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## Book Review: Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum

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Eli Goldblatt. (2007). *Because We Live Here: Sponsoring Literacy Beyond the College Curriculum*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press. 226 pp., \$23.95 (paper). ISBN: 1-57273-769-7.

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Eli Goldblatt describes *Because We Live Here*, a study of his work with Temple University's Writing Program, as "part institutional history, part anthropological field journal, part sociological analysis, and part manifesto" (p. 8). In the pages that follow, Goldblatt provides a rigorous, honest, yet ultimately inspiring evaluation of the collaborative literacy programs he and other Temple faculty have helped establish over the past decade. *Because We Live Here* does not, however, focus simply on the theories and practices that led Goldblatt and the Temple Writing Program to develop the institutional and community partnerships they did; rather, it attempts to define successful community engagement as a dialogic relationship between university and community partners.

*Because We Live Here* is primarily an exploration of what Goldblatt defines as "writing beyond the curriculum." This concept builds on what Goldblatt sees as the success of writing-across-the-curriculum programs, which emphasize writing as a mode of learning and communication across all disciplines. Writing beyond the curriculum links these programs to the "public turn" in composition studies, which Paula Mathieu (2005) defines as a movement to connect writing classrooms to community engagement and social justice. In this model, literacy and writing are understood not as predefined skills or abilities, but instead as the cultivation and maintenance of relationships through written texts. For Goldblatt, these relationships necessarily extend beyond the university, thereby linking literacy education and community engagement to broader issues of social justice.

In Chapter 1, Goldblatt links writing beyond the curriculum to his re-reading of Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. By linking educational principles of growth and communication to questions of civic participation, Dewey provides not only a progressive educational method but also a rationale for university-community part-

nerships. Goldblatt emphasizes the social dimensions of Dewey's pedagogy by emphasizing "access, reflection, and connection." Goldblatt develops from Dewey a model for "[bringing] the margins to the center" and "[cultivating] relationships both inside and outside school to support literacy learning" (p. 15). For Goldblatt, the relationship between education and democracy is one that necessarily links universities to the communities that surround them and comprise their constituents. Nonetheless, these relationships are not always already operative, and only grow from diligent work by both teachers and administrators.

Chapters 2 and 3 examine Temple's diverse student base, providing compelling and rich descriptions of Temple's student demographics and transfer numbers. If Goldblatt had gone no further, he would have clearly demonstrated how much richer and more responsive our work as teachers can be when we have this kind of ethnographic understanding of our institutions. But he uses the strong transfer relationship between Temple and community colleges in the Philadelphia area to suggest the need for "deep alignment" between these various institutions (p. 96). Deep alignment goes beyond articulation agreements, which often set transfer standards and equivalencies but overlook pedagogical goals, and implies a shared curricular vision that is responsive to competing institutional mandates but remained centered on student needs. Focusing on conferences and informal collaborations between Temple, the Community College of Philadelphia, and other metropolitan institutions, Goldblatt demonstrates how deep alignment between institutional partners allowed them to address issues such as retention and six-year graduation rates.

Deep alignment further draws on Deborah Brandt's (2001) concept of "literacy sponsorship" to articulate open, collaborative partnerships between different institutions and community organizations. Literacy sponsorship describes how institutions and individuals involved in literacy education articulate implicit yet powerful models of literacy via their policies and programs. Goldblatt's model of deep alignment suggests that literacy education is most effective when it involves multiple stakeholders and can accommodate multiple models of literacy. To this end, Chapter 4 focuses on New City Writ-

ing, a Temple program that works “as a partner with local schools and neighborhood organizations” (p. 131). Much of the chapter describes NCW’s work with Proyecto sin Fronteras and The Lighthouse, Latino/a educational programs aimed at fostering community involvement. For Goldblatt, these collaborations allowed both Temple faculty and their community partners to articulate their models of literacy sponsorship and productively align their programs. University participants came to function as “knowledge activists,” providing intellectual and institutional resources to support rather than supplant community organizations’ goals (p. 141).

Perhaps the most compelling discussion for scholars focused on community engagement is Chapter 5’s focus on developing and securing grants. While Goldblatt limits his analysis to Temple’s work with the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, he nonetheless describes in detail the process of developing community and foundation relationships, articulating conceptual and programmatic frameworks, and ultimately utilizing grant money. While the three programs described by Goldblatt differ in scope, they nonetheless emphasize that well-written grants can themselves be a form of community engagement.

Goldblatt details how grants were collaboratively written and funds divided between organizations, with oversight being shared by university and community partners; such partnerships become a form of social action, with universities helping community organizations reach their own goals rather than providing targets from elsewhere. This model emphasizes how literacy sponsorship, and a commitment to literacy as relationship-building, can foster community organization while still meeting the goals of writing beyond the curriculum.

Paradoxically, Goldblatt is weakest when contrasting his own model of literacy sponsorship to those of other colleges and universities. While his study of Temple is careful, nuanced,

and balanced, his assessments of nonmetropolitan universities tend to be painted with a broad and unflattering brush. Large state universities, particularly land grant institutions, are compared to monocultural cornfields, prisons, and hospitals with little evidence provided to support the claim that faculty and students have little or no connection to their surroundings. Faculty at research institutions are likewise depicted as having little interest in undergraduate teaching or community engagement, and while this is no doubt true of some academics (and maybe even some institutions), it ignores successful community partnerships that faculty at nonmetropolitan schools have created.

While this assessment doesn’t weaken Goldblatt’s overall argument, it may leave some readers wondering whether programs such as New City Writing can exist outside of a metropolitan setting. Nonetheless, scholars looking to connect their research and teaching to broader communities and likeminded institutions will find in Goldblatt a source of inspiration and an instructive model. While he seldom skirts the real difficulties of forging responsive university-community partnerships, he nonetheless demonstrates that these partnerships can be truly collaborative enterprises and thereby effect real, if modest, change.

## References

- Brandt, Deborah. (2001). *Literacy in American lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mathieu, Paula. (2005). *Tactics of hope: The public turn in English composition*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

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