

Building the Capacity of Organizations for Rhetorical Action with New Media: An Approach to Service Learning

Abstract

Service-learning projects that connect students in new media writing courses with community organizations are typically framed as opportunities for students to develop production skills through 'real-world' projects. This article proposes a different model and rationale for digital-age service-learning projects, in which students teach organizational staff and/or the constituents they serve both how to produce new media texts and how to use these texts for rhetorical action. A pedagogical framework for this model is presented, which outlines three dimensions that constitute the capacity for rhetorical action with new media: functional competence with particular technologies, a critical perspective on technology, and a rhetorical approach to technology and media creation. Two iterations of a course called Digital Storytelling in Organizations, which used this service-learning model and pedagogical framework, are described. A rationale for translating this service-learning model to courses that feature other new media technologies is also discussed.

Keywords: Community literacy; Digital storytelling; New media; Nonprofit; Pedagogy; Service learning

1. Introduction

The rhetorical and communicative work of nonprofits and community-based organizations increasingly requires new media texts. Promoting the organization's mission, for example, now routinely involves maintaining a web site and multiple social media accounts, all populated with compelling written and multimedia content. Outreach presentations to potential donors and clients often feature video testimonials. Even many grant applications now require application videos. For nonprofit and community-based organizations, which often do not have a dedicated new media expert on staff, service-learning partnerships with local colleges and universities offer one way of getting new media projects off the ground. Departments and programs of writing and rhetoric have engaged in many such partnerships, typically with students producing new media texts for their community partners. This article explores the possibility of a different model for university-community partnerships, in which university classes help those within nonprofit and community-based organizations learn how to produce their own new media. Such an approach not only accomplishes the practical work of creating organizationally useful texts, it can also teach students, community partners, and researchers about the dimensions and dynamics of organizations taking rhetorical action with new media.

University-community projects with an aim to teach technology in the community are certainly not unprecedented. In 2000, Alison Reagan and John Zuern described what they called the "Going to Class, Getting Online, and Giving Back Project," in which their students developed training materials and traveled to housing developments in Manoa,

Hawaii, to teach residents computer skills such as word processing and Internet research. Glynda Hull and her colleagues have developed a drop-in media lab in West Oakland, California, called D.U.S.T.Y. (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth), where neighborhood youth use digital hardware and software to create expressive, multimodal texts (Hull & James, 2007; Katz & Hull, 2006). D.U.S.T.Y. also serves as a service learning and research site for UC Berkeley students. Recently, Aaron Knochel and Dickie Selfe (2012) have documented a community media project in which Selfe, a faculty member at The Ohio State University, and a small team of student-collaborators offered participatory digital production projects for community members in the Hilltop neighborhood of Columbus, Ohio.

The work I describe here proceeds from a different perspective. It imagines service-learning partnerships that teach community members new media production skills, but *in the context of organizations that they are affiliated with*—that is, organizational staff and/or the constituents they serve learn practices and produce texts useful to their organizations, with both students and community partners paying heightened attention to the situated practice of rhetorical work with new media. Rather than frame this approach as community media or literacy work, I describe here a rhetorically informed pedagogical framework for teaching technology to people within their organizational contexts. The pedagogical and rhetorical expertise of those within departments and programs of writing and rhetoric is a fitting match for this approach. Furthermore, working in this way with nonprofit and community-based organizations can further develop our students'—and our field's—

understanding of the rhetorical dynamics of new media composition and use in organizational settings.

To situate this approach, I begin by describing three important rhetorical articulations of university-community writing projects: Linda Flower and her colleagues' work to help local citizens develop their rhetorical agency by creating "local publics" for deliberation on important community issues; Ellen Cushman and her colleagues' aim to realize a "praxis of new media" by pairing students with local communities to produce digital texts; and Jeff Grabill and his colleagues' articulation of civic rhetoric, with the accompanying practice of creating new infrastructures for community invention. Next, I describe the rhetorical framework that guides my work, where service-learning partnerships help organizations build their capacity for rhetorical action with new media by developing a competency that includes functional, critical, and rhetorical dimensions. I then describe two different iterations of a course that I have taught using this framework: in the first, students taught staff members from several organizations new media production practices in a training workshop; in the second, students guided the constituents and several staff members of one organization through a media production workshop, with the aim to create texts that would meet particular organizational exigencies. Both courses were called Digital Storytelling in Organizations, where "digital storytelling" was defined as the production of personal narrative videos to be used for organizational purposes. I end with a discussion of how these course models could work with other production technologies, as well as some closing thoughts on the disciplinary implications of this approach to service learning.

2. Rhetorical frameworks for service learning and community-engaged writing projects

The teacher-scholars whose work I describe in this section—Linda Flower, Ellen Cushman, and Jeff Grabill—have each articulated a distinct rhetorical framework for university-community writing partnerships. Notably, each imagines a rhetoric for transforming reality, be it by bringing together, in the case of Flower, a new local public; by articulating, in the case of Cushman, effective and ethical new media practice; or by creating, in the case of Grabill, new structures for civic participation. Such courses enact what Thomas Deans (2000) calls a “dialectical relationship between action and reflection” (p. 143), and avoid the common service-learning pitfall of “hyperpragmatism,” which J. Blake Scott (2006) describes as positioning students as pre-professionals, whose service-learning experiences primarily prepare them for entry into stable, unproblematic workplaces (p. 242). Service-learning courses with an underlying rhetorical framework, on the other hand, posit that reality is unstable and that service-learning encounters hold the possibility to change things for the better by introducing new texts, practices, and perspectives.

The most comprehensively articulated rhetorical vision of university-community partnerships has been described by Linda Flower (2008) in her book *Community literacy and the rhetoric of public engagement*, which describes and theorizes the Carnegie Mellon University and Community Literacy Center (CLC) partnership in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Over more than a decade of university-community projects, Flower and her colleagues honed a method of working with community members in Pittsburgh, pairing them with

student-mentors to create texts about community problems—for example, a city-wide teen curfew, landlord-tenant disputes—and then holding public “Think Tanks,” which convened community stakeholders to “construct and reflect upon wise options” to these problems (Higgins, Long, & Flower, 2006, p. 26). The civic aim of this process was to convene “local publics” where democratic deliberation could take place and, within these convened publics, to work toward personal and public change.

For Flower and others who have written about the CLC, rhetoric offered “the distinct capacity [...] to provide principled, adaptive heuristics for treading into unfamiliar waters” (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 28). This rhetorical underpinning enabled the CLC to frame its work not as *service*, but rather as *praxis* (Flower, 2008, p. 168), where *praxis* is defined as “deliberative and experimental action based on goals and values” (Flower, 2008, p. 79). Teacher-scholars affiliated with the CLC, including Lorraine Higgins and Elenore Long, elaborated a set of heuristics for eliciting competent rhetorical performances, including the “story-behind-the-story,” “rivaling,” and “options and outcomes.” These heuristics could be “identified, described, and taught” (Higgins et al., 2006, p. 28), further aligning the method with the traditional teaching-focused aims of rhetoric.

Ellen Cushman’s work has long been concerned with community engagement, and she has, since the early 2000s, orchestrated and written about service-learning and community-literacy projects. In an early article, “Sustainable service learning programs” (2002), Cushman argued for long-term engagement with community partners, as well as projects that proceed with “tight integration of research, teaching, and service” (p. 41). By the mid-2000s, Cushman had begun to integrate multimedia composition into these

projects. For example, students in her Multimedia Writing course were paired with staff from the Cherokee Nation, with the students creating an interactive web text that described the Allotment period in the Nation's history (see Cushman, 2006; Cushman & Green, 2010). Additionally, Cushman has facilitated outreach projects that pair an individual graduate student with a community organization, with the student producing a digital text such as an organizational video (Getto, Cushman, & Ghosh, 2011).

Theorizing this work, Cushman has suggested that the new media service-learning course is an ideal site for helping students—and the wider field of practitioners and academics—develop a critically and rhetorically informed practice of new media production. Cushman frames this practice as a *praxis of new media* because it is, as Flower said of *praxis*, “deliberative and (always) experimental action based on goals and values we are able to articulate (and are) prepared to revise” (2008, p. 79). That is, a framework is articulated and used to guide practice, but it is revisable, based on the unfolding experience of production and community feedback. Among the guiding goals and values of Cushman's *praxis* is the idea of “multiliteracies,” the belief that a range of sign technologies are available for making meaning, and that effective meaning-making requires appropriate selection of and combinations of these various sign technologies. To this semiotic theory, Cushman added a rhetorical and ethical awareness, as well as a concern with “infrastructures” (DeVoss, Cushman, & Grabill, 2005; Getto et al., 2011; Star & Ruhleder, 1996). To responsibly compose new media texts—to proceed with another Aristotelian term used by Cushman, *phronesis*, or “ethical action and good judgment for public good” (2006, p. 114)—one must move forward with and further refine this framework for new

media composing. This refinement happens in the *praxis* of new media that unfolds in university-community partnerships.

Like Flower and Cushman, Jeff Grabill, with various colleagues and students, has long worked within the community and simultaneously developed a rhetorical framework to describe and clarify this work. Grabill (2007) described his more recent work as “action research,” or “working with people to answer questions and solve problems” (p. 45), primarily through research to better understand and design new interfaces. Grabill’s rhetorical framework is that civic participation today—which consists of creating and circulating discourse that contributes to community change—is a matter of both invention and performance. In the digital age, active civic participation occurs by inventing “at and through the interface” (Simmons & Grabill, 2007, p. 438), and so work and research to understand and design interfaces is key. One project that Grabill documented, for example—both in the book *Writing community change: Designing technologies for citizen action* (2007) and in an article with colleagues Amy Diehl and William Hart-Davidson (2008)—was the creation of a mapping tool called Grassroots. The tool allowed ordinary people to create visual “asset maps” of their local communities, which might provide new and persuasive arguments about the need for community change.

Interestingly, in the book-length explication of this civic rhetoric, Grabill framed his rhetorical rationale not in the rhetorical terms used by both Cushman and Flower—*praxis* and *phronesis*—but rather in terms of *metis* and *techne*. *Metis*, defined as local knowledge, even cunning, is a sort of underdog approach to rhetoric, where the aim is to generate “surprising” inventions, which might persuade experts to listen. Grabill identified one

possible role for writing researchers: to design “*metis*-capable infrastructures” (2007, p. 91), like Grassroots, which support these surprising inventions. *Techne*, in Grabill’s framework, is *metis* operationalized: it is “subversive, a way of inventing knowledge and persuasive discourse that seeks to counter domination” (2007, p. 85).

Across the work of Flower, Cushman, and Grabill, there are similarities. Sustained engagement with community partners is key: none of their projects were completed in a single course; all were in fact built over years. The integration of research, service, and teaching is also central to all of these practitioners’ approaches. While doing meaningful work in the community, they have also engaged in research about rhetoric in the world today. Both the ability to sustain community engagements and the capacity to connect research, teaching, and service also speak to commitments made by their respective programs and/or universities to community engagement and engaged scholarship.

It is another similarity, this one across the work of Cushman and Grabill, the two scholars engaged most in the production of new media, that leaves an opening for the pedagogy I propose in this article. In the projects documented by Cushman and Grabill, it was students or university faculty members that did the bulk of the actual digital production work. While community members were very involved in the collaborative design process in both Cushman’s Cherokee Nation interactive web text project and in Grabill’s Grassroots project, the community members did not do the hands-on digital production or tool building. Relatedly, while Cushman and Grabill were both very concerned about sustainability, they spoke primarily about the sustainability of new texts and interfaces, rather than about the sustainability of new media production practices

within organizations. This small, but I think important gap, offers room for another way to work with organizations. Given the proliferation of new, more technologically accessible production and distribution technologies, as well as the huge range of new distribution venues for digital texts (i.e., blogs, YouTube, Facebook), those of us within departments and programs of writing and rhetoric might apply our pedagogical and rhetorical knowledge in service-learning projects that develop organizations' capacity to make and distribute their own new media texts.

3. Defining organizational capacity for rhetorical action with new media

3.1. Functional, critical, and rhetorical dimensions of technology use

What exactly does it mean for an organization to develop capacity for rhetorical action using new media? What are the dimensions of such capacity? A fruitful place to turn for guidance is the literature of professional and technical communication, as well as that of computers and writing, where the nature of technological understanding necessary for civic participation and success in school and at work have long been subjects of inquiry.

A clear consensus of this literature is that composing with new media requires more than just technical skill. Lee-Ann Kastman Breuch (2002) and Kelli Cargile Cook (2002) both argued relatively early in the digital era that using technologies in workplace settings requires a multi-dimensional literacy, composed partly of technical skill, but also of ethical, rhetorical, critical, and social competencies. I have found Stuart Selber's (2004) categories for what constitutes "an ideal multiliterate student" (p. 22) distinct and memorable enough to fruitfully guide how my students and I, as well as our community partners, think about

technology use for rhetorical ends. Selber, writing about how we might define “technological literacy” for college students, articulates a “multiliteracy” that is composed of three component literacies: functional, critical, and rhetorical. I suggest that the parallel terms *functional competence* with particular production technologies, a *critical perspective* on technology, and a *rhetorical approach* to creating new media texts and technologies offer an apt and teachable pedagogical framework for situated technology use. These slight alterations to Selber’s terms I recommend so as to avoid further saturating the bloated term “literacy.” As Anne Wysocki and Johndan Johnson-Eilola (2004) memorably warned, the word is both laden with assumptions that certain new skills offer a direct path to social and economic improvement, and strongly associated with the book.

We might think of *functional competence* as the capacity to use technologies as tools, knowing how particular technologies work and how to use them to “construct new meaning through literate practices” (Selber, 2004, p. 34). Functional competence is context-specific, but developing it can be seen as accruing the technical, social, and discursive competencies that make one feel, as Selber says, “empowered” (p. 46) to use technology to reach some known set of goals. For example, functional competence with video technology as a staff member of a small nonprofit might mean knowing how to film footage with an inexpensive camera, how to store footage, and how to maneuver within a standard editing interface to combine media, add effects, and export a video of appropriate size and quality for a given distribution context.

A *critical perspective*, on the other hand, is an approach toward technology that acknowledges technology not just as a tool, but also as a cultural artifact (Selber, 2004, p.

86), with built-in biases and the potential to reinforce existing, problematic social structures (see Nardi & O'Day, 1999, for an in-depth discussion of competing metaphors for technology). A critical perspective can allow technology users to detect local infrastructures that might impede their use of technologies (DeVoss et al., 2005). Importantly, a critical perspective does not end with critique, but rather it ideally translates critical response into ethical and just action (Feenberg, 1999). Melinda Turnley (2007), for example, described how action was informed by a critical perspective in her service-learning course: students read and discussed critical theories of technology, and then used this perspective to guide decisions in their work with community partners. A critical perspective might mean rejecting particular technologies, even (or perhaps especially) those that appeal primarily because they are shiny and new, as contrary to an organization's core values. It might also mean making changes to a local production environment, such as redesigning a lab space so as to make it more accessible and inclusive.

The final dimension of capacity for rhetorical action with new media in organizations is a *rhetorical approach* to technology and media creation. A rhetorical approach recognizes that designing technologies and designing new texts with technology are persuasive activities. Brenton Faber (2002), in *Community action and organizational change: Image, narrative, identity* helpfully explained how new texts can alter organizational discourse, and although his discussion of *image* and *narrative* proceeds without mention of new media, these terms help describe how new texts can create a new persuasive reality, by altering the narrative of those within an organization or the organization's image to outside observers. A rhetorical approach also values principled and

reflective practice. Not only does this mean making design decisions with attention to traditional rhetorical terms like audience, context, and purpose, it also means attending to what Jennifer Sheppard (2009) called “technological rhetorical” considerations, those “rhetorical choices specific to the development of new media” (p. 128). Technological rhetorical considerations might, for example, include considering how different or multiple modes can work with or against one’s persuasive aims, or how various screen technologies might alter one’s intended message. Finally, a rhetorical approach “insists upon praxis” (Selber, 2004, p. 145), technology use that is not only principled but is open to revision for the better. In summary, a rhetorical approach to technology and media creation positions technology users as producers of meaning, and asks them to proceed in that role with a reflective, critically aware practice.

3.2. Why digital storytelling?

Given the aim to build the capacity for rhetorical action with new media among community partners, and the functional-critical-rhetorical dimensions of such capacity, what technologies might be the focus of service-learning courses? The technology must be feasibly taught to those with little technical experience, and learning it must facilitate thinking and discussion about critical and rhetorical approaches to technology. In this section I will discuss why I chose to teach digital storytelling to students and community partners, using the functional-critical-rhetorical framework. I am arguing here for a general approach to service learning, so it is important to note that other new media practices—for

example, shooting and editing video, blogging, digital photography, and social media—could also be substituted as the focus in such a course.

Digital stories are two-to-four-minute personal videos, constructed from a recorded personal voiceover and still photographs, combined using digital video editing software. While the genre is often used for personal reflection and expression, it can also be used to capture the personal testimonies of organizational staff and constituents. Once completed, digital stories can be contextualized and delivered in a number of ways, both face-to-face and online.

Digital storytelling has been widely used in schools to teach multimodal composition, in no small part because the process builds functional competence with multiple hardware and software tools, including audio recording hardware, digital cameras, and image, audio, and video editing software. Working across modes can enable learners to see similarities across different production and editing tools and practices (e.g., editing in multiple tracks, garbage-in-garbage-out, the importance of orderly file management, uncompressed vs. compressed media tradeoffs), while also glimpsing the different specialized discourses that accompany particular modes. Finally, despite the range of modes and tools that can potentially be taught through digital storytelling, the practice can still be completed with fairly inexpensive hardware and software.

Digital story production also enables *critical* discussions about technology use. The genre has a populist history to and discourse about it, having originated in the work of community media practitioners who very much aimed to put technology in the service of the privileged art of human storytelling (Lambert, 2009a, 2009b). That is, the rhetoric of

digital storytelling stands in opposition to arguments for new and expensive technology for its own sake. Furthermore, the personal nature of digital story scripts and photography raises many difficult ethical questions about the representation of others in online media; when used in organizational settings, digital storytelling also raises questions about the ethics of recruiting staff and clients to speak in the service of organizations that employ and provide services to them (Dush, in press).

Finally, digital storytelling enables discussion about and forces complex decisions related to how new media might do *rhetorical* work for organizations. Digital stories capture highly personal stories, images, and voices in a format that is easy to share with a range of audiences across a range of common organizational contexts: from the intimate context of a client and a service provider watching together on a laptop, to a roomful of potential donors watching a story embedded in a fundraising pitch slideshow, to the range of fuzzily defined audiences and contexts that arise when stories are circulated online. Before and during the development of individual stories, organizations must consider what sort of meaning stories might make in these various contexts, as well as how to build context around stories to reinforce the desired meaning(s).

4. Two course design examples

4.1. Overview

I describe below two iterations of a graduate-level course, Digital Storytelling in Organizations. Each differs logistically and offers different ways for students and organizations to learn about how organizations build capacity for rhetorical action with

new media. In the first example, students trained staff members from six local organizations in the practice of digital storytelling, in an on-campus training and production workshop. The publicized aim of the workshop was for participants to gain functional skills by producing their own story—the story could be about a purely personal topic or link personal and professional experiences—and to explore whether digital storytelling might be an appropriate practice to bring back to their home organizations. In the second course I describe, students worked with the constituents and staff of one organization in an on-campus media production workshop, guiding participants through the production of digital stories and planning for the distribution of these stories.

Both courses described below were offered in eleven-week terms; class met one evening per week for 3.25 hours. Each section enrolled seventeen graduate students, split about equally from my department's MA programs in New Media Studies and Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse. Both courses received funding support from a university grant for service-learning course development and research. This support enabled paid planning time, the purchase of equipment for use during and after the course (via a checkout program for our community partner organizations), and one hundred hours of follow-up support from a graduate student, to continue the work begun in the workshop at the community partners' home sites.

The two courses operated on similar schedules: each term began with students learning about digital story production by making their own stories, while concurrently exploring key critical issues related to digital storytelling through course readings. This work happened in weeks one through six. Students and community partners connected

early in the term, meeting at the partners' organizations in weeks two or three. The community partners then came to campus for half of one class period in the middle of the term, for a story draft feedback session, and the course culminated with a three-evening on-campus production workshop.

Although I hesitated to hold production workshops on campus, where participants would be removed from the realities of their organizations' existing technologies and infrastructures, this seemed the only workable option. In the first course, it was simply too logistically daunting to send student teams out to run production workshops at six different organizational sites. I also wanted the community partners to come together in the same room, where they might share ideas and contribute their organization's perspective to our group conversations about the situated use of new technologies. Working off-site was problematic in the second course as well, because the workshop participants, though they were all affiliated with the same organization, worked and lived all across the city of Chicago. Our department's on-campus lab was both centralized and, importantly for me, predictable. I had navigated our local infrastructures enough to know how to minimize technical difficulties during the production workshop.

In the description of each example below, I follow a similar structure, describing: 1) how the course was framed, including its scope and basic logistics, 2) the roles occupied by the teacher, students, and community partners, 3) how functional, critical, and rhetorical learning mapped onto student learning outcomes, assignments, and readings, and 4) how functional, critical, and rhetorical learning mapped onto objectives and activities for community partners.

4.2. Example 1: Training organizational staff

My first effort to pair students with organizations involved convening staff from a range of different organizations for an on-campus digital storytelling train-the-trainer workshop. Our partners included eight staff members representing six nonprofits: most were coordinator- or director-level staff in communications, marketing, or development. Participants had been selected on the basis of an application and statement of interest submitted to me approximately three weeks prior to the start of the course. Students worked in groups of two or three with an assigned partner organization, helping that organization's one or two participants to each create a digital story. Facilitated discussions about critical and rhetorical issues related to digital storytelling were another important aspect of the workshop. As the head facilitator, I made sure these discussions happened at key parts of the digital storytelling process: for example, before participants learned audio recording, we discussed the usability/quality/cost tradeoffs of available recording technologies, and after the showing of the participants' completed stories, we discussed how particular stories might be distributed, given different rhetorical aims.

In this course, my role as the teacher was to organize and lead the community partners' production workshop, as well as to provide structure to discussions about organizational implementation of new technologies. Students were assistant facilitators during the training workshop, and they offered one-on-one coaching to their assigned participant(s) throughout the digital storytelling process. I suggested to students that they also think of themselves as potential future consultants to organizations, and see the

workshop as an opportunity to learn about the range of new media capacities and needs of nonprofit organizations.

Community partners simultaneously occupied the role of trainee, there to learn both skills and a framework for the wise adoption of new technologies, and the role of professional peer, there to meet and exchange ideas with other local nonprofit professionals. The students and I also valued the nonprofit staff members for their connection to real-world implementation sites; they grounded our potentially abstract class and workshop discussions about how digital storytelling could be used for rhetorical work in organizations. Finally, community partners assumed the role of potential trainers, who might bring knowledge about digital storytelling back to their home organizations and teach others the practice.

Functional competence with digital storytelling technologies was articulated on the class syllabus as a learning objective. Students were prepared to meet this objective by producing their own digital story, and their competence with digital storytelling tools was both reinforced and expanded as they coached their community partners during our on-campus training workshop. Our readings throughout the term encouraged students to take a critical perspective toward technology; some of these readings articulated digital storytelling as a community media practice, with a populist aim to bridge the digital divide and put technology in the service of human connection and expression (Burgess, 2006; Lambert, 2009a); other readings problematized the claims about digital storytelling by raising ethical concerns (Aufderheide et al., 2009; Couser, 2004) or questions about the digital skill acquisition possible via the practice (Meadows & Kidd, 2009). These critical

concepts were useful as the students later negotiated how to help their community partners revise story drafts; for example, both Patricia Aufderheide, Peter Jaszi, & Mridu Chandra (2009) and G. Thomas Couser (2004) wrote of the inherent vulnerability of those who share the details of their lives in documentary films and life narratives, with Couser emphasizing the added vulnerability of those who are in fiduciary, or dependent, relationships with those that document or sponsor the documentation of their stories. Some of our workshop participants were participating at the behest of their work supervisors and were noticeably unsure about how to reconcile the traditional digital storytelling imperative to explore a meaningful personal story with the discomfort of doing so in a project primarily affiliated with their job (even the participants that opted to create a purely personal story would likely show their stories back at work, as a way of debriefing on their workshop experience). As I coached student teams in how to advise their community partners, particularly in the story drafting and revision processes, concepts from our readings helped the students both to identify tensions that might underlie drafting difficulties and to strategize about solutions.

In the course, students learned a rhetorical approach to media creation as they considered if and how digital stories could potentially do rhetorical work for the participants' organizations. Early in the term, students completed an assignment to analyze the communication genres of their community partner organization and to identify specific ways that digital stories might help to meet organizational exigencies. Rather than write a paper that summarized others' claims about digital storytelling and digital stories, students engaged with the specific capacity and needs of their assigned organization, which they

came to better understand through a combination of reviewing the organization's application to our workshop, visiting the organization, and talking directly with participants. Questions about audience, purpose, and context also arose often in the story scripting process, as participants decided if and how to connect their personal stories with their professional stories—four of the eight attendees ultimately did so—and again in one-on-one and whole-class discussions about how to contextualize and distribute the completed stories.

The main objective for community partners in this course was that they learn enough about digital storytelling to make a decision about whether the practice was appropriate for their organization and its rhetorical aims. In the on-campus workshop, all participants made their own digital stories, which gave them the chance to learn not only the functional aspects of digital storytelling technology, but also to feel the real difficulty of sharing personal stories for work purposes. The aim of this personal experience was to prompt a more affective understanding of the complexity of digital storytelling, and to thus prepare participants to work more responsibly with their own clients and/or coworkers. The community partners also learned, side-by-side with the students, about consent forms and responsible protocols for recruiting organizational participants. Finally, we approached technology rhetorically in our group discussions about the possible utilities of the stories participants had produced and those they might help others in their organizations to produce.

After the course, many of the organizations continued on with digital storytelling or its associated technologies. My university's service-learning center funded a graduate

student assistant, who supplied ten hours of follow-up assistance to each organization. The new trainees thus had help as they began to carry these new practices back to their home organizations. The Marketing Director from a large social services agency, with the help of the student assistant, produced two short videos that featured clients, to promote his organization's services on the web. Two staff members from an organization with a mission to build grassroots partnerships in international settings ran a digital storytelling training for a consortium of women's groups in Haiti; this organization is also currently developing a digital storytelling module in a tablet-based training app for community leaders. A neighborhood organization that had sent its Communications Director to the training had the student assistant help a community organizer on its staff to create his own story, to better develop his—and thus the organization's—capacity for creating video documentation of issues in their community. A health services organization requested help with the seemingly mundane task of inventorying its video hardware (all in unopened boxes), so that they might assess if and how it could be used and to purchase some appropriate editing software.

Not all of the organizations that participated in the on-campus training workshop have implemented digital storytelling projects, but this end is desirable. The aims of the workshop and our partnership were not universal uptake, but rather that each organization developed its capacity to decide whether digital storytelling was an appropriate practice, given the organization's particular rhetorical aims and their particular context.

4.3. Example 2: Guiding an organization's new media production project

In the second Digital Storytelling in Organizations course, offered one year after the first, the class worked with just one organization, guiding a group of its constituents through a production workshop. Our partner organization was a network of urban public charter schools, whose staff wanted to collect parent and teacher stories that could show impact to funders, inspire new parent advocates, and help recruit teachers. The network had sent its Communications Director to the prior year's training workshop. With the help of its Family and Community Engagement Director, the Communications Director and I planned a presentation at a meeting of the advisory board, where I explained our project and collected names of parents and teachers interested in attending an on-campus story production workshop. Four parents and three teachers ultimately participated. My hope for this course was that by working closely with one organization, producing media clearly intended for distribution, both the students and the network's staff could focus in depth on the rhetorical practice of creating and distributing stories.

My role as the teacher was primarily to be the project manager, who set the logistical stage for the workshop and met with the network's staff about their developing needs and ideas, reporting back what I learned to students. The students, who again worked in small teams, this time assigned to one workshop participant, were given more responsibility for teaching technology in this course than in the prior year's course. This was partly because I had a better sense of what to expect in the on-campus workshop, and partly because I prioritized learning how to teach technology to others as a key learning objective. While the student teams were responsible for giving assigned parent or teacher a

positive experience, they had to balance that aim with the need to help the participant produce a product with potential rhetorical use for the charter school network.

The community partners in this course were both the teachers and parents attending the production workshop and the staff of the charter school network. The teachers and parents we approached primarily as community members with an interest in telling a story, learning about digital story production, and contributing their voice and story to the charter school movement. The two network staff members that worked closely with our class were a source of information for the students about the rhetorical aims of the charter school network. The students and I communicated with these staffers when, for example, a student team had concerns about how to guide a storyteller's script revision. The Communications Director also distributed two documents to the class: the first a summary of stories the charter school network wanted to spread and stories that they wanted to counter, the second a list of "myths and facts about charter schools." For example, the network was eager to counter the popular assumption that charter schools do not serve students with learning disabilities or other special needs, and they wanted to assure potential teachers of the flexibility and support available for charter-school teachers. These texts, along with conversations with the network's staff, helped guide students as they thought about the rhetorical work that particular participants' stories might do.

As in the prior year's course, one of the core learning objectives for students was that they develop functional competence with digital storytelling technologies. Additionally, they were asked to conceive of how to teach this competence to others: we used Selber's (2004) *Multiliteracies for a digital age* as a core text, focusing especially on the meaning of

and teaching methods for functional competence. The students interviewed their assigned parent or teacher early in the term, to learn what level of technical competence the participant hoped to attain. Some wanted to learn how to use the technologies for personal reasons—a number of the parents, for example, hoped to teach video editing to their children—and several of the teachers were curious to see if they could reasonably deploy digital storytelling in their classrooms. With their partner's desired competency as a guide, each student team completed a "Facilitator Plan," in which they documented a plan for teaching their parent or teacher, using Selber's parameters of functional literacy to frame what and how they planned to teach.

A critical approach to technology was again initially developed through course readings. Early in the term, students read a range of chapters and articles and were asked to respond in a short paper to the prompt *What is digital storytelling and what is it good for?* (In hindsight, the second question would have been better phrased as "what *might* it be good for?") The assignment provided students with a list of claims about digital storytelling—e.g., "Digital storytelling can put the hands of media production into the hands of ordinary people," "Digital storytelling helps build a community's identity"—and asked them to select three claims to both support and argue against, using ideas from our readings. The combination of this paper and our in-class reading discussions gave students a foundation from which to later think through the situated challenges of working with our community partners. For example, ethical challenges again arose as the parents and teachers struggled to create stories that would be rhetorically useful without disclosing too much personal information. Since four of our workshop participants were parents, the

ethics of speaking about and showing photographs of one's children in digital stories was particularly prevalent. In our on-campus workshop, students confronted the theoretical issues that they had read about, as the parents and teachers, the network staff, and our class members talked through specific drafts. Two mothers, for example, told sensitive stories about their sons' learning disabilities and the ways that prior schools had failed to acknowledge or respond to these disabilities. These drafts raised ethical questions, especially about how many details to disclose about the boys' experiences and if and how to use personal photographs. The stories also raised rhetorical challenges, because the charter-school staff was keen to avoid criticizing other schools in arguments they made about the value of their schools. The discussions in this course were more urgent than those in the prior year's course, as it was clear from the start that all of the stories were expected to publicly circulate and do rhetorical work.

The final academic learning objective for this course was that students could describe how personal stories can be used for rhetorical action in organizations. Throughout the quarter, we referred to our two key readings on the subject, Brenton Faber's (2002) *Community action and organizational change: Image, narrative, identity* and a chapter from Francesca Polletta's (2006) *It was like a fever: Storytelling in protest and politics*. Faber's book provides useful language describing how change can happen in organizations through the introduction of new texts. Polletta's chapter, "Why stories matter," is a good overview for how stories enable and constrain different forms of social action. The final project in the course asked students to select two of the seven stories produced in our workshop and to explore how each story might do rhetorical work for the

charter school network, including what narratives and/or images the story might reinforce or complicate and how the story might be contextualized and delivered so as to maximize its potential to spread a desirable story or counter an undesirable one. Finally, the project asked students to discuss the potential shortcomings of each story—and digital storytelling in general—as tools for changing the discourse around charter schools.

The objectives for the teachers and parents that participated in the workshop were that they achieve their desired level of functional competence with digital storytelling technologies and that they create a story that they felt proud of. The objective for the staff of the charter school network was that they could delve deeper into critical reflection on digital storytelling and the rhetorical potential of digital stories. The Communications Director read parts of Faber's book and sat in on our class meetings. And because she could observe the story production process, removed from the all-consuming demands of facilitation, she could ideally be more reflective and critical about the process.

As in the prior year's course, the follow-up assistance of a graduate student was essential. The student assistant began his work by creating a YouTube playlist of the workshop stories on the charter school network's YouTube channel. He then researched the technical requirements for a range of more targeted distribution options, such as assigning the stories QR codes and posting these to posters at school choice fairs and linking the stories to a web-based mapping interface. He also researched the best ways to distribute small sets of stories to different audiences, and ultimately built two Constant Contact email templates with different stories embedded in them, for emails to be

distributed to the board members and to parents. My work with the charter school network to distribute the stories is ongoing.

5. Conclusion

5.1. Transferring the model to other new media practices and other institutions

I have suggested throughout this article that Digital Storytelling in Organizations can be a model for courses that feature new media practices other than digital storytelling. In fact, while the component technologies of digital storytelling are easy enough to learn, the entire process requires competency with quite a collection of technologies, including audio recording hardware, audio editing software, image collection hardware (digital cameras and scanners), image editing software, and video editing software. The practice also requires both patience with and time for writing and revision. This complexity was the greatest challenge of both courses described above. Learning functional competence with the technologies took the students nearly five full class periods (approximately fifteen classroom hours), and on-campus technical production with our community partners took four class periods, leaving less time than I would have liked for exploration of critical and rhetorical concerns. Without sufficient attention to critical and rhetorical approaches to technology, the work I have described risks being technology training, and thus unaligned with the disciplinary work typical of departments and programs of writing and rhetoric. These time-related challenges are particularly intense at a university like mine, which operates on a quarter system. Having a graduate student assistant's support after the

course was a necessary element to feasibly and responsibly realize the goal of building organizational capacity for rhetorical action with new media.

A two-course sequence would be one response to these time pressures, with the first course focused on learning and teaching technologies, culminating in a production workshop for organizational staff or constituents, and the second course focused on using stories for rhetorical action, with students and community partners conceiving of organizational story production projects or building out contexts around existing stories. Another way to avoid time pressures would be to use these pedagogical models with a less technologically complex new media practice. A course like *Blogging in Organizations* or *Social Media in Organizations* would create fewer infrastructural demands, and learning functional competence with the necessary technologies would take less time, leaving more room for students and community partners to develop critical perspectives and a rhetorical approach. Making a careful assessment of the functional, critical, and rhetorical dimensions that can be taught through the practice, as I demonstrated with digital storytelling in section 3.2, will begin to reveal the possible structure of different courses linked to different technologies and new media practices.

Finally, my experiences support Ellen Cushman's (2006) argument regarding the "alignments in material resources, disciplinary practices, and institutional infrastructures" (p. 123) necessary to enact and sustain new media service-learning courses. I held our class and training workshops in a department-controlled lab that I could configure with the software necessary to create digital stories. My department—of Writing, Rhetoric, and Discourse—had a range of other necessary technologies (i.e., microphones, an audio

recorder, a digital camera). Perhaps most important, because my department's core disciplinary work is understood to involve teaching, technology, rhetoric, and composition, I could easily get the course on the schedule and attract a full roster of students. That this was a graduate course was also important to its smooth deployment: the students were mature and easily took to the role of coach and trainer; the work of training community partners seemed to them a reasonable use of class time; and the three-hour-long class blocks allowed us to streamline the production workshop to 3.5 on-campus sessions, a manageable commitment for our community partners.

Furthermore, as Cushman suggested, such complex projects thrive when there is a "strong institutional commitment to rewarding faculty who pursue a scholarship of engagement and outreach" (p. 128). Both of these courses, as I have previously mentioned, were supported by internal grants in support of service-learning initiatives. My home institution, DePaul University, has a mission tied to the urban outreach work done by its namesake, St. Vincent DePaul, and we have a dedicated service-learning center on campus. This institutional identity makes it feel less risky to undertake teaching that is admittedly far more logistically complex than that which I ordinarily do.

5.2. Building rhetorical capacity: Timely and meaningful work

Conceptualizing new media service-learning projects as opportunities to build the capacity of organizations for rhetorical action with new media can offer a rich experience to all involved. Students not only learn digital production skills, but also see the challenges of putting new technologies and practices to use in organizations. They can see critical

perspectives they have read about enacted in the real-world dilemmas of community partners, and they have a classroom community with whom to explore these dilemmas. The community partners—staff members of nonprofits and community-based organizations, participating with or without their constituents—can develop new technical skills, create usable texts, and learn a framework for using other new technologies in a responsible and ethical way. Ideally, with sufficient institutional support, these partnerships can be sustained over time, and university partners can be an ongoing resource as the nonprofit and community-based organizations move forward with new media practices.

Finally, asking students to work with community organizations as teachers, rather than as producers is a novel approach, yet also a disciplinarily coherent one. Our expertise as teachers and theorists of writing and rhetoric has long been located not only in producing rhetorically effective texts with an effective and ethical *praxis*, but also in teaching others to do the same. In a world where digital composition tools and online distribution platforms are proliferating at a pace that is near impossible to keep up with, helping to build others' capacity to ask questions like—*What technologies will help our organization to say what we want to say?* or *What technologies will help us to reach the audiences we want to reach?* or *How can we responsibly deploy and evaluate new technologies?*—is timely and meaningful work.

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