousness*, the bridging of identities, and the “*path to conocimiento*” (or pathway of learning

to accept difference between and within individuals and communities). In addition to recognizing their enactment of identity politics that reflect Donna Haraway's organic metaphors, I would like pay close attention to the narratives of both *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *Let Me Speak* as they embody Anzaldúa's "*path to conocimiento*," a progression of steps including reading, deconstructive analysis, re-myth-building or reconstruction of consciousness, sensory perception, and social action that culminate in a more socially-just conception of identity politics.

By conducting a kind of survey of the characteristics of Menchú's and Barrios de Chungara's narratives as they match up with this "*mestiza* consciousness," I would like to demonstrate the ways in which both may serve as models for socially-just community organizing and literacy acquisition for communities wishing to act as ambassadors of learning and understanding in order to work toward social justice and equality in the future.

I, Rigoberta Menchú

I, Rigoberta Menchú, by the indigenous Guatemalan author Rigoberta Menchú was published in 1983 from tape recordings of speech that narrates the community life and political struggle of the speaker, her family and her people. In it, Rigoberta tells the story of her personal and her community's collective struggle toward political organization and social justice in an environment of absolute racism and economic oppression targeting her people waged by the Guatemalan government, European-American land owners and global capitalist interests. While Menchu tells the story of herself and her own life, she is also interested in telling the story as the collective history of her community and her people. "This is my testimony," she says:

I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people... The important thing is that what's happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (1)

Menchú's testimony, then, is in fact a political one, and it is the medium through which she speaks in order to gain recognition of the history of the cultural consciousness, injustice, and collective struggle experienced by all of the Maya in Guatemala. In many ways similar to Domatila Barrios de Chungara in Bolivia, but with differences in the roles and skills she offers to her people in their particular situation, Menchú serves as a kind of literacy ambassador between her community, her people, and the broader political world of Guatemala with which they must learn to converse and take part in political discourse. However, although her role is like that of an ambassador, her work is often to help lead her people through a period of transition into multiple literacies that will allow them to empower themselves. That is, she acts and writes as one of them, not as just herself. As Latin American scholar Lynda Marin writes, "What most obviously marks these Latin American women's testimonials [including Menchú's] in particular and the genre in general is the self-professed eschewal of the first person singular subject" (52). Throughout her testimony, Menchú professes communal authorship by emphasizing to the reader (or listener) the ways in which her acquisition of cultural identity, community organizing experience and literacy skills in both Spanish language skills and political life of Guatemala were not hers alone but were the enterprises of an entire people working together to accomplish common goals of social justice.

In the following section, it is my intention to demonstrate some of the ways in which Menchú's narrative illustrates the history of herself and her community together as they work to pursue common goals. In order to pursue these goals, Menchú's community initiated their own literacy project by focusing their efforts into what I will identify as three specific areas:

recognition of communal cultural experience, political organizing for the goal of social justice, and development of cross-cultural literacies. In all of these areas, as well, it will be helpful to those looking to reproduce aspects Menchú's community's project to point out the characteristics of development which align with both Donna Haraway's and Gloria Anzaldúa's theories of justice-promoting consciousnesses so that these aspects can be focused on and possibly reproduced in the future. In particular, in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the author's testimonial embodies the idea of an organic, plural or *mestiza* consciousness of identity politics in the formation of individual and collective selves, details the reflective development of a collective consciousness of the mutual benefit and mutual goals that motivate collective organization and action, and the chosen methodology of experience for pursuing these joint goals, including dialogue and exchange for the purpose of achieving cross-cultural literacies and social justice. It is through these lenses of what I will call organic identity politics, *mestiza* consciousness and affinity organizing that I will now turn to my reading of Menchú's narrative in order to perhaps succeed in identifying some of the key aspects of the movement of her people which might be followed by instructors in a wide variety of situations to help us understand the principles of experience and reflection at play in other social justice and community pedagogy projects.

Cultural Identity

Throughout *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, and particularly within discussions of "The Family," ceremonies, and life in the community and on the native land, Menchú develops her identity as an author as both an individual and a communal one, where her ties to her community come to create her sense of self along with her sense of cultural perspective on society. Her narrative is constructed out of a plurality of voices that tell the stories of communal meaning and shared history. These stories emphasize the web of interconnectedness which binds community

members in mutual identification and respect. Even as unique individuals change and grow, their change and growth belongs ultimately as much to the community on the whole as it does to themselves, and, in turn, each individual has a responsibility to the health of the social whole as they are responsible for their own health and growth. These auto-ethnographic strategies support both Donna Haraway's explanation of organic identity politics that facilitate affinity organization as well as Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of mestiza consciousness and cultural understanding represented by multivocal texts and inter-personal, inter-cultural dialogue.

Menchú begins her *testimonio* by telling the story of her family: her parents, the founding of her village, the land where they lived and their migration patterns as poor farm workers:

They [her parents] founded a village up there. My village has a history—a long and painful history...My parents got more and more people to come up and cultivate the land so there would be more if us to ward off the animals that came down from the mountains to eat our maize when it was ripe, or when the ears were still green...I was born there. (4-5)

Rigoberta's personal story begins then, before her birth, as it is intricately connected with the history of her people and their land. The story of her village, which is presented as one told to her by her parents, is also a story their communal life bound by common goals and existence together at its very beginnings. Her parents were farmers, but the nature of the work of carving out a life from the land necessitated more people to come and help in order to sustain themselves. It would have been impossible for her family to live and survive on their own; for this reason their lives were all linked inextricably with the people who became their partners. The voices of her parents implicated in this story also contribute to the countering of Menchú as a univocal author of this story. It is not her story alone, but a story that came to her even before birth, through the eyes and voices of her parents and, as she explains later, of her grandparents and long line of communal ancestors as well.

The partnership of Rigoberta's people on the land extended not only to agricultural survival, then, but also in the collaborative construction of the cultural life of their society through ceremony and tradition. "The ceremony is very important," she says:

When children reach ten years old, that's the moment when their parents and the village leaders talk to them again. They tell them that they will be young men and women and that one day they will be fathers and mothers. This is actually when they tell the child that he must never abuse his dignity, in the same way his ancestors never abused their dignity. (13)

In a multi-vocal coming-of-age tradition, then, Menchú describes here the way that she and other young people of her village were taught the idea that their responsibility to themselves was intertwined with their responsibility to the community and to communal history. Dignity, as Menchú describes it in this passage, seems to signify not just personal dignity but also shared sense of dignity that comes from mutual identity. Every individual's actions, then, have deeply-felt implications for the spiritual life of the whole village.

Even so, Menchú also describes the sense of individual uniqueness of expression that each person is capable of owning within themselves as well:

By accepting the Catholic religion, we didn't abandon our culture. It was more like another way of expressing ourselves...It's like expressing ourselves through a tree, for example; we believe that a tree is a being, a part of nature, and that a tree has its representation, its *nahual*, to channel our feelings to the one God. That is the way we Indians conceive it. (80).

The concept of the *nahual*, as Menchú describes it, is a person's "protective spirit who will go through life with him," (18). Because the *nahual* is very deeply tied to the individuality of a person, he or she is told that it must be kept secret, a secret for themselves alone to guard. Further, a child is not told about their sacred animal until he or she is thought to be old enough to honor its sacred nature: "We are only told what our *nahual* is when our personalities are formed" (19). In this way the idea of identity within Menchú's culture and community is transmitted as

having spiritual, ancestral origins, and individuals share a common dignity as community members, yet they are each also unique in their individual spiritual selves. They are all interconnected parts forming one whole unified society, and yet each of them (Menchú included) is taught by a plurality of voices that she is an infinitely unique contributor to the communal whole.

Organizing in the Community

As a member of a society within which cultural identity politics between individuals were formed along the lines of Haraway's "organic metaphor" and cultural identity within individuals was formed in terms of plurality and multiple voices as Gloria Anzaldúa describes mestiza consciousness, Rigoberta Menchú frames the organization of that society as the recognition of a mutual benefit, mutual struggles, and mutual goals. First, she describes her personal awakening to her responsibility to aid her family by contributing to their efforts to survive. As she becomes more skilled as a worker and also expands her perception of the political situation of her family, then, her sense of responsibility also expands to her community as they fight together for political and socioeconomic justice. Finally, Rigoberta's consciousness of the political injustice against native peoples in Guatemala and around the globe causes her to take responsibility for oppressed peoples throughout her country and all over the world.

In "An Eight-Year-Old Agricultural Worker," Menchú describes that process by which she took responsibility as a member of her immediate family with a role to play in helping her parents, brothers and sisters to survive. She saw how much her mother sacrificed in the *fincas* (large coastal plantations) out of feelings of communal obligation and familial responsibility, and how much care and love her mother felt for the workers:

My mother liked to give the workers the food they deserved, even if it meant she didn't sleep all night. They came back tired from the fields and they wanted to see that she ate well, even though her own family were eating badly somewhere else... Watching her made me feel useless and weak because I couldn't do anything to help her except look after my brother. That's when my consciousness was born... I wanted to work, more than anything to help her, both economically and physically. (34)

Because she saw her mother's suffering and need and felt a common empathy and compassion for her, Menchú took the responsibility of helping in any way she could upon herself, even at a very young age. More than feeling sorry for her mother, though, she seems to be saying here that a certain "consciousness" was born in her—one that made her aware that her family must work together, that their shared needs, pain and suffering must be met with shared efforts of mutual aid, and that the only way that her family could achieve in their struggles of political and economic injustice was to work together.

After Menchú recognized that she had the same responsibility to her family as to herself, her narrative develops further the idea of an organic extension of identity outward to include her entire immediate community. In describing the spiritual feeling of mutual need and support experienced throughout her village, she gives an example of communal organization to achieve those goals:

For instance, someone might need a house because his son is setting up his own home. We discuss what we can do to help him... There's always some collective action to arrange... Then there's another meeting of the community's important men and women. This usually has to do with our land. Especially when they started taking our land away. Every Thursday the village meets to decide: who is going to the capital?; who would accompany my father—the community's elected leader?; how would he get there? All this means we have to put aside time to attend to the community's affairs... But the whole village is ready to give the time. (86)

In the preceding passage, Menchú emphasizes the assumption of responsibility for communal affairs by the entire community, each member doing what he or she can in a pragmatic way in order to accomplish goals that are at the same time both individual and collective. This principal

of organization became increasingly political as rich property owners threatened to spread their exploitation of land and people more pervasively in her village. The immediate threat called for a vision of the needs of the community beyond the ordinary necessities of survival on the land to the effects of outside forces that demanded collective attention. Like the sense of responsibility that Menchú felt for her family, though, the affinity bond that drives community members to work together is one formed out of mutual identity and love. “My community always loved me very much...” she says. “We never let the slightest opportunity pass—any little fiesta—to organize some sort of celebration using our customs. It was our way of fulfilling our obligation to the community” (87).

Finally, Menchú describes the way in which the collective consciousness of her community expanded out to motivate organization with unions of poor workers, indigenous and *ladino*, throughout Guatemala in order to harness the power of their numbers for survival by fighting for the right to life and social justice:

I remember my father asked some unions in the FASGUA, Federación Autónoma Sindical de Guatemala—Guatemalan Federation of Independent Unions, to help us because they were unions for workers, for labourers, and we were peasants—agricultural labourers. The unions helped us a lot. They said they would denounce the fact that we were being thrown off our land. (109)

Because the unions were for workers and Menchú and her community were workers as well, then, their common tie of identity and mutual benefit caused them all to organize their efforts toward the end of securing their rights and struggling against the people who threatened those rights. Working for the rights of one individual or one village, within the larger scheme of the political whole of Guatemala and the world, meant joining forces in order to work for the rights of all oppressed peoples. Only by adopting this big-picture view could the welfare of Menchu’s individual village be protected.

After she discusses the political hardships, imprisonment, tortures and killings that those who banded together to fight back endured at the hands of their oppressors, Menchú goes on to say of the collective bond that both motivated her people to keep fighting for survival and empowered them with the strength and agency to act as a group that “only those of us who carry the cause in our hearts are willing to run the risks,” (244). The idea of carrying the cause in their hearts, then, seems to correlate to the collective love for community and for land that was imbued in their identities and spirits. Menchú’s family, her village, and workers across Guatemala had a common identity and affinity built on love as well as on the practical truth that, in order to achieve their collective goals, they must organize themselves and work for the mutual benefit of the entire whole.

Literacy Skills Acquisition

As a part of the collective struggle of Rigoberta Menchú, her family, her community and all poor Guatemalan workers, literacy skills in Spanish language and well as Guatemalan governmental and political culture were identified as tools needed to achieve political agency for the purpose of fighting for communal rights and social justice. Because Menchú recognized her own political identity with that of her family and her people, the imperative to gain literacy skills brought on by the common need of the community was also one that she saw fell to her as a capable individual member of that community. Her personal motivation to learn Spanish and to give her people a voice was the motivation of mutual benefit to her whole community (her “communal self”), and this motivation drove her to pursue learning and literacy skills as a matter of pragmatic necessity. Through her interactions with the Catholic clergy who were foreign to her village but taught her the utility of literacy skills in dealing with the outside world of urban Guatemala and beyond, through her witness of the vulnerability of her father and her people to

trickery based on their limited understanding of important documents, and through her desire to give a voice to the situation of her people to those with the power to make change, Menchú identified her own responsibility to serve as an ambassador of literacy and cultural understanding for her people.

As a child, Menchú explains, she saw the traditions and heard the stories being passed onto her by her own people, but she was also exposed to new ideas from the Catholic clergy who had come into the village to educate about spirituality and religion. This exposure to culture and knowledge that had been inaccessible to her before caused an insatiable desire to learn and understand. The death of her friend to senseless poisoning on the *finca* caused her to grapple with many difficult questions:

After that, I got to know some priests. I remember that I couldn't speak Spanish so I couldn't talk to them. But I saw them as good people. I had a lot of ideas but I couldn't express them all. I wanted to read or speak or write Spanish...My father was very suspicious of schools and all that sort of thing...but I said, "No, I want to learn, I want to learn," and I went on and on about it. (89)

Menchú went to the priests, whose religion she saw as a comforting supplemental form of expression to her own native beliefs, because she was looking for a way of understanding the hardships of life. Although her father recognized their connections to elite social classes as members of the society of colonialization and urbanization, separate from their village, Menchú "saw them as good people," and wanted to engage in dialogue that might increase her understanding, and this motivations caused in her a strong desire to learn literacy skills for that purpose. She also wanted to express herself, to have her own voice heard and understood. This desire toward exchange and understanding helps to serve in the role of a literacy ambassador to her people. Later on, Menchú does meet a non-indigenous teacher with whom she can communicate:

He was the man who taught me Spanish. He was a ladino, a teacher, who worked with the CUC... That *companero* taught me many things, one of which was to love *ladinos* a lot. He taught me to think more clearly about some of my ideas which were wrong, like saying all *ladinos* are bad... The example of my *companero ladino* made me really understand the barrier which has been put between the Indian and the *ladino*. (165)

Through an exchange that fostered understanding, then, love and affinity were also able to grow between Menchú and her teacher. Further, the literacy that she was acquiring from him was more than language communication skills—it was the ability to think critically and to understand the larger picture of the system of oppression that divides those with a mutual benefit by creating barriers and making enemies of them out of ignorance. Menchú was then able to carry those skills on to practice more than just communication in Spanish; she was able to see the sociopolitical situation of her people with expanded vision that enabled her to reach out across those barriers to remedy their livelihood and benefit with those who could join the struggle for empowerment and unite to affect political change.

Aside from Menchú's desire as a cultural ambassador to learn about, understand, and participate in dialogue with outside communities, her motivation to empower herself and her people through literacy was born out of her people's very real and immediate need to be able to understand and analyze the political language and documents that their oppressors would use as weapons against them in their ignorance. When her father was sent to jail for the first time, it became urgent that Menchú's community find some way (or pay someone) to help them who could understand and speak the language of the government officials and bureaucrats in power. "In Guatemala this is what happens with the poor, especially Indians, because they can't speak Spanish. The Indian can't speak up for what he wants... The Governor is a ladino and doesn't understand the language of the people" (102-103). Because Spanish was the language of power and privilege, it was imperative that Menchú's community find a way to communicate in

Spanish. Having to go through middlemen and lawyers who took advantage by overcharging the indigenous peoples for their services and who could not be trusted to communicate honestly for the benefit of the community was yet another barrier to empowerment and agency. The people's illiteracy in the language and ways of the oppressor opened them up to the trickery and deceit of those who wished to exploit them further. Recalling a new stage in the on-going story of land-grabbing by rich *ladino* men from her people, Menchú says:

This time the problem was more complicated because they [the oppressors] brought with them the document we had signed, which said we had agreed to stay on the land and live off its produce for two years only; that when they two years were up, we had another place to go and would leave the land. This wasn't true. We didn't know what it was we had signed. My father said, "This is unjust, because we were deceived." (109)

The trickery of the wealthy classes without any feeling of mutual benefit or responsibility to the indigenous people of Menchú's community, then, caused an absolute need for them to begin to learn the literacy skills necessary to protect themselves from such deceit. Menchú saw this immediate need as her own responsibility as a member of the community. "The most distressing thing for us was not being able to speak," she says, "That was when I told myself: 'I must learn to speak Spanish, so that we don't need to go through intermediaries,'" (110). Menchú then made it her personal calling to learn to speak Spanish in order to serve as an advocate for her community and empower them and herself as one of them to counteract the treachery of their oppressors. Her motivation was the concrete, immediate necessity to protect those whom she loved, and that necessity drove her to become a spokesperson for the plight of her people to the outside world.

Once Menchú was able to speak as an advocate for and organizational leader of her people, she identified the need to begin to teach other members of the community to speak for themselves also, so that each could rise to take over the work of the struggle for justice that must

be constantly renewed and strengthened. So learners continually had to switch to roles as teachers, and vice versa:

We have learned that the role of a leader is as a coordinator more than anything, because the struggle is propelled forward by the *compañeros* themselves...In practice, *compañeros* have to learn Spanish as I did, have to learn to read and write as I did, and assume responsibility for all their work as I did...Our experience in Guatemala has always been to be told, “Ah, poor Indians, they can’t speak.” And many people have said, “I’ll speak for them.” This is a kind of discrimination...We need leaders who are in danger, who run the same risks as the people. (228)

Those who would presume to speak for and take up the banner of her people without a true affinity for them, understanding of their needs and commitment to their values and mutual benefit, then, rather than empowering them, would take the power of voice away which would belong to the people themselves. The test of united struggle as a motivation for organization and learning is the test of knowing what it is to work together because of a true common feeling and need as a commonly-identified member of the larger communal whole—not a project of benevolence toward the poor and disempowered “Others” who cannot be invested with the tools to fight on an equal playing field for themselves.

The motivation of the people to empower themselves as a collectively-identified whole through community organization, and working together to protect their mutual benefit enabled them to achieve literacy skills necessary to communicate and gain cross-cultural understanding, to advocate for themselves politically and, finally, to tell their own story to the world as a collective author of auto-ethnography spoken through the person of Rigoberta Menchú. Menchú identified her “self” as being intricately a part of her community at the same time that she was an individual, and that self was constantly realized and re-realized through exchanges with the society around her and her responsibility to those whom she loved. This identity politics,

discussed as “organic identity politics” by theorist Donna Haraway and a “mestiza consciousness” by Gloria Anzaldúa, allowed her to serve as an ambassador of literacy to her people and to author a multi-vocal text which speaks of a collective history, by, for, and about themselves. This consciousness also fueled the motivation of Menchú and her people to organize themselves and channel their political agency for the purpose of achieving common goals. In this way, literacy both engendered their empowerment and, cyclically, that empowerment then opened the doorway to more opportunities to become literate and empower themselves further. In other words, once this process of literacy and empowerment was sparked, it continued to feed and grow itself. But both the elements of analysis and action that Paulo Freire identifies as praxis had to be present from the beginning for this process to take place. In this way, collective identity and the struggle to survive together opened the doorway to a loop of learning, discovery and understanding that was essential to their collective empowerment.

Let Me Speak

Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domatila, a Woman of the Bolivian Mines, by Domatila Barrios de Chungara, is an auto-ethnographic text that, like *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, conveys its message of mutual identity, community organization and literacy acquisition through multi-voiced accounts of a community’s struggle for social justice. I would like to posit that a reading of *Let Me Speak* will complement and expand upon the model outlined in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, though, by adding the unique perspective of a Bolivian mining community where a history of worker organization is already in place (though far from having achieved socialist goals) yet where sexism and inequality persist in the lives of the women and children who live with their

fathers and husbands at the mines. In this way, *Let Me Speak* offers blueprints for auto-initiated community literacy projects along the lines of Gloria Anzaldúa's theories that focus specifically on becoming unified and organizing across social borders like gender in order to form the strongest possible political affinity unit with power to effect social change. Domatila focuses her testimony on the unity of her entire community: they are wives and families supporting miners and vice versa. She demonstrates the ways in which the oppression and exploitation of the miners carries through to exploitation and devaluation of the work of their families. But Domatila also asserts that the miners are not the only capable political actors with voices in the community; she and her Housewives' Committee, once they organize themselves, show that they too are empowered, politically and communicatively literate agents of change who can have a meaningful impact on the political situation of their community. Further, although sexist and classist men often attempt to divide Domatila from the men in her community by denying her agency—and, on the other hand, middle-class feminists of the 1970's inadvertently attempt to divide them by turning men into an enemy—the author continually asserts the interconnectedness of all members of her family and community and the importance of the contributions of each working together in the struggle for justice. In addition, the testimony of Domatila and her community is particularly important to those looking to follow their example of initiating community literacy projects that address inequality and bring about change by harnessing the process of analysis and action specifically through becoming involved in social justice political discourse to realize their own situation and utilizing the media to communicate their analyses and gather support.

In *Let Me Speak*, Domatila narrates her community's collective story of struggle and self-empowerment by establishing the mutual identities of families, indigenous communities, and

all poor workers and peasants through their affinities of love and mutual benefit. She tells their story of organization first as families, then of the women of the community in the formation of the Housewives' Committee, and, finally, in national and international partnerships with larger workers' unions and the poor families around the world. As organizations working together, then, these families, communities and organizations found the skills and voices with which to speak. They learned to utilize media and tactics such as radio stations, letters and strikes in order to get out their messages and empower themselves, and they also learned collectively by venturing to "talk back" and by owning their own experiences, struggles and trials as the most effective teachers of how to fight oppression and work toward justice in their communities.

Identity Politics

Domatila Barrios de Chungara begins her *testimonio* with a qualification:

I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story that I'm about to tell as something that is only personal. Because I think that my life is related to my people. What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country...I want to talk about my people. I want to testify about all the experience we've acquired...It doesn't matter what kind of paper it's put down on, but it does matter that it be useful for the working class. (15)

With this dedication, Barrios de Chungara frames her text as not just belonging to her or made up of her stories alone, but as a project for the benefit of the working class fashioned out of their own experiences. She writes as a community and as a movement, rather than as one woman alone, partly because her life is inextricably "related" and connected to the lives of the people with whom she lives and works. Their experiences are represented in her text as a wealth of accumulation told by a plurality of voices that are woven together to make up a common authorial identity. First, she stresses, it is crucial that men and women and whole families work together toward mutual goals; they must be a unit. Second, entire neighborhoods and

communities must come together in solidarity in order to support each other. Lastly, this is also true of workers' organizations and socialist groups throughout Bolivia and the world. It is by exercising this primary and fundamental solidarity of identity, recognizing mutual goals and caring for one another, and then taking actions to support each other and fight for justice together, she urges, that the liberation of all can be achieved. As a result of the mutual aid through the sharing of resources (including literacy skills) and collective political agency enacted by strikes and public dissidence such as letter writing campaigns, Barrios de Chungara's community fought successfully for their rights. In other words, it was through their ability to consciously recognize their common benefit and identify with one another that they were able to educate and empower themselves.

In one of her beginning sections, Barrios de Chungara explains the situation in which whole families are exploited by the mining corporation and the government and, on top of this, their efforts to empower themselves are undermined by the divisions of sexism. "By exploiting the miner," she says,

they don't only exploit his wife too, but there are times they even exploit the children. Because there's so much to do in the house... In spite of everything we do, there's still the idea that women don't work, because we don't contribute economically to the home... We've often come across that difficulty. (34-35)

Because "women's work" is in the home instead of in the mine, then, and does not earn a wage from the company, that work is devalued and women as workers and capable contributors to the household along with it, along with children and the elderly. Barrios de Chungara, along with other women in her community, denounces this division and devaluation and resists it by adding up the true economic value of wives' time spent working in the home in support of the miners and their families. This sequence of action exemplifies Anzaldúa's steps of awareness, reading

and truth-telling to raise socially justice consciousness. After arguing her point that whole families are in the struggle for equality together because they are all being oppressed and exploited together, rather than men more than women or children, Barrios de Chungara goes on to implore that the battle for justice must be fought together as well: “That’s why it’s so important for us revolutionaries to win that first battle in the home. And the first battle to be won is to let the woman, the man, the children participate in the struggle of the working class, so that the home can become a stronghold that the enemy can’t overcome,” (35-36). Although it is not the situation of oppression but rather their relationships with each other that creates her community’s bond of affinity and mutual identity, it *is* their mutual struggle for justice and absolute need for solidarity with one another to achieve political change that motivate a recognition and consciousness of their common benefit. In this sense, for Barrios de Chungara’s people the project of social justice achievement provides a uniquely appropriate context for community literacy education.

When Barrios de Chungara speaks of her village, Siglo XX, and the community there, including the women who would become her partners in struggle, she emphasizes the collective nature of experience and knowledge, which is power that the people own together and both identify and access through the practice of analysis and action that is their own auto-initiated community literacy project. It was the solidarity of the community of Siglo XX, she says, that “taught me how to struggle and gave me courage. Thanks to the wisdom of the people here, I was able to see injustice more clearly and this lit a fire in me which only death will put out” (61). Throughout her life and her narrative, the author continues to return to that village, her home, whenever she able to, because it is her affinity for and responsibility to her people which seems to motivate all of her actions. In describing the injustices suffered by her people there

collectively, she tells one story after another of the village households during the September Massacre, of ransacked homes and killings (97-98). But the wisdom of the people of Siglo XX, she explains, did not even allow the military to divide them and turn them upon themselves. When the village wives are questioned about their practice of giving bread to the soldier-boys who have mistreated them cruelly, and even Barrios Chungara herself asks, “‘But how can you? How can you practically say ‘thanks’ for having come to kill us like dogs?’” they answer with solidarity for their community:

“But no, senora! These are our sons! They’re like our own sons! It’s the ones at the top who give the orders, senora. It’s not these boys’ fault. And the day after tomorrow, maybe the same thing’s going to happen to my son, when he’s drafted: he’ll be sent to kill people. How can we not give them a piece of bread?”

Everyone reacted like that. And after a while, I understood them. How wise my people are! (100).

Even though the government regime had sent soldiers to massacre Barrios de Chungara’s village, there were some mothers among them who recognized the fact that all of them were of one people and did not allow a severing or division of the people to lessen their strength. Even though Barrios de Chungarra’s anger might have prevented her from seeing this, she was able to listen to their wisdom and learn from it. Barrios de Chungara then took this wisdom of the people forward into the future, to strengthen her own ability to organize the people in solidarity and guard against without the possibility that they would become divided.

Barrios de Chungara also carries her sense of solidarity, responsibility and identity outward to apply them to all poor workers who must struggle together to have their voices heard and fight against injustice. Speaking of political organization, she says, “No one can get anywhere if they aren’t in tight with the people. That’s the most important thing. We mustn’t ever forget the working class, the peasants, all of us, are the two basic pillars that socialism’s going to be built on, right?” (167). For Barrios de Chungara, then, any political organization

must primarily have affiliation with and affinity for the working class in order to struggle for and with them. This is what a new and just order must be built upon. For, she says:

My people are not struggling for a small victory, for a small wage increase here, a small answer there. No. My people are preparing themselves to get capitalism out of their country forever, and its domestic and foreign servants, too. My people are struggling to reach socialism. (230)

It is in solidarity with all oppressed and exploited peoples for whom true change and victory mean an overthrow of the unjust hierarchical system that Barrios de Chungara and her people must work and join hands for a common cause. They must recognize their common identity, as individuals and as members of a community, in order to most effectively pursue the mutual benefit of all for whom respect, equality and social justice are valued above all.

Political Organization and Protest

After recognizing their affinity for one another as families, communities, and workers' unions supported equally by both women and men, Barrios de Chungara's people are better prepared to organize themselves into groups that can take political actions in order to defend their rights and their livelihoods. The Housewives' Committee that she helped organize, participated in and served for many years as a leader of formed themselves as a faction that could fight alongside the men of the workers' unions for the health and integrity of whole families and communities. They saw their roles as women in the community as integral in their contributions to the struggle toward socialism, and their efforts coincided with those of the male workers', even as they had to fight doubly hard as women to have those efforts recognized or valued in a sexist environment.

Because striking was the workers' most effective tactic, according to Barrios de Chungara, the Housewives supported men on strike as well as organizing strikes of protest

within their group. They also gave voice to the workers' struggle throughout Bolivia and eventually the world in letters, on the radio and in political discourse. By organizing their actions in support of themselves and their communities without exception, Barrios de Chungara's affinity group exercised solidarity that sets an example of Gloria Anzaldúa's idea of *mestiza* consciousness that reaches toward the path to *conocimiento* by building bridges of understanding between themselves and other groups and communities and then using the understanding gained in those exchanges to order to raise consciousness and affect change in their society and the world.

Barrios de Chungara explains that the motivation of the Housewife's Committee was the wives' commonly felt responsibility to do something as members of a community whose mutual benefit depended on their actions. "The mine workers' wives organized a committee in Siglo XX during that very difficult period of Paz Estensoro," she explains. "Seeing all the struggles the people were involved in, they couldn't stay on the sidelines" (71). Rather than accepting a passive "women's" role that sexism their society might otherwise have relegated them to in the home, they chose to empower themselves with agency in the service of their families and their people:

At the beginning we had the mentality they'd [men] taught us, that women are made for the home, to take care of the children and to cook, and that they aren't capable of assimilating other things, of a social, union, or political nature, for example. But necessity made us organize. We suffered a lot doing it, but today the miners have one more ally...the Housewives' Committee, the organization that arose first in Siglo XX and now exists in other nationalized mines. (71)

Because of their sense of commitment and mutual responsibility to the miners, other women and their families, political activism became an imperative for them, even motivating them enough to transgress the gender roles they had internalized and to undergo suffering and

sacrifice in their pursuit of social justice. They chose to organize for the good of their people even though, as Barrios de Chungara explains in her narration of the many stories of the sexism and oppression that they went through: “In La Paz the women were treated badly and they [the government] even tried to put them in jail and abuse them. Each one of the women would return completely demoralized,” (72). Here, Barrios de Chungara is explaining the way in which, when “each one” of the women traveled to protest separately, she would be utterly defeated. But, rather than causing them to give up, this moral defeat and their strong motivation to achieve justice caused them to join together and organize themselves in order to continue the struggle. ““If instead of going on like that, each one on her own,”” she remembers the women saying collectively, ““we all got together and went to claim our rights in La Paz, what would happen? Maybe we would all take care of each other and gets better results”” (72). So the Housewives’ Committee was formed in 1961, in order for these empowered women to have a way to work together for the values that it was their personal, familial and communal mission to protect.

After their formation as a political group, the committee began to make political demands and participate in strikes and action in support of and in solidarity with their husbands, families and communities. Although they almost always had to act in a climate of acute sexism, the women persisted in their demands. Again, Barrios de Chungara uses the many voices and stories of the women with whom she worked in order to tell the story of their struggles:

The compañeras who were in La Paz went back to the place they’d been thrown out of and declared a hunger strike...Fortunately, the factory workers immediately supported the women...And they sent out a document in which they asked for freedom for their compañeros, payment of the workers’ wages, stock for the grocery stores, and medicines for the hospitals...They were joined by university students, factory workers, and even women from the other mines began to arrive, in solidarity with the compañeras.

The government had to accept their demands so that the strike wouldn’t get any bigger, and the housewives won. (72-73)

Once the Housewives' Committee began to take action, as is evidenced in the above passage, other groups did begin to join in their support as well, including those mine workers from other communities. Their actions also gained widespread attention, resulting in broader solidarity from groups across Bolivia and Latin America and the government's meeting some of their demands—as well as, in many cases, tightened reigns of oppression, torture, displacement and even death for the wives and their families.

Along with documents issued as demands and terms for their political actions, the Housewives' Committee also participated in the organization of the community by communicating via radio, distributing letters and discussing their testimony in public forums, including the publication of Barrios de Chungara's *Let Me Speak*. The practices of authorship, like their strikes, arose out of the motivation of mutual aid and were composed of the voices, stories and political concerns of them all collectively:

The women were strong and really wanted to work, so they didn't give up. Of course, they wept with rage and a sense of impotence, but they went right ahead. They got a hold of a typewriter and they began to write. They sent out communiqués of support for the workers and had them read on the miner's radio stations, stating their point of view... They sent letters to the president and his ministers... They sent letters to COMIBOL, to the Mine Workers' Federation... They really worked a lot. (74-75).

The women's efforts on behalf of their community utilized multiple forms of media and also showed literacy of these forms acquired at the behest and because of the immediacy of their situation of organization and struggle.

Later, in 1974, Barrios de Chungara was asked to speak as a leader of the Housewives' Committee for a United Nations Tribunal in Mexico in honor of International Women's Year. In this act, as well, Chungara showed both a powerful awareness of the potential potency of her discourse and an ability to use her opportunity in order to voice the concerns of her people by

telling the stories of their experiences. “I worked up the courage to tell them,” she says, “. . . because that was my obligation. And I stated my ideas so that everyone in the world could hear us, through the Tribunal,” (201). Barrios de Chungara recognizes, much as Gloria Anzaldúa does in her “path to *conocimiento*,” that analysis of a situation leads to awareness which, when spread, can lead to a liberating raising of consciousness. Her identification with and responsibility to her community motivated her to speak on behalf of their mutual interests, above all purely personal concerns—even avoiding risk to her own safety and that of her children. She recognizes the fact that any break in solidarity undermines the health of her entire community and all of its individual members:

I think I fulfilled the mission that the companeras and companeros from Siglo XX gave me. . . We made everyone who was represented there aware of my country. . . But despite all the comfort I found in Mexico, I never had the desire to stay and have all that, as long as the people in Bolivia are suffering so much. . . Of course, I dream of the day when I’ll have all of those comforts. . . but I want it for everyone, for all my people. I don’t want it for me alone. (204-206)

So Barrios de Chungara and the Housewives’ Committee’s efforts on behalf of their people, because they were on behalf of themselves and the health of the entire community in a holistic sense, were strengthened by motivation rather than corrupted by division and suffering. It was their identification with and love for her people, as well, that caused the Housewives to take political actions, including literate ones, and caused Barrios de Chungara to write her testimony. In the fashion of Paulo Freire’s description of praxis, then, this motivation to act was also a motivation to educate themselves, to analyze their situation and to teach others about its injustices. In the last section, I will turn my attention to the power of this motivation that Barrios de Chungara and her community harnessed to self-educate and acquire literacy to read and participate in a discourse of social justice in Bolivia.

Community Education and Literacy for Social Justice

Like Rigoberta Menchú, Domatila Barrios de Chungara documents the ways in which she identifies with her community along lines that follow much the same shape as the organic metaphor for identity politics and mestiza consciousness sketched by feminist theorists like Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa, and she acts with her community on the basis of that shared identity in pursuit of mutual benefit and justice. In order to do this, Barrios de Chungara and her people, and particularly the Housewives' Committee, must find a way to educate themselves to be literate with regard to the means and methods of the pursuit of social justice. Part of these skills include becoming speakers and composers of an effective discourse in order for their voice to reach out among themselves and to other communities to create awareness and achieve political agency.

In Barrios de Chungara's testimony, acquisition of literacy of social justice discourse becomes a central way that her community is able to empower themselves and fight for justice. Barrios de Chungara and her organization developed a powerful sense of motivation and an effective pedagogic framework because they recognized their community's immediate and urgent needs, as well as the important role that education could play in their struggle for justice. She tells the story of how, in order to pursue these goals, they struggled collaboratively to develop the skills that were needed to reach specific justice-driven ends, such as radio production, letter writing and strong argument design. And, in many cases, their efforts to develop effective discourse takes the shape of dialogues within which they learned to analyze and critique their political situation by "talking back" to those whose arguments were challenging their own experience.

In several passages, Barrios de Chungara iterates the importance of the people educating themselves as a measure of preparation for their responsibilities to the community and assurance that they will be able to do the work that is necessary to protect it. After a revolution in which a government was instated that was presumably on the side of the people, there was a power grab by aristocrats and upper class people who betrayed the working class people before long. Barrios de Chungara explains the imperative to self-educate this lesson brought with it:

“This happened because we’d always been taught the idea that only someone who has studied, who has money, and who’s gone to the university can govern a country. They don’t educate us, and they look down on the people, so we weren’t prepared to take power ourselves, despite the fact that, *yes*, we had made the revolution... That’s brought us to the conclusion that we, the people, have to prepare ourselves in order to reach power.” (50-51)

The conclusion of the community was a realization that only someone who shares working class values and concerns is truly able to lead for and in solidarity with the vast majority of uneducated people whose life is the hardest, so the working class must educate among themselves and equip themselves with the skills to lead.

Later, after Barrios de Chungara has learned much as a leader and also suffered greatly, being tortured and abused in prison, it is her father who reiterates this imperative as a life-long struggle to keep learning in order to serve the people best:

“One day this government will be toppled, it’s not eternal... But you’ve got to prepare for that, you can’t go back the way you are now. You’ve got to learn more. You’ve got to live up to the trust that the people have placed in you. Being a leader doesn’t only mean accepting a responsibility. You’ve got to prepare yourself, daughter.” (159)

Barrios de Chungara’s father recognizes here that preparation and education are very real requirements if his daughter and their people are going to succeed in their struggle together.

When he says that she can’t just accept the responsibility, also, he implies his belief that a person is not simply able to accomplish all that he or she might need to accomplish in life without the

benefit of education—but that, in order to lead themselves, the people must learn to be literate in the practices and discourse that will be required of them in the struggle for justice.

In order to educate themselves through relevant means rather than pursuing a formal education that might estrange them from the people, Barrios de Chungara describes the ways in which the community's best teacher and teaching tool was their own experience of working class life and the engagement in actions that could teach by necessity what practices and skills were essential to defend themselves, along with reading and hearing the testimonies of others and their struggles and actions. "When you're small," she says, "it's hard to live in poverty with all kinds of problems. But that developed something strong in us: a great sensitivity, a great desire to help all the people," (54). This sensitivity and desire result from an affinity with the community and are two of the elements of education that she identifies as foundational to the education of a people's leader. Throughout life, then, authentic experience and relationships with each other continue to teach Barrios de Chungara and her community what they need to know to keep moving forward in their education and their respect for each other:

And how many things have been worked out by the people through their own experience! Every day we see things that we can learn from the people. And that's why I think that if we'd only stop and look at each step—even the steps that the most humble citizen takes—we'd see great intelligence, great wisdom. I think it's very important to point this out and to look carefully at the people's work to find out what makes them what they are, so we can appreciate their values. (71)

Appreciation of each other's values is one of the most important parts, according to Barrios de Chungara, of the people's ability to learn from one another and develop a consciousness of continued solidarity. There are wisdom and intelligence already within the people; they must learn to understand, observe and dialogue with each other in order to "work out" solutions to and practices to address their problems together. "With the experience I've had in Los Yungas,

thinking over everything that I'd lived before in Siglo XX and that I'd suffered in prison," she explains, "from all of those things I'd become aware, I'd acquired a political consciousness" (163). This political consciousness, the kind of awareness that both Haraway and Anzaldúa speak of as goal of education, was the result of Barrios de Chungara's engagement with her community as fully-invested member with a willingness and ability to absorb the knowledge of wisdom of her people and grow herself from analysis of all of their struggles, the ability to interpret or analyze on the road toward *conocimiento* outlined by those theorists as well. It was the ability to see the affinity and mutual benefit between the members of her community and also the broader workers' movement, and it grew out of both her lived experience of the realities of life and oppression and the critical examination that experience (her own and others') for the purpose of finding a way to survive. "So I'd already had a certain amount of preparation," reflects Barrios de Chungara, "For me it was the fruit of the people's experience, of my own experience, of the few books I've been able to read...Our development must come from our own clarity and awareness" (163).

As an integral part of the education of her people, then, Barrios de Chungara identifies the need to develop a literacy of social justice discourse, an ability to read and analyze texts, stories, testimonies and also to author them in the service of creating awareness of the experiences and struggles of the community. She also identifies the path to developing these skills as one of action and dialogue within the community:

It's possible that there've been errors, that without a real reason or cause the workers have been hurt. I think that this has happened mostly because of lack of experience. When someone who hasn't lived, who hasn't known, wants to go along a new road, they always have to fall a few times and then pick themselves up again. That's why we need to learn from experience, either from our own history, from the struggles which took place before in Bolivia, or from the experience of other peoples.

And there should be testimony. That's been our mistake, not to write down everything that happens. Very little has been set down in writing. Like the testimonies that we had in the union, or on the miners' radio stations, like for example recordings; they were taken or destroyed by the army. And all of that would have been so useful to us, even just to think about what we were doing and criticize it, you know?" (40)

In order to think about and criticize their experiences, Barrios de Chungara suggests here, the people must record their stories, and they must reflect upon and analyze those stories in order to learn from them. It is by engaging in this practice of literacy that her people can educate themselves about what has been done in the past and what can be accomplished in the future in order to fight for social justice. In this way, for Barrios de Chungara, the process of learning must be both reciprocal and on-going, involving writing to learn to write and understand as well as reading the stories of others in order to learn to analyze and understand as well. "I saw that the people's experience is the best schooling there is," she says, speaking of her participation in the International Women's Tribunal. "We Latin American women issued a document about the way we see the role of women in underdeveloped countries, with everything we felt was important And then the press published it" (205). In this way, the authorship of Barrios de Chungara and her peers, at the same time that they were learning to express their ideas to the Tribunal, made it possible for others around the world to read and understand the testimony of their experiences.

In another case, Barrios de Chungara learned to speak out publicly, motivated by her desire to help her *compañera*, as she was prompted by the immediate need to do so:

I turned around and saw a woman who was there with her little children, crying because they'd killed her husband...So I stood up and began to speak. And I denounced everything that had happened. I explained our whole problem...How the repression was killing us. And I spoke of all the things I'd seen...And I told them the whole world must find out about our situation. (102)

Eventually, the strength of her words began to attract attention; both from her fellows and from the government and military forces who were aligned against them. But the ability to compose

effective and poignant letters, communiqués and documents was essential to that attention which was a vital tool against the cloaking of truth and promotion of ignorance. As Barrios de Chungara's compañero tells her, “‘Señora, all the people are on your side. Here, take these.’ And he gave me a whole bunch of papers. . . . And there was my letter in lots of copies. . . . Some were leaflets from the Communist party, others from the university. . . . All of them had reproduced my letter” (132). The reproduction of this letter was both a moment of awakening for Barrios de Chungara toward the awareness that her words could carry much weight in the social justice struggle and an imperative to learn to make them as clear and effective as possible as well as an instrument of change that helped bring about the support of organizations across Bolivia (and eventually the world).

As Barrios de Chungara's words attracted support from and for her community and contributed to their ability to teach themselves, they were also met with the sexist, classist and racist arguments of those in power who wished to suppress them. At these times, though, the community's ability to interpret and criticize these arguments worked as a method for teaching them how to fine-tune their own discourse and prepare it for a worldwide audience. Barrios de Chungara's harsh treatment in prison prompted her to examine the situation of her people based on heuristics that were aimed at the roots of injustice. She explains that they beat and ridicule *her*, a mother and defender of her people “for being an extremist And I began to ask myself: ‘What's a socialist country? How are problems solved there? How do people live there?’ And then I began to analyze: ‘What have I done? What do I want? What do I think? Why am I here?’ I only asked for justice for the people. . . .” (229). Barrios de Chungara asked herself these questions and then made it her work, as a leader responsible to tell the true experience of her people, to be able to answer them honestly, clearly, and in a way that kept the values of the

people in the foreground of discussion at all time. In this way, she honed her discourse. By the times she was at the Women's Tribunal in Mexico, she was able to answer those middle class women who "tried to distract the Tribunal with problems that weren't basic. So we had to let the people know what was fundamental for us in all of that" (200). Once again, it was the motivation of her responsibility to her people, as one of them, that compelled her to speak out and inform that world about the situation of injustice that they were suffering, in order so that her words might make a difference for them all and aid in the mutual struggle toward well-being. "I worked up the courage to tell them [the Tribunal] about the problems that were being discussed there [in Bolivia]. Because that was my obligation. And I stated my ideas so that everyone in the world could hear us, through the Tribunal" (201).

Domatila Barrios de Chungara was given a voice by her people, and the voice that she gave back on behalf of them was the product of her education as a member of the mine workers' community, a woman, a mother, and leader for whom a responsibility to defend her people came before all else, including her individual safety or comfort. Within her testimonial, her consciousness as a member of her community begins as a subject inextricably identified with as one of and one with her people, and her commitment to unity and solidarity with them causes her feeling of mutual responsibility for them, even as she must counter the potential divisiveness of sexism, racism and classism among them. Their mutual struggles, rather than dividing them and causing defeat, motivate Barrios de Chungara and her Housewives' Committee, along with other workers' organizations, to organize themselves so that they might utilize their unity in order to empower themselves to take up the fight for social justice. In order to do this, as well, they recognize that they must educate themselves to be prepared for the challenges that lie ahead. The

most effective way to educate themselves, then, was to utilize and tap into the richness of experiences of their community and bring about a literacy of social justice discourse through exchange of writing testimonies, reading and analyzing these stories, and composing their own publications that promote awareness of social justice issues and a consciousness of working class values to a local as well as a global audience.

Conclusion

“Everything I know and am I owe to the people. And also the courage they’ve inspired in me.”
Domatila Barrios de Chungara, *Let Me Speak* (71)

In the formation of their testimonial texts as an “act of identity formation which is simultaneously personal and collective,” Rigoberta Menchú and Domatila Barrios de Chungara engender themselves as subjects through a multiplicity of voices at the same time that they illustrate the motivation to act politically on the behalf of the mutual benefit shared by their communities and, in turn, by all for whom the values of respect, equality, and human rights and humane living conditions are the foundations for meaningful social action (Yudice 15). Because of their motivation to mutual aid, the authors’ narratives are driven by a strong, clear imperative to serve as testimonial texts that can work to bring about reflection and awareness among their own people as well as the rest of the world and affect social change.

In order for their publications, speech and discourse to take on the most potency possible in the service of empowering their people, with whom they identify as partners in action, both authors and their communities are bound to educate themselves and become literate within the discourses of power and social justice that they need to participate meaningfully in. Their methods for learning (and teaching themselves reciprocally through service as literacy

ambassadors to each other) are exemplary of the politics, motivations and methodology proposed by feminist composition and identity politics theorists and are also exemplary materials out of which models can be constructed for community service learning projects grounded in an authentic desire to learn based on identification of shared values and mutual benefit, self-motivation to accomplish real goals with immediate results, the utilization of existing skills and resources to accomplish these goals and the leadership of learning ambassadors. Rather than solely being guided by or guiding each other through this process, each individual in the *testimonios* is portrayed, through his or her own stories, as both a teacher and a student—all as active participants in a joint project in which they are all invested and for which reason they must all learn, as well, to have mutual respect for one another. As ambassadors they act with each other on behalf of one another, and the lessons they teach are gleaned from the community itself as well as interaction and dialog with outside discourse.

I have found that, by examining these communities' experiences and narratives as possible models for identity politics, organization, engagement and education, we writers and teachers interested in engaging ourselves in pedagogical projects that best serve the goals of social justice struggle in our communities can learn a great deal. Whether we are motivated to act and identify with one another by means of urgent necessity and then we embark on the path to organic identity politics because we must do so in order to take action together, like Menchú and Barrios de Chungara, or we engage in community literacy projects that carry very real import to student and community life—but that may require us to spend extra time at the outset in reflective discussion to identify how each individual's interest, skill set and goals can be honored to serve mutual benefits—the educational and social value of literacy service seem to be located in the cooperatively initiated combination of meaningful consciousness-raising reflection and

meaningful active experience that have noticeable effects on what students identify themselves to matter in their own lives.

When we identify the mutual goals of equality and justice within our communities as teachers and as students, we can begin to learn and to act as non-hierarchical literacy ambassadors on behalf of the health and well-being of the whole of us as well as the greater good of each of us as individuals, and those lessons and actions will be motivated by an authentic will to serve ourselves mutually. In this mutual motivation to social justice service, we, like Menchú and Barrios de Chungara and their communities, will find ourselves acquiring and applying skills alongside one another according to a pedagogy of social justice theory, practical awareness and dialogue between these and among each other that puts all of our well-being and pragmatic educational needs first.

Service Learning for Social Justice in L1.5 and L2 Classrooms:
Synergizing Communal and Pedagogical Goals

Introduction

As numerous students in 21st century classrooms confront issues such as economic inequality, uneven access to education and health services, and potentially violent or unsafe living conditions, they face an oppressive reality that isn't accounted for in many traditional academic settings. Traditional schools assume that resources and status are uniformly available to those students who work hard and do well, and they likewise assume that students accept this model of achievement standards and institutional expectations. These assumptions, however, can create a gap between institutional goals and those of the students and communities that they serve, particularly when the latter's real-life circumstances include alternate modes of discourse and methods of creating change or getting ahead that are more functional than academic ones. For instance, in at-risk or low-income communities in which standard academic English is not often spoken and sticking with your loved ones, rather than leaving them to go to school, is seen as a survival tactic, academic priorities may not be as highly valued. Writing classrooms are particularly susceptible to the fallout of this gap in the form of less-than-average literacy skills; low performance on essays and written examinations; and, at times, drastically lowered motivation to learn to write and communicate effectively in academia.

As a possible beginning answer to these problems, as well as to a pressing call to academic engagement in community literacy work, service learning has been identified as one of the most hopeful fields of pedagogical possibility. Indeed, experienced compositionists like Linda Flower and Bruce Hertzberg have supported service learning in part because of its potential to combine educators' pedagogical and activist goals in a joint project. Instructors who

are looking for ways to motivate otherwise disinterested or disenfranchised students with authentic, “real-life” calls to composition and literacy development see service learning as a mode of bringing the outside world into the classroom. At the same time, instructors looking to incorporate the concerns of social justice and critical pedagogy into their classrooms see service learning in composition as a way of bringing political consciousness to their instruction and of creating authentic opportunities for analytical composition by taking the classroom out into the community.

As an instructor and a writing project facilitator, I have had the opportunity to witness this gap and have grown to feel frustrated with it myself, even within the frameworks of a service writing project which was designed to motivate students and benefit the community-at-large. Last year during the spring and summer, I worked with my graduate advisor on a community service writing project called Oregon State Writing Liaison (OWL). We set up the OWL Project as a kind of peer review exchange, where local high school English students submitted their assigned essays to a facilitator (me), and these documents were distributed to certain sections of the university’s first-year Writing 121 classes to review and comment on with attention to key elements of composition. As a pilot project, OWL’s premise was simply to give college composition students an authentic, real-world context to motivate meaningful engagement with both the community and with writing “with a purpose”—the purpose being to address the needs of high school student writing in a helpful way. Further, the project proposed to achieve these ends by increasing first-year students’ familiarity with varying audience perspectives, including reasons for what might otherwise be considered arbitrary rules for writing. In turn, the high school students stood to benefit from the extra attention that they received from college-level peers. In particular, the college students were able to give them valuable advice and expose them

to college approaches to writing. The reciprocal nature of the setup seemed carefully worked out and evident, and it was manageable in scope (even though there was still more coordination required and more complications in paper shuffling and time management arose than anticipated). That is why it was particularly disheartening to see, in student response after student response, a marked lack of engagement with the project's community goals, as well as a lack of appreciation for it as a service. The real motivation still didn't seem to have been all that we had thought it could be; the students hadn't adopted the project as their own in the way that we'd hoped.

It's true that instructors still have many questions about how service learning might be employed most effectively, both as an instructional tool in composition classrooms and as a catalyst for progressive social action. In which situations is service learning most appropriate, and what are some of the possible pitfalls to look out for? When is it not effective pedagogically, and when may it even become damaging to the goals of egalitarianism and community justice? And, once the benefits of service learning have been credibly established with the field of composition and rhetoric, what are some of the most ethically viable and pedagogically productive scenarios that instructors can create and facilitate for community writing projects? Some researchers (myself included) have also begun to wonder: if students see themselves as invested members of the communities they are promoting literacy within and writing collaboratively with, can the ideas of "community service" and "self service" in language education be collapsed so that at-risk students can become invested in standard written English by being guided through projects that allow them to start making change in their own lives, homes and neighborhoods?

As a writing and English teacher devoted to eliminating social inequality and oppression in the communities where I live, I believe that the goals of social justice pursued by community service project facilitators and those of effective literacy education pursued by language and composition teachers are, or should be, essentially the same. The purpose of education should be to empower individuals with the skills to create better, healthier societies for themselves through the practices of communication, understanding and action. In the following article, I would like to propose that literacy projects, particularly those conducted in “at-risk” communities where social injustices are prevalent (and literacy of academic and political languages is commonly at L1.5 or L2—not completely native-speaker—levels), are effective means of helping these communities to empower themselves. Further, not only is literacy education particularly compatible with community service in these situations because of a need for critical social analyses and awareness campaigns in at-risk communities, but it can also be managed by instructors to work toward the mutual benefit of teachers and students of composition together as they aid their own communities’ growth and educational development. For community service writing to truly work in both educational circumstances where there is evident immediate need for action to combat oppression and in those (such as middle class suburbs, perhaps) where the call to service and community must be the product of more reflection, there is an important caveat. For authentic motivation and self-selection to occur, students and their communities must be empowered to recognize and address their own needs. These needs and the collective consciousness necessary to take on literacy projects holistically as a community become the catalyst that begins positive and collaborative processes of learning. And this consciousness can develop because of immediate, violent pressure for grassroots community actions to fight oppression, or, preferably, because of proactive instructors and community members who wish

to see change and growth happen before the breaking point. For community consciousness about mutual goals to be a catalyst for planned projects, though, these projects must be initiated, facilitated, and tailored to meet the needs of specific contexts and this work must be done on non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal ethical terms that position individuals as teachers, students, and literacy ambassadors to each other on the basis of their personal bases of knowledge and their practical ability to help themselves, their families and their communities.

As both a teacher and a social justice activist in under-privileged indigenous communities in Latin America and in U.S. classrooms, I have come to appreciate the work of community service education projects that have been particularly successful at doing just that—not only because of the odds stacked against these learners and teachers in extreme cases of poverty, violence, and literacy acquisition under duress, but also, I believe, because these extreme circumstances made their successful pursuit of literacy skills and social justice politics especially essential in the struggle for survival. In the following sections, I will argue that answers to many of the current questions about service learning can be considered by examining some of the most successful records of literacy service projects, especially those that have come about as a result of real, immediate social need, have had extreme stakes, and have been initiated by communities to empower themselves and bring about significant social justice and educational impacts. A particularly useful but underestimated area is indigenous community organization and testimonials. Literacy education became imperative in some Latin American regions where analytical and composition-skill acquisition was a “do-or-die” collective learning mission of extreme mutual importance. In these communities, individuals rose to contribute their work and utilize their skills and resources in order to achieve common goals together, through a synergistic and non-hierarchical organizational structure. In other words, they realized their mutual benefit

collectively and then self-selected to achieve the greatest possible learning and teaching outcomes together, for the purpose of political empowerment. I have found that a close examination of these most urgent and necessary literacy education cases yield rules for ethical and effective project facilitation. These rules or principles can be applied equally to situations where the call to action may be less evident—but is no less real—as long as the key element of community consciousness and recognition of mutual goals are the foundations of action. What's more, educational resources may include much more ready access to literacy tools in these “less dire” cases, and these benefits increase potential for utilizing synergy to achieve literacy and political empowerment goals—rather than eliminating the need to do so. Through careful analysis of these Latin American testimonials, along with current research in composition and literacy service learning, I believe that we can assemble fundamental lessons for building projects that maximize this synergy. Specifically, non-hierarchical, cultivated awareness of the mutual, tangible benefits of collective literacy and education must motivate participation in consciousness-raising, justice advocacy, and community service practices. Further, once this immediate motivation has been established, all community members, including teachers and students, must engage in an on-going process of action and reflection. This process will encourage them to continually self-select their roles and project goals and prepare them to be literacy ambassadors to one another and to reach out in dialogue with all players in their cultural “contact zones.”

By analyzing the most recent reports of service learning literacy projects and assessing their strengths and weaknesses, I also hope to shed light on some of the ways that composition instructors might begin to practice “ethical community literacy education” in ways that meet needs on a case-by-case basis in order to enrich their own pedagogies’ capacities for effective

service. In basic writing, L 1.5 and L.2 college classrooms, students are being asked to make great gains in their critical thinking as well as writing, both because they are entering the professional realm and because they have sub-standard academic English language skills. Often, they are coming from other language or discursive backgrounds than speakers of Standard Written English, and institutions are asking them to synthesize and learn a large variety of literacy and language skills at the same time. Composition and literacy service projects can serve to empower these students by boosting their literacy and writing skills by tapping into the abilities, motivators, and real-life literacy demands that are pre-existing for them. Likewise, they also serve the community at large by engaging students as literacy ambassadors who can use writing and language projects to further the goals of mutual aid, community health and egalitarian social justice by encouraging and participating in political discourse in order to effect change.

In the next sections, I will explore the possibilities for service learning as a pedagogical tool that helps students to make gains in literacy skills while also developing themselves as civic leaders who can draw on their own experiences and lives in order to empower themselves and those they care about as community members. I'll first spend some time reviewing the history of the service learning movement and its philosophies, especially as they pertain to composition and community literacy projects. Next, I'll analyze recent composition service research and project reports in order to identify some of their key findings about essential elements that should be included in service writing education. Finally, I'll compare my own experience as a community literacy facilitator and the OWL project with these essential elements, and I'll bring in some new perspectives on how effective projects can be initiated and structured based on the narratives of collective literacy acquisition written by indigenous communities struggling to gain skills in

order to fight for survival. By synthesizing lessons learned in these narratives and other writing service programs, I will then draw suggestions for how composition and language instructors can best utilize service learning literacy projects to meet the needs of students and communities.

John Dewey, Community Literacy Narratives and Service Learning from Volunteerism to Socialist Cultural Critique

In order to better understand the possible contributions of service learning to writing or language education and social justice progress in the form of community literacy projects, it is necessary to consider some of its established pedagogical benefits, and challenging aspects as well as key characteristics of successful projects. Traditional philosophies or ideological systems present in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries form the historical roots of service learning for the composition classroom. The altruistic ideology of volunteerism, John Dewey's pragmatism and community literacy projects sometimes accompanied by literacy narratives have all contributed to the rise of service learning pedagogies that have become increasingly popular in classrooms of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. By examining distinct threads in service learning thought, instructors can begin to make sense of the elements that they find most pedagogically and socially viable in terms of classroom and community politics in their particular situations. As cognitivist compositionist-turned service learning composition scholar Linda Flower has observed: "To avoid repetition of history, this ethic [of service learning] will need a spirit of inquiry that not only can acknowledge some deep-running differences in how people define that problems and goals on which a collaboration is based but can embrace the difficulties of entering a cultural contact zone" (96).

The ideology of volunteerism, which Flower identifies as the frameworks for some of the logical bases of service projects, originates in a kind of “do-gooder” mentality that maintains hierarchies between educators (teachers) or educated (students) and the communities that they are helping. This rationale can also be thought of, according to Flower, as a kind of “missionary” logic (97). Embedded within its ways of relating classrooms to communities, there is a danger of reproducing unequal power relationships within literacy practices. “Literacy work waves the cultural missionary banner,” she suggests, “when it reduces reading and writing to narrowly school-based skills...or concentrates on replacing community languages, such as black English vernacular, with standard written English” (97). Another danger comes from the logical thread of “technical expertise,” which may create hierarchies between the expert vs. the amateur (98). For instance:

When literacy tutors . . . build a relationship based primarily on their educated expertise and the transmission of school-based reading and writing skills, they are not likely to confront larger problems, such as how to use these cultural tools for intercultural purposes or how to judge when a hybrid discourse, integrating the literate practices of universities and communities, would be more effective. (99)

In other words, altruistic or volunteerist logical bases for scholarly community engagement do not adequately encourage the kind of political and cultural awareness that is essential in determining and interpreting the political and pedagogical effects of community literacy projects on whole communities.

John Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy of education is another logical thread that Flower identifies as influential to service learning projects in composition. In his 1915 book *The School and Society*, the philosopher describes his pragmatic views in the context of the educational climate of the day:

Where the school work consists in simply learning lessons, mutual assistance, instead of being the most natural form of cooperation and association, becomes a clandestine effort to relieve one's neighbor of his proper duties. Where active work is going on all this is changed. Helping others. . . is simply an aid in setting free the powers and furthering the impulse of the one helped. . . The school life organizes itself on a social basis. (29-30)

In a very real way, then, according to Dewey, the motivation for cooperation and collaboration within communities of learning, which is a natural social organizing force based on group affinity and mutual goals, is thwarted by traditional competitive classroom environments, while it is encouraged by joint projects where successes are shared. The idea of the shared success as a motivation to learn asks learners to work together to find the very best methods for achieving their goals, and learning and academic growth take place on a kind of very real and immediate "as-needed basis." Flower calls this "The Logic of Prophetic Pragmatism and Problem Solving." She takes cues from philosopher Cornell West in order to answer the question of what should guide instructors' efforts toward service learning in lieu of an over-arching pedagogical dogma. She suggests that the answer is to place concerns for effectiveness and results in the foreground and to follow the lead of a "courageous vulnerability to our own uncertainty" (West qtd. in Flower 101). Flower suggests that this uncertainty-accepting logic of inquiry is disposed to deal with issues more honestly and appropriately than more generalizing logics or ideologies and, as such, is an ethical foundation that can motivate community-university projects with both sides as mutual partners collaborating to solve common problems in unique, context-specific and difference-appropriate ways (101).

If service learning composition program coordinators are searching for effective models for how to initiate and administer projects, it is essential that these models be constructed out of methods that have been shown to coincide with ethical, non-hierarchical and empowering principles of pedagogy and educational organization and to produce successful results as

authentic, motivational causes to which students can attach personally and that they can get on board with in a real and meaningful way. I believe that in order to effectively conduct a historical survey of records that can be taken into account to inform possible models of successful service learning programs, it is also relevant to take into account a tradition of communities collaboratively working to undertake the task of learning within their own self-initiated community literacy projects in order to accomplish certain mutual goals. In any community (i.e. an interconnected group of individuals with a relationship to one another and some form of common identity), there is necessarily a shared quality of health and wellness at stake for all. This is a principle of social justice discourse and egalitarian identity politics explained by feminist theorists like Donna Haraway and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others.

Current Scholarly Debates about Service Learning Writing Projects: Ethics and Effectiveness

In order to reconstruct a thorough history of the scholarly conversation that situates today's composition instructors at the helm of exciting possibilities for ethical service learning practices, I will now survey some of the most recent service reports that compositionists have produced, along with their findings. The works of composition instructors such as Thomas Deans and Bruce Hertzberg, among others, present a set of topics in community service composition that speak to the pedagogical dynamics and social politics of service writing projects in classrooms and in communities. Particularly, they agree that the dynamics of composition service learning projects must be changed to reflect more non-hierarchical educational orders in which students are encouraged to exercise more agency in choosing their own projects goals as well as their own roles as service facilitators or ambassadors. Non-hierarchical dynamics such

as that created by Linda Flower's "roundtable" model in which educational and server/served role switching continually occurs can foster the essential elements of effective service writing projects. Researchers and project coordinators have identified these key elements as, first and foremost, motivation and authenticity of stake in writing classroom projects and real-life applicability for students and communities as they choose their own projects and goals, positive effects through participation a for basic writers (confidence-building), and extensive pre-, during- and post-project processes of critical analyses and reflection to accompany this active participation.

According to service learning scholar Margaret Himley, among others, hierarchical learning situations in which students, communities and educational institutions are not all on a level playing field constitute a main contributor to unsuccessful or non-meaningful projects. Further, the question of how to re-frame these situations is a key to creating effective and ethical project dynamics. Himley also says that reflective consciousness and awareness of the politics of service can help to counter the circumstances in which hierarchies and socio-economic injustice are already built into potential sites of community service learning within ideologies of volunteerism or meritocracy. As she points out in "Facing (Up To) 'The Stranger' in Community Service Learning," theories elucidating the politics of the "Other" in feminist ethnography and post-colonialism can be applied to composition service projects (and must be) in order to avoid reproducing unjust separations between students and instructors and communities. She mentions that, at times, cases of student non-engagement or resistance have presented large barriers to collaboration with communities. When students don't see the projects they are asked to undertake as "their own,"—when they aren't relevant immediately to their lives, I would argue— or when students go to work in communities that they see as "disadvantaged" or in some way

underneath them personally, they are at risk of labeling those help-receiving “others” as less capable than themselves or irrelevant to their lives. The same danger applies to instructor-student relationships in which instructors see students and their communities as coming from different worlds or having a different set of goals and values than the instructors’ own. “By explicating the immediate and broader relations of power that structure these ‘stranger encounters,’ we are more likely to produce the kind of agitated pedagogy that creates opportunities for progressive practices and effects,” contributes Himley (416). Project facilitators can help to ensure that the benefits of community service composition are realized by maintaining a commitment to critical reflection related to the politics of service learning as social practices which have the potential to reproduce or help to combat the hierarchies in which community members or students are alienated as socio-economic, racial, gendered or educational “others.” Service learning compositionists also identify non-hierarchical project structures accompanied by action and reflection as solutions to some of the most pressing and potentially negatively impactful ethical issues of service writing. In “The Ethics of Service: Questions of Power, Representation, and Reciprocity,” Thomas Deans emphasizes several concerns that should be reflected upon before, during, and after the service “action” in order to encourage non-hierarchical, ethical project organization. These include the binary between server and served, issues inherent in ethnography and anthropology, paternalism and noblesse oblige, reproduction of dominant ideologies, the cost or implications of confronting or not confronting issues of social difference, the contexts and histories of particular universities’ interventions, development of reciprocal, dialectical relationships within “serving” and “learning,” the necessity of identifying real benefits for community partners, the dangers posed by brevity of service periods, and the lack of motivation in students (20). In order to answer many of these concerns, he identifies one potentially

synergistic paradigm of service projects, “writing with the community,” as particularly fitting. He cites Linda Flower’s Community Literacy Center as an example of this project structure and applauds its participants’ commitment to universal collaboration on community literacy issues as a key factor in the development of non-hierarchical intercultural awareness when writing with the community. “The ‘talking around the table’ metaphor is central to the CLC,” he suggests, explaining that almost all of the CLC’s programs and published materials are constructed around the concept of multiple voices with agency “talking around a table”—each having an egalitarian rather than a hierarchically-determined stake and influence in the conversation (130). His assertion places his and Flower’s discussion of service learning composition projects within a discourse of diversity and social equality that identify social justice efforts as guiding their core pedagogical values. In addition to exemplifying a model of non-hierarchical organizational structure, as well, the CLC’s program involves an on-going discussion in which all parties with a stake in the community can actively participate in analyzing the center’s trajectory and its progress.

When project success has been established, one of the most essential aspects of that success cited in many service reports has come from the authentic motivation for learning enterprises that the projects have inspired in students and communities. Compositionists Linda Adler-Kassner, Robert Crooks, and Ann Watters, in “Service Learning and Composition at the Crossroads,” describe the importance of authentic motivation by asserting “Service-learning makes communication—the heart of composition—matter, in all manifestations... Students and instructors feel a greater sense of purpose and meaning in the belief that their work will have tangible results in the lives of others” (2). The authors point out that service learning projects help students make transitions from “students to writers.”

This transition marks the agency exercised by students and also indicates increased levels of self-confidence. Further, it “allows a less obvious role shift for instructors, as well: from carrot and stick-wielding lesson enforcers to facilitators for student-directed and collaborative writing projects” (2). Researchers also point out that it can be easier to evaluate service learning projects than more traditional assignments in some ways because it is often evident whether or not the desired effect of the work or composition was achieved (3). For L1.5 and L2 communities such as indigenous workers in Bolivia and Guatemala, as well as lower-class ethnic neighborhoods in the U.S, these immediate effects can mean more monetary compensation, more political representation, or healthier places to live on the whole. Nora Bacon, an instructor at Stanford, identifies some of the key benefits of a newsletter-writing campaign called the “Esperanza” project and conducted by students in order to increase consciousness about human rights issues in El Salvador as meaningful motivation because of “‘real’ audience and purpose” that mattered to students, exposure to new environments and important information about justice discourse, increased self-confidence and collaboration skills, and genuine contributions to society (41). Because of the “real” aspect of the newsletters, Bacon’s students took an interest in their work as more than just a mere classroom assignment. It was collaborative social action that they could take to pursue the goals of justice, literacy and awareness that they valued personally.

As these sources indicate, meaningful, authentic motivation of students in service composition projects is intimately tied with how these projects are structured to meet the real needs of their communities and those they care about. Composition instructors and writing service project researchers have found that a community service writing project can provide many diverse students with authentic motivation to write by giving them “synergistic” opportunities to meet social as well as personal educational needs and goals (Arca, 136; Bacon,

40-42; Brack and Hall, 145; Bridwell-Bowles, 21; Deans, 3; Dorman and Dorman, 153; Stock and Swenson, 156-157).

Thomas Deans explains some of the motivational and synergistic pedagogical advantages of service learning projects in composition in *Writing Partnerships* (2000). He describes John Dewey's legacy in service learning as a pragmatic "experimentalism" and community consciousness that "comprehensively thinks through not only *learning* but also *service* and the nature of their dialectical relationship," (29). "Education, for Dewey," Deans comments, "is a form of growth through *active experimentation and reflective thought*" (31). An integral part of the pedagogical and psycho-social benefits of service learning in composition, then, might be located in its capacity to present situations to students that are instructional in both practice and analysis. These two sides of education create a dialectical relationship between action and reflection that educational philosopher Paulo Freire calls *praxis* (Freire 87). Deans points out that there have been instructors in the past who have exercised critical pedagogies inspired by Freire but that with service learning social action can actually happen instead of just faith in "radical intellectualism" (46). Many scholars and practitioners of service learning in composition agree, then, that both reflection and action are necessary elements in a synergistic pedagogy that accomplishes community goals by raising awareness and literacy of socio-political issues in students and outside communities by engagement in real-stakes projects, with increased critical thinking and composition skills as a kind of necessary co-product of action. In order for growth in critical thinking skills and political consciousness to occur, though, it must be emphasized that it is essential that reflection accompany action, as well as the other way around.

All of these instructors and researchers seem to agree that *both* service-in-practice and constant conscious reflection and analysis that examines the dynamics, politics, and implications

of service work are necessary to ensure meaningful projects both educationally and to communities. While they identify this necessity according to the particularities of their various project contexts, the common thread of emphasis on *praxis* seems to run through all of their work. In Nora Bacon's project, for example, the task of writing the letters also prompted students to analyze and come to conclusions for themselves of El Salvadorian and international human rights issues, and, in turn, they hoped that their letters would cause others to think critically as well. Without this element of critical thinking, though, both the task of writing and the hope that others would read their letters would have been rendered educationally and politically hollow. In her conclusion to a report on the *Write for Your Life Project*, Lilian Bridwell-Bowles emphasizes the role of both reflective analysis and action incorporated into service-learning projects as key pedagogical processes. She says that, in the case of the WYL Project at Michigan State, "Literacy scholars had thought that information would be empowering, but they quickly learned from the young students that analysis without action was inadequate. . . Analysis combined with action is the cornerstone of this new movement" (27). Susan Fox and Wade Dorman state that, in their project, emphasize the reflection element as the key difference between service learning and volunteerism, and they hoped reflection activities would reduce student alienation.

As can be seen in this research, discussions and writing exercises that ask students to consider the socio-political situations of their communities (and possibly their own families) and give them time to develop thoughts about informed actions that they can take to improve their own lives and the lives give them a chance to become truly engaged with projects that matter to them. When undertaken before and after efforts to promote community literacy or writing campaigns that are focused on specific community justice issues, reflection helps to drive a kind of cyclical, dialectical engine of political consciousness and social justice activism that teaches

students to be self-critical agents of social change and to identify community project's needs and possible solutions through their own (collaborative) initiative. This self-driven aspect also works to grow students' confidence as it empowers them as individual contributing community members at the same time that it empowers their entire communities by making them more literate politically and capable of collective self-assessment and change. But, in order for students and teachers to be able to come together with and as community members who are motivated by common goals to reflect and act to create change, they must recognize their mutual benefit and the reasons why social change in the form of community literacy projects should matter to them. Non-hierarchical project structures that engage issues that are chosen at least in part by students' and have tangible, preferably immediate, effects on their own experiences in their families, neighborhoods or emotional lives—issues that they can personally identify with—are essential if the process of action and reflection are to create authentic connections that accomplish the goal of raising consciousness.

Minding the Gap: Taking a Lesson from Indigenous Community Literacy Project Successes

As a counterpoint to all of these concerns—and as models of community literacy project success in “at-risk” communities—I believe that the literacy narratives of indigenous Latin Americans struggling for change can teach composition service facilitators much in terms of key ingredients for creating non-hierarchical service learning situations in contemporary L1.5 and L2 communities situated outside of dominant, “academic” rhetorical practices whose abilities to master those dominant practices can determine their potential for political empowerment. For these communities, often because of a history of colonialism, migration, and socio-economic

pressures, collective literacy and composition skill acquisition aligns with a mutual struggle against race and class oppression that manifests in sub-par living conditions and a cycle of damaging literacy deficiency (with regard to powerful academic and political discourses). It is my contention that authentic, justice-motivated community narratives of literacy and organization offer models for how social justice and critical pedagogy theorists' ideas might be best applied to basic writing, L1.5 and L2 community projects in the future. Specifically, they serve as a successful experiment in community service learning. They demonstrate how the elements of authentically non-hierarchical organization and communal consciousness can catalyze meaningful, holistic, and community-centered processes of learning. They also demonstrate the project principles of self-selection and self-evaluation of roles and goals, participation in on-going praxis, and the utilization of the service of skilled individuals as literacy ambassadors who learn in order to become teachers themselves and, in turn, perpetuate the positive, empowering cycle of literacy education.

Let Me Speak by Domatila Barrios de Chungara and *I, Rigoberta Menchú* by Rigoberta Menchú, in particular, illustrate ways that communal consciousness prompted by the immediate need to fight oppression can spark the process of self-motivated collective education and empowerment. In them, the authorial voices give their communities' social histories, including literacy acquisition and practices, in the form of a testimony which can serve as a story to teach others around the world who wish to learn about their communal struggles for justice and the ways in which they learned from each other's own experiences and actions as a process of mutual aid, literacy acquisition and development of cultural and political awareness.

These testimonials demonstrate the practical potential and key principles of community writing and literacy projects that follow John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of pedagogy while

embodying synergistic community-initiated efforts at self-empowerment through practices of communal education and social action in the mutual pursuit of justice. They confer value on all skills and resources that can be used to aid in the mutual goal of justice, and they endow power and responsibility to all individual community members so that they might play the most beneficial, unique roles possible. It is within this framework and historical context, I believe, that some of the most hopeful conversations about community service writing projects can currently take place.

For the communities of both Menchú and Barrios de Chungara, the necessity to become skilled at literate political practices and knowledgeable in social justice discourse for the promotion of mutual benefit was the primarily motivating factor in community education efforts. They are engaged in a struggle for justice, and the success or failure of their efforts, in the most immediate of senses, means the continued suffering or the survival of the community's members. These communities develop a collaborative style of literacy acquisition that is motivated by their efforts to communicate with one another, publicize their struggle to the world and engage in effective social justice discourse. They implicitly incorporate Freire's rejection of education as a method of filling up students' minds with knowledge by suggesting a non-hierarchical structure in which dialogue between community members in relationships of respect and love for all create learning environments where students can be free and empowered to pursue the ideas and skills that are most relevant to them and that help their communities most. Also at play in these narratives is Mary Louise Pratt's vision of the classroom (or the community arena-as-classroom) as a "contact zone," in which discourse communities and cultures are composed of constantly-dynamic interchanges and exchanges between individuals—practices with very real political values, of which instructors, ethnographers, and empowered community members alike must be

conscious in order for socially-just educational dialogue to occur. Within the contact zones and discursive communities of indigenous communities, national workers' organizations and international human rights movements, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* and *Let Me Speak* offer applied examples of socialist, feminist and post-colonial theories and politics at work in community service learning projects; they also serve as examples of some of the most effective pedagogical advantages of community service learning projects in action.

In the testimony of both Rigoberta Menchú's and Domatila Barrios de Chungara's community literacy efforts, a common characteristic was the self-selection of individuals to act as sorts of cultural ambassadors to aid their communities with the knowledge they had to offer in a variety of ways, including learning, teaching, and utilizing literacy skills. Because these roles were self-selected, and also because communal bond between participants as partners in struggle within the cause was so deeply felt, individuals were empowered themselves to take up the torch that no one else (no political party leader) would truly carry for them. Because a wall of illiteracy existed between mainstream political discourse and their ability to take action together to effect change, there was a need for education to ensure better living conditions for all in the community, the community came together to educate each other by taking a praxis approach that encompassed both social action and analytical reflection to continually enlighten their perspectives and renew learning.

In thinking about how lessons from the communities might be applied to a re-structuring of our own community literacy project, I find that the OWL project could have benefitted strongly from an emphasis on self-selection and roundtable discussions in order determine project goals between students, instructors and the community along with more immediate results that are directly impactful to students' lives in positive ways. We had focused on several

elements of service projects that the literature on service learning in composition had identified as building blocks for success. First, the project included action-combined-with-reflection or praxis because of its emphasis (though perhaps still inadequate) on considerations of the implications of the peer review relationships for both sides' classrooms and for the community at-large. GTAs who were interviewed after the conclusion of OWL noted how they had discussed their perception of that project's purposes as well as the participants' expectations and, in most cases, the proposed timelines. Finally, some students also participated in reflective writing assignments or conversation about OWL's progress throughout. But, due to time and flexibility restrictions, unfortunately, a great deal of time could not be devoted to community-building activities, and students were not allowed to participate in determining their own roles or personal project goals. After reviewing the OWL project in its entirety, including high school student responses, I am strongly inclined to identify this inability as one of its major shortcomings and reasons for the lack of overall participant investment in its outcomes (although other challenges could have contributed, such as the short length of project and highly-complicated scheduling and paper-coordinating issues). In short, neither high school students, college students, nor their instructors were given the choice to relate their composition service experiences to their own value systems or home "non-academic" lives as members of a community. In exit surveys, high school student after high school student identified the chance to ask questions and build a relationship with a real college student as the most rewarding element of the project for him or her personally. Understandably, they were interested in knowing what college was like because many were about to enter the collegiate world themselves. However, the most immediately relevant information to them was finding out how daily life was going to change (e.g. free time, friendships, academic rigor). This information was much more important

to them than improving academic writing skills in order to do better on an as-yet-inconceivable essay assignment or—much less—a cover letter and job application. The importance of academic writing just simply wasn't yet perceived by most of them because there was no equivalent in their day-to-day lives. They hadn't chosen their own project roles or goals based on outcomes they would have liked to have seen in the own lives or in their own communities or households. Even if more of them had been apt to make the connection between writing project as community service and their own benefit as community members and future writers, there was an inadequate amount of time devoted to building that sense of community and facilitating those connections. In addition, the same goes for classroom instructors, whose role, rather than educational governors working on behalf of institutions, should ideally be one of a slightly more resource-endowed community literacy ambassador. But, with a curriculum adjusted to function along the lines of the non-hierarchical, self-selected literacy ambassador model, I believe that service learning projects initiated in all communities where there is a need for social justice service (that is, *all* communities—for even where individual privilege is normative, it is never without consequences, losers or a cost in community health) can become effective and highly motivational modes of literacy education.

Although the level of urgency for literacy skill acquisition was considerably less in the OWL Project than in examples of indigenous community literacy struggle, and the need for pre-, during-, and post-project reflection for the purpose of community- and awareness-building were consequently higher, the potential for meaningful relationships between students, teachers and their community was still there. But more emphasis must be placed on reflection and reflective writing about issues that individuals find speak to them personally and that they can plug their skills and interests into directly. More opportunities for students to follow through with

contributions as writers and literacy ambassadors in order to accomplish their own goals and help their own families (particularly in at-risk communities) and support their own values can position community service writing-for-social-justice projects as real, meaningful chances to effectively join the projects of literacy and composition education and social service.

Conclusion/Pedagogical Applications

Although the *testimonios* clearly offer outstanding examples of the kind of work and relationship dynamics that can drive community literacy projects toward authentic success, it is yet another step to settle on the best ways to incorporate their principles into modern educational environments and contemporary community life. In order to identify some of the most practical ways that community service writing instructors can bring the lessons of non-hierarchical project organization, self-selection and real personal life applicability taught in authentic community literacy success stories such as *Let Me Speak* and *I, Rigoberta Menchú* to their own instruction, I have found it particularly helpful to seek guidance in the recent research and ideas of social scientists and teachers Norma Gonzalez, Luis Moll and Cathy Amanti, in their collection, *Funds of Knowledge* (2005). *Funds of Knowledge* documents the efforts of teachers to engage as researchers of their students' families and communities in order to participate in reciprocal relationships that join the goals of service learning, social justice and critical pedagogy. Their claim "is that by capitalizing on household and other community resources, we can organize classroom instruction that far exceeds in quality the rote-like instruction. . . children commonly encounter in schools" ("Funds" 71). In effect, their experiment created a model of how contemporary U.S. teachers can work to initiate projects that use the synergistic potential of the cultural contact zones available in their schools' communities to tap into the power of literacy ambassadors and learning relationships that facilitate meaningful praxis. In other words, they find ways to catalyze processes of community consciousness development and self-motivated literacy education. Two of the main advantages of the *Funds of Knowledge* approach, they explain, are that "the teacher in these home-based contexts of learning will know the child as a whole person. . . taking into account or having knowledge about the multiple spheres of activity

within which the child is enmeshed,” and also that “reciprocal practices establish serious obligations based on the assumption of *confianza* (mutual trust), which is re-established or re-confirmed with each exchange and leads to the development of long-term relationships (“Funds” 74). The involvement of teachers in children’s families and communities as active and trusted participants grounded in communal interests, then, makes it possible for them to facilitate the kinds of projects in which students are motivated by a rich sense that their learning is of immediate importance to and draws upon the lessons of their home and community lives.

It is my suggestion that these same principles and advantages of drawing on community knowledge as joint members can be of use (especially, but not limited) to teachers of basic, L 1.5 and L2 writing who can not only take on roles themselves as community researchers in order to coordinate service learning projects but whose writing students can take on roles as researchers and literacy ambassadors to their communities as well. To accomplish these goals, composition instructors can draw on and research their (and their students’) broader communities’ needs just as indigenous community organizers (whose primary guiding principles are community health and justice) have done in order to discover the modes and possibilities for projects that best meet their classroom and community mutual goals. They can engage in community-building activities such as explorations of experience of injustice (in discussions, written assignments, and/or experiential homework assignments like visits to sites of talks with community/family members) and reflective written assignments geared toward fleshing out their implications and the ways that students and teachers might feel about them. These kinds of reflective assignments can also be essential for allowing students to determine ultimate desired project outcomes to decide which projects/roles are best for them.

Engaging in research and deep reflection about shared community goals before undertaking a project is also an important step for students, teachers, and community members to partake of together in order to develop confidence in each other as allies. The knowledge already inherent within the community must be utilized as a jumping off point; classroom projects associated with larger causes already in motion can take advantage of their momentum and their authentic role as services to the community. Students and instructors alike should work collaboratively as teams, engaging in research and discourse to determine how each can contribute most with his or her interests, knowledge and skills to projects that affect their own physical or emotional lives directly and to use their individual strengths to help each other grow as a mutually-invested group. Additionally, constant reflection and inquiry into the political implications of service to the community through thought-provoking activities (continuing discussion, journaling and research papers) should be introduced as a mode of continual project and self-assessment.

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By employing these ethical premises and non-hierarchical practices, composition instructors can help ensure that they are utilizing the synergistic potential of service learning to motivate students, facilitate the development of skills and abilities that are vital to community life, and support the goals of social justice and critical pedagogy. When teachers are researchers and learners invested in their communities and their students' lives, students learn as researchers and as teachers in projects that they see as having real impacts on them and their loved ones, and whole communities become partners in learning, teaching and social action. My hope is that damaging social hierarchies and cycles of oppression will begin to dissolve and processes of growth and education that are authentic, motivating, and engaged with community health and

justice will benefit and thrive from the momentum created by relationships of collective mutual aid and caring.

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