

Preparing “academic citizens:” Service-learning in Research University (Ryder, 2011)

Phyllis Mentzell Ryder, a Ph.D. in Rhetoric, Composition, and the Teaching of English, who teaches in George Washington University. In this article that she wrote in 2011, she argues that conducting research with and for a community organization will help the students understand that academic work is accountable for both public and academic communities. By comparing the community-building strategies of both, it will introduce the students to rhetorical moves related to their discipline in the community. Further, this will foster even more the students’ role as scholars as well as citizens.

To name a few examples about what the students will become after participating in service-learning programs based on previous research are as follows: By Corporation for National and Community Service, 2007, more politically engaged, more tolerant to others, develop better problem solving skills, feel more connected to their school, tend to receive higher grades on content area tests, etc. By Eyler, Giles and Braxton, 1997, better attitudes, better skills, more understanding of social issues. Some of the points above are share the same ideas in some way with the article about the sense of belonging by Strayhorn, 2012. Participating in the service-learning is a form of formal socialization. The students’ feeling of being more connected to the school, including to their peers and faculties. The students can also develop skills and understanding about a complex idea. These are the factors that will lead to the sense of belonging and support to the higher-grade achievements.

In this article, she was working with a service-learning model in which the students were doing the research on behalf of the organization, which is sometimes called community-based research. Here, students will work closely with the community organization on a particular project. There are important things that the academics should prepare prior entering the community to work together. Perspectives between both parties might differ, so a mindful understanding must be borne in mind. What is valued as knowledge, or how knowledge is made might also differ within the practical community. In other words, scholars must know how to deal with the public community, thus the knowledge that has been studied in the classes will smoothly be applied within the public work. When it is necessary, it can be complemented, corrected, and adjusted by the community members, as they hold their own knowledge, values, perspectives, and concepts.

A study in Public and Academic writing

Ryder was comparing an academic research article with a brochure, a public publication from some community organization named Anacostia Watershed Society, a nonprofit community organization in Washington, DC which represents academic writing and public writing, respectively. The academic writing was based on research conducted by a professor of chemistry and biochemistry at George Mason University with participation from some students. It discussed the pollution in the Anacostia river at DC, how does it get contaminated, what substance was the pollutant, which area contributes the most pollutants, etc. The community brochure was discussing the same object, with a less formal way and the content was written with the distinct approach. It was on the mission, which strives to make polluted Anacostia River become clean, swimmable, fishable for the health and enjoyment of everyone in the community. Of course, the differences between those two writings can obviously be recognized. The audiences of academic writing are usually from the academic circle as well. Academic writing usually demonstrates the author's understanding and affirmation of the value of the academic community. While the public writing, brochure, was written to persuade the community members to participate in particular work, and in order to be attractive the brochure was published in color and with photos, persuasive words, etc.

In order to break down the public-making strategies, Ryder suggests examining the components of the writing: purpose, agency and capacity, and interdependency. By identifying these, we will be able to reveal the perspective that the text is advancing.

The community organizations' writings are usually obvious as a reflection of their vision and mission. But in the academic community the vision and mission is not made so explicit. There is something interesting when discussing the academic writings. Ryder explained that academic writing is motivated by a need to correct or advance what has come before. This can be assumed that academic writings were very rare come with a brand new idea. This is understandable as we can imagine there are millions academics all over the world, we share the same disciplines, the same culture and urges to produce documents, so that almost every matter has possibilities of ever being asked or raised as a topic of writings. These left a little chance for the next writer to come with a brand new original idea, but correcting or advancing what has already come before.

Agency and capacity in the community organization's writing are located by convincing the audiences that they are the ones who can do the work and have all the resources needed. With the rhetorical writing and persuasive words, I believe this is one of the methods to build the sense of belonging to the community members about their surroundings and environment, for instance. Furthermore, it will lead them to participate in accomplishing the goal. Whereas, academics devise their

agency and capacity within their disciplinary and research methods. The author convinces their readers that the methods are appropriate and he/she encourages us for future research and methods to continue investigating the problem.

Interdependence in public writing is reflected on how the author addresses their audience as part of a broader public, that if they work together they will make a greater accomplishment than individual does. While for the academics, the other scholar fellows as their audience are expected to create knowledge together over the long term. They need each other to create a more complex and full knowledge since it will be very hard to accomplish by a single individual.

Through the article, Ryder emphasizes the importance of students enrolling service-learning class in order to initially encourage students' role as citizens as well as scholars. However, the students must prepare themselves prior entering public community to work together on a particular project. They also have to mindfully recognize the perspective, value, knowledge in the public community. One approach that can be done is by examining the public writing, it can be in the form of a brochure, report card, pamphlet, and so on. And then, they can compare it with the academic article with the corresponding matter. By doing so, the student will be challenged to arrange their analysis to meet the community's expectation. By this way the students will learn much about the parallels and distinction of the rhetorical conventions which prevail in the community.