Creating Reciprocal Learning Relationships
Across Socially-Constructed Borders

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This paper describes how a service-learning course that matches college students and older adult literacy learners addresses two difficult educational issues: 1) widespread attrition in adult education programs and 2) the need for the training of teachers to include ways for them to become effective at working with people who are different from themselves. This paper also shows how the theoretical construct of border crossing is a useful metaphor for understanding the ways that this program fostered important “learning relationships” for both older adults and their college student tutors. Based on interviews, a year of participant observation and an analysis of student writing, two essential elements of successful and reciprocal learning relationships emerged—the importance of connecting across differences through caring relationships and the ability to reflect in ways that transformed previous assumptions. More generally, this paper addresses a gap in the service-learning literature by looking at the impact of this program not only from the point of view of the college student tutors (those “doing service”), but also from the point of view of the older adult learners (those “being served”).

All the higher mental functions originate as actual relations between people.

(Vygotsky, 1978: 57)

In reading the literature on adult literacy programs, it does not take long before one realizes that attrition is one of the key challenges facing the field (Belzer, 1993; Dirkx & Jha, 1994; Perin & Greenberg, 1994; Quigley, 1992). Similarly, in reading the literature on pre-service teachers, it is clear that training them for multicultural environments is a key challenge (Bornstein, 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Dunlap, 1998; Paine, 1989; Warren, 1999; Zeichner, 1996). At the same time that these dilemmas face adult literacy practitioners, researchers, and teacher educators, service-learning is being discussed as a potential solution for a variety of educational and community dilemmas (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Holmes, 1999, Meyers & Scott, 1996; Sax & Astin, 1997).

This paper addresses the role that relationships play in the learning processes of both college student tutors and older adult learners in one particular service-learning program, Project WRITE (Writing and Reading through Intergenerational Teaching Experiences), as they participated in intergenerational learning pairs. For the purposes of this paper, learning relationships are defined as the socio-academic connections between older adults and their college student tutors that encompass both personal and learning exchanges.

Relationships formed within college student/older adult learning pairs were central to the learning that happened in this intergenerational, multicultural service-learning literacy tutoring program. There were two central elements to the building of reciprocal learning relationships: 1) a valuing of caring, personal relationships between members of diverse learning pairs within the context of tutoring, and 2) an ability to transform previous assumptions by reflecting on the ways that both individuals and social structures shape learning. The data will show the ways in which the presence of these elements facilitated learning and the ways in which the absence of these elements discouraged learning for both members of the learning pairs.

Our work posits that the kind of “border crossing” (Giroux, 1991; 1992) needed to form relationships in this program addresses the needs of older adult learners and the needs of a generation of new teachers by fostering learning relationships across differences. Giroux (1992) suggests that, “Students should engage knowledge as border crossers, as people moving in and out of borders constructed around coordinates of difference and power” (p. 29). What is less clear from his discussion of border crossing and border pedagogy is how this border crossing happens. What makes it possible for people to cross these borders? What are the benefits of doing this kind of border crossing? How do people build relationships in spite of the borders they encounter? How can people make more than a superficial connection across borders?

Because border crossing is especially salient in an environment that brings people from a variety of races, ages, and socioeconomic classes together,
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Elisabeth Hayes and Sondra Cuban (1996) use the metaphor of border crossing to describe the experiences of college students in a service-learning class about literacy. Hayes and Cuban write, "As we looked at our students' experiences from [the perspective of border pedagogy], we felt that service-learning offered a wealth of opportunities and examples of border crossing" (1996, pp. 6-7). The authors examine the many borders that the students cross—borders both physical and conceptual—and discuss the pedagogical benefits of the border crossing metaphor for students in service-learning classes. Hayes and Cuban suggest that students can gain a critical stance on issues of inequality, injustice and illiteracy by "analyzing dominant [adult literacy] texts," "conducting interviews" with their learners, and "questioning the system" in the context of the service-learning class (1996, p. 10).

These were exactly the kinds of activities that Project WRITE learning pairs engaged in together. However, we wanted to see not only if and how border crossing was part of the learning of the college students, but also if and how it was a part of the learning of the older adults too (Erwin, 1997). The metaphor of border crossing works well for college students in service-learning classes, but were the people that the college students tutored also crossing borders? Were they benefiting in the same ways and to the same degree as the college students?

While Hayes and Cuban (1996) acknowledge that border crossing is an apt metaphor for college students, they do not include the experiences of the people that the class serves in the border crossing equation. Thus, there is no evidence to suggest the effectiveness of border crossing for those being served by service-learning classes. This is the central question guiding this study: Does building learning relationships across borders assist "those who are being served" as well as "those who are serving" and if so, how? At the same time, this paper addresses some of the ways that service-learning models have often reified simplistic notions of what "helping" means and who is being helped by whom, how communities function, and how change happens. Although the voices of both college students and older adult learners will be present throughout the paper, we are particularly interested in highlighting the experiences of those being served.

In the sections that follow, we will first describe the context and the methods used to collect data. This will be followed by a short review of some of the literature on the centrality of relationships and the role of reflection in the learning process. The final section reveals the intricacies of several of the program's learning pairs, some of the borders they were able to cross, and some that seemed impenetrable.

### Project WRITE: An Intergenerational Service-Learning Tutoring Program

In conducting this study, the first author was the coordinator of a service-learning program called Project WRITE and taught a course for college students in which they became literacy tutors for adults over the age of 55 who want to work on their reading, writing and math skills. The second author was an intern for Project WRITE for four semesters. Both authors trained, supported and supervised college student tutors and tutored older adults in Project WRITE. Together we worked on this study for a year as practitioner researchers, paying particular attention to the relationships that developed between college students (tutors) and the people they tutored (older adult learners). We were particularly interested in the border crossing of college students and older adults, how they built learning relationships across differences, and how they reflected on the learning they were doing in the program.

The college course focuses on teaching strategies, social and historical perspectives on literacy in the United States, and the influence of aging on the learning process. Although there is some tutoring that happens in small groups outside of class, one day a week both college students and older adults come together and participate in whole-group activities. During these weekly classes when the group was all together, we were able to be present, coordinate group activities, and observe the tutoring that took place in learning groups.

In addition to age differences between college students and older adults, there are also racial differences. All but one of the older adults have been African Americans. A majority of the college students who have taken the course are white, but there are also African-American, Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Native-American and mixed race students in the class. The diversity of the Temple University student population creates levels of similarity as well as differences, and makes it more difficult to frame college students' and older adults' experiences as absolute. For example, one college student joined the program because she was struggling with how to help her mother learn to read.

While some of the college students share a common socioeconomic background with the older adults, there are also significant differences. The college students come from diverse class backgrounds. The older adults also come from varied backgrounds. Many of the older adults migrated from poor rural communities in the south; others grew up in working class homes in the city. Although the racial backgrounds of the older adults are relatively uniform, their educational histories vary considerably. When
college students and older adults discuss "where they're from," there are often moments of viewing shared past experiences as well as moments of seeing how race and class (and therefore poverty and privilege) influence individual experiences and beliefs.

**Methods**

During the academic year 1996-97, we were participant observers in the class twice a week, participated in classroom discussions, read the same articles that the college students read, and assisted the college students with tutoring. We developed relationships with older adults through our interactions during class and correspondence on the telephone. During the spring semester of 1997, the second author became a tutor for two older adult learners. The tutoring experience allowed her to reflect on her own abilities to cross borders and build learning relationships.

In addition to analyzing college student writing and documenting interaction among participants during two semesters, five African American women participants between the ages of 57 and 73 also were interviewed. All of the women that were interviewed have participated in the program for at least a year; three of the women have participated in the program for over two years. At the end of one semester, two tutors who had formed very different relationships with older adults were also interviewed. More older adults were interviewed than college students for two reasons. First, we had collected many written documents from the college students. Second, since Hayes and Cuban (1996) eloquently described the border crossing experiences of tutors, we wanted to focus on those being served and their impressions of relationships with tutors. The interview questions focused on relationships between college students and older adults as well as past educational experiences. The same interview protocol was used with both older adults and college students. All interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and then coded.

The data—observational fieldnotes during two semesters, interviews with older adults and college student tutors, student papers and journals, and tape recorded classroom discussions—were analyzed inductively to investigate the relationships that developed between college students and older adults across borders, the connections between relationship-building and learning for both members of the learning pairs, and the role of reflection in making this process meaningful. The data analysis took place in two parts: 1) all data were initially coded to indicate moments when older adults and college students showed evidence of building relationships during interaction (e.g. sharing personal information with each other, continuing to talk after class, joking and laughing together, etc.) and discussed building relationships in the context of their learning in the program, and 2) all interview, classroom and student writing data were also coded to indicate the role of reflection in facilitating the learning processes of both college students and older adults.

**Learning and Relationships**

The quote from Vygotsky at the beginning of this article represents his perspective on how relationships are essential to learning, or as he says, to all "higher mental functions." Erickson (1987) has described the link between learning and relationships by using the metaphor of a surfer. In order to surf, one must lean into the wave; that is, it is essential that one is not standing straight, but rather is trusting that the wave will carry him or her to shore. As a result, Erickson discusses just how important trust is in building learning relationships because "to learn is to entertain risk" (p. 344). In order to learn, we must trust that we can show our vulnerability to our teachers and tutors, to "lean into" the new and unknown and know that we will not perish.

More specifically, recent research within the literacy field (Lysaker, 2000) has shown the centrality of relationships in the process of learning to read and write. As Lysaker suggests:

In the relational model of language learning, the development of skills and strategies that are necessary for using written language are seen as both subordinate to and dependent on the sharing of the meaning-making experienced by the participants. The current conceptualization of learning to read and write as the development of a set of cognitive and linguistic processes, rather than a personal and social task learned through relationship, may be limiting our ability to provide effective instruction. (pp. 480, 483; emphasis ours)

This research shows that even at the most basic level of learning to decode and make meaning with words, the relationship to what Lysaker calls "a caring other" is central to the learning process.

Experiencing quality learning relationships may be of particular importance for those who are "on the margins" in one way or another. In her study of a service-learning project, Keith (1998) showed how perspectives on the centrality of relationships differed for participants across cultural and socioeconomic borders:

Relationships conveying respect...and high expectations are more important to those who reside on the margins of society than to those who can take them for granted; such relationships are also known to facilitate learning for "minority" students (Vasquez, 1994). Yet pro-
professional bent on changing behaviors and teaching appropriate language and skills may consider them incidental and so miss an important point. (p. 92)

This research supports the work of Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (1995), who found that building meaningful relationships with caring adults was a key component of the educational experiences of ethnic minority girls who found success in school. This kind of rapport and trust seems particularly important in the context of adult education programs, as many of the adults are coming back to school in spite of negative experiences in the classroom when they were children. Research (Cavanah & Williams, 1994; Horsman, 1990; Skilton-Sylvester, 1997; Skilton-Sylvester & Carlo, 1998) has shown that the social relationships formed in adult education programs can be crucial to their success in meeting the learning needs of adults.

Levels of Reflection in Service Learning

Typically, there are three elements of service-learning courses: students 1) spend time in class learning about a particular social issue, 2) spend time outside of class working in (or with) the community and 3) reflect on their experiences in relation to course content. Researchers have found that the quality and depth of reflection that tutors do is directly connected to their ability to learn as they serve in the community. In fact, many researchers (Conrad & Hedin, 1980; Eyler 1993; Myers-Lipton, 1996; Rutter & Newman 1989; Waterman 1993) have found a relationship between the presence of systematic, thoughtful reflection and several different desirable learning outcomes (e.g., increased self-esteem and social responsibility, better academic learning, good relationships with community members). Of particular interest is a study by Eyler (1993) that found that "extensive reflection was a positive predictor of transfer of curriculum-related concepts to a new situation, but that regular but modest levels of reflection were not" (Eyler & Giles, 1999, pp. 172-173). In thinking about service-learning in relation to future teachers, it is particularly important that students be able to transfer concepts and skills to community-based situations.

In their review of the underlying principles of service-learning, Kahne & Westheimer (1999) discuss two main orientations: charity and change. In describing these two orientations, they discuss three dimensions of service-learning goals: moral, political and intellectual learning. Because the focus of this paper highlights the importance of relationships and reflection in the learning process, the moral and intellectual dimensions are most significant for the argument we are presenting here. Intellectual learning in service-learning programs hinges on an ability to reflect. However, all reflection is not equal. Kahne & Westheimer suggest that intellectual learning can be seen either as additive or transformative and that students need to be pushed to do "the kind of critical analysis that might help students step outside dominant understandings and find new solutions" (p. 37). Project WRITE attempts to go beyond a charity orientation in how it structures reflection—to make intellectual learning as transformative as possible by encouraging both college students and older adults to reflect not only about their own learning and experiences, but also about the social and political structures that shape the ways that race, class and language influence educational processes and practices.

In discussing the moral dimensions of learning, Kahne & Westheimer distinguish between two kinds of relationships—giving and caring. It may be easier for college students to develop a "giving" rather than a "caring" relationship, but meaningful service-learning is based on making connections with people that involves more engagement than is customarily associated with a giving orientation. Kahne & Westheimer discuss Noddings' perspective that in caring relationships, "the other's reality becomes a real possibility for me" (Noddings, 1984, p. 14). The possibilities found in caring learning relationships are not only that we will understand another's reality, but that we will in doing so be able to have a reciprocal relationship in which both people are knowers and learners and "struggle [for progress] together." (p. 15). That is, reciprocity in learning pairs is crucial both in the development of a caring learning relationship and in the need for college students and older adults to be able to reflect on their own learning in the context of complex social systems. We have found Kahne & Westheimer's distinction between charity and change, giving and caring relationships, and additive and transformative intellectual learning to present useful ideals in thinking about what is possible. We, however, like to think of these not as dichotomies but as continua along which our program falls at different points over time. These ideals are useful tools for framing the discussion that follows about the realities we have encountered in working to foster reciprocal learning relationships and opportunities for transformative reflection across social differences.

Connecting Across Differences through Reciprocal Learning Relationships

Despite differences in age, race, socioeconomic class, and gender, many college students and older
adults created caring connections across these differences and, subsequently, formed personal relationships. As Lisa Delpit says, "In order to teach you, I must know you" (Delpit, 1995, p. 183). Delpit writes about the importance of getting to know one's students both academically and personally through recognizing and using students' cultural backgrounds in the classroom. The relationships built by older adults in Project WRITE with the college students were often an incentive to continue coming to class; conversely, the lack of a relationship with a college student was detrimental for some older adults. One day after class, the second author learned how important relationships are for the older adults; she was speaking to a woman named Joanne (all names are pseudonyms):

Joanne: I didn't like that tutor I had first semester. What was her name?

Interviewer: Oh, do you mean Sabina?

Joanne: Yeah, Sabina. I didn't like her at all, and that's why I stopped coming. I didn't like her but I didn't want to hurt her feelings. That's why I stopped coming that semester.

(fieldnotes, 11/11/97)

It is very important for Joanne to have good relationships with her college student tutors. She often speaks about her personal life as a part of tutoring sessions, and likes the college students to do the same. When a caring relationship did not develop with Sabina, she decided to leave the program.

Another example came from an older adult named Bruce, who was really struggling financially and in his relationship with his girlfriend when he first started the program. He had good rapport with his first tutor, Ruth, when he began, and he attended classes regularly. When he was placed with a different tutor the following semester, he only came once and then dropped out of the program for good. The bond between Ruth and Bruce crossed lines of age, gender, race, culture and socioeconomic class—Ruth is a middle class European American woman in her forties, and Bruce is a working class African American man in his sixties. Since Ruth and Bruce shared their personal lives with one another, they were able to find connections on which to form a relationship. Building relationships not only helped older adult learners "stick with the program," but it also increased their level of comfort for kinds of risk-taking needed to learn something new. In Erickson's terms, it allowed them to "lean into the wave." As one college student explained, "It makes it much more relaxing...if you just have a conversation about the weekend, they get relaxed and able to do work" (interview, 4/30/97).

Although the relationship-building mentioned above was crucial for both combating the traditional attrition found in adult education and for setting up an atmosphere that fostered learning, looking at relationships this way can reify traditional power relationships between members of the learning pairs. College students who crossed borders into the older adults' lives tended to learn about the older adults' experiences growing up in the rural south, what education and work was like for them growing up (often in poverty), and the lived experiences of growing up as an African American in the United States. Seeing the older adults primarily in this way might have sustained the notion that older adults are powerless and that college students are powerful. Ward (1997) discusses how this is a common dilemma in service-learning programs:

[An] "I give/they receive" orientation to the helping relationship often betrays a "better than/less than" dynamic that impedes the development of real caring relationships in which mutual expectations, responsibilities, and benefits are shared by both those who help and those being helped. (p. 144)

There were a couple of ways, however, in which Project WRITE attempted to shift the power in these relationships. First, the tutoring occurred on the college campus, allowing the older adults to enter the college students' "culture" rather than the more affluent students entering the less affluent world of those they are serving. This gave older adults more control about how much they wanted to share about where they lived and their economic circumstances.

Second, as a result of meeting as a whole group, there was an on-going opportunity for the coordinator to emphasize the knowledge of the older adults. The age difference also helped to counter-balance the traditional power weighting that often happens in service relationships. Because the college students were often about the same age as children and/or grandchildren of the older adults, the latter had the prior experience to offer advice about life. Peirce (1995) has discussed the ways that identities shift for adult learners in different contexts; she gives an example of how a learner, who was a mother, was able to take a more powerful stance in her work with younger colleagues because she could draw on her knowledge as a mother in this new encounter, even though her linguistic resources were limited. This same dynamic happened in the context of Project WRITE because of the age difference of the college students and older adults.

Since power relationships between pairs were often ambiguous, many college students and older adults, despite differences, seemed to have an easier
time sharing personal information with one another. When the group talked about their pasts in addition to sharing their present-day experiences, there were moments of amazing connection. For example, when Bill (68) and Jack (20) realized they shared the same neurological disorder, they found a connection across their differences in age. Caroline, an older adult, shared the painful legacy of slavery with the class and reflected on how it was worth sharing with the college students:

It wasn't fun to reveal the history but it was educational and fun to let people that didn't know the black culture history -- the true black culture history...there's a lot of pain in it. Sure, it's hard but see, a lot of it will never be revealed. Never.... But yes, it was fun revealing a certain part of it. (interview, 4/16/97)

While Caroline did not reveal the totality of her experiences, she opened up just enough to let the college students feel parts of her life history. It meant a lot to the members of the class that she was willing to share an uncomfortable subject.

Sharing personal information, especially traumatic life experiences, seemed to happen in part because college students and older adults were not working within traditional tutoring relationships—rather, both older adults and tutors had, at various times, powerful roles. In fact, the relationships between many older adults and college students appeared to be reciprocal; there was a lot of "give and take" and changes in roles. For example, one college student read a paper she had written for another class to some of the older adults and sought their advice on revising:

Geraldine (an older adult) and I have these big, intense talks upstairs so to the point where two weeks ago I had a paper due, I had a rough draft but I wasn't too crazy about it so I read it to the ladies and they were like, "that's really boring. Do that again." And I did it again and I think I did better because they were honest about it. (taped class discussion, 4/28/97)

This college student looked to the older adults for their opinion of her academic work. She had many "big, intense talks" with the older adult she was tutoring and trusted her wisdom. Their relationship was reciprocal—both were giving and taking, teaching and learning.

Another example of an older adult taking a more powerful position in the relationship came from an older adult named Anna who talked about the importance of sharing part of her life with her college student tutor:

I think that it helps me a lot that I share part of my life with someone else -- my learning and all. Maybe something might help them a lot because we always learn from each other different things...I think that brings me out to a different point that she responds to me and that helps me learn to understand her. Then maybe something of mine will help her life. (interview, 4/9/97, emphasis ours)

This quote illustrates the complex way learning happens in the context of a caring relationship. Learning, according to Anna, is not just one-sided; sharing her life helps her own learning, but she acknowledges that her experiences might help her college student tutor as well. This reciprocal element was present in many relationships between learning pairs and was essential for both older adults and college students. As one older adult put it:

[learning is] a little harder until I get a better understanding of where she's coming from and she gets where I'm coming from and then we blend in right together. I think that once I get to know her then I can understand more about her and she can understand more about me. (interview, 4/9/97)

In both these examples, there is a desire on the part of both college students and older adults to understand and learn from one another. Sharing personal information and connecting across differences were important for many of the learning pairs, and the learning relationships appeared to be most successful when the sharing was reciprocal.

However, not all older adults or college students were willing to share personal stories, especially those that focused on "differences." One older adult felt troubled when others talked about slavery; she pointed out: "I didn't like when they...go way back there in the slaves. I don't know nothing about slaves back then" (interview, 4/2/97). This older adult felt that talking about slavery was a border that should not be crossed—one that she placed firmly between herself and others.

A college student named Tina also preferred to focus on what she had in common with the older adults rather than differences, especially regarding socioeconomic class:

I decided I wouldn't say anything about my life other than [this city] because it just felt uncomfortable for me because then I'd be in a minority, but people could interpret that as looking down on other people—I have 2 houses or whatever... so I decided at the beginning that I wasn't going to say anything in the learning groups about that...I focused more on what we had in common. (taped class discussion, 4/28/97)

Tina's discomfort with talking about her social class
caused her to try to remain behind a border of socioeconomic class; she did not want to risk being a "minority" so instead she strove to find the similarities between herself and the older adults in the program.

The willingness or lack of willingness to share personal information within learning pairs was largely dependent on the relationship that formed between the two individuals. In one case, an older adult was able to connect with some tutors but not with others. Catherine, an older adult, saw value in getting to know a tutor personally. She expressed her feelings about Richard, her first tutor, and compared her relationship with him to her experience with Margaret, her second tutor. Catherine recalled that Richard would often talk about his personal life when she said, "Richard tell me about somewhere he went, and he had a good time but spent too much money. He had me laughing...yeah, he talked a lot and really tried to help me...I used to talk to Richard about a lot of things" (interview, 4/2/97). Because Richard took the initiative to tell Catherine about his life outside of class, she, in turn, talked to Richard about her own life. She thought about her relationship with Richard longingly, saying, "I liked Richard...I was learning real good with Richard. Richard know how to teach real good" (interview, 4/2/97). The personal relationship she experienced with Richard enhanced her learning experience; she felt comfortable with him and, therefore, felt comfortable learning with him.

The closeness she felt with Richard was replaced in the next semester with the distance that she felt with Margaret. Catherine asserted, "Well, she don't tell me nothing about her life...only thing she told me was she was from Long Island somewhere out there in the suburbs" (interview, 4/2/97). There is a real sense of detachment regarding Catherine's perception of the place from where Margaret comes. Her use of the words "somewhere out there" implies that she learned little about Margaret's background and had few ways to consociate with her. While Catherine did learn from Margaret academically, there was no personal relationship to provide her with a sense of comfort and connection during tutoring sessions.

When Margaret, the tutor, talked about her relationship with Catherine, she admitted, "[Catherine]'s kind of private in terms of her personal life. I know bits and pieces, but it's not like we sit and have big, long conversations...but I'm not very talkative about my personal life either so it could be me as well as her-- it could be both of us" (interview, 4/30/97). Margaret mentions Catherine's restricted talk about her personal life but then connects this to her own elusiveness-- she affirms her role in the relationship as the possible cause for not getting personal and then contemplates the role that they both play in the decision to place boundaries on their conversations. This college student went on to say, "I don't really see how being 'friends-friends' is helpful to the tutoring situation...when we sit down we get down to business...like I really don't know much about Catherine but I don't think it's hindered our relationship" (interview, 4/30/97). Margaret's decision to keep the tutoring session strictly academic appears to be as much a result of her beliefs about teaching and learning as it is a matter of her personality.

One might be tempted to say that the age difference, which was much more extreme between Catherine and Margaret than it was between Catherine and Richard, explains why Catherine did not always form a personal relationship with younger members of the program. Richard is in his forties whereas Margaret, Catherine's second tutor, was twenty-one years old. Catherine recalled that she and her first tutor, Richard, had no problems understanding one another. She explained, "I talked to Richard about different things. He seemed like he more understanding that she is. She young, she don't understand much...People who are young don't understand nothing" (interview, 4/2/97). Looking across the table at the second author (who is in her early-twenties) during the interview, Catherine added, "You're young, but you understand things" (interview, 4/2/97). Interestingly, age was a border Catherine could cross with her interviewer; they had conversations throughout the year which were personal in nature. However, Catherine could not cross the border of age with Margaret because they never spoke about their personal lives; the relationship was neither personal nor reciprocal.

For the majority of college students and older adults, the program offered a place where differences could be discussed and where relationships could be built across those differences. Eyler & Giles (1999, p. 28) suggest that service-learning, because it allows for "informal conversations between people who are working together," can often be a site where discussions about race, socioeconomic class, age and gender take on a different tone than in more formal classroom discussion. Although this did not always happen, there were moments when this course seemed to function as a borderland where just such relationships and just such discussions could take place.

**Toward Transformative Learning**

Certainly, transformative learning is a tall order. However, we did find that the more deeply both college students and older adults were able to reflect on their experiences and "try on" new ideas, the more
engaged they were in learning and the more risks they were willing to take in building learning relationships. In her paper, a college student named Ruth wrote, "Did I have the ability to break through cultural and racial boundaries that I was unaccustomed to? Yes, through working in this class...we all together formed new ideas and new perceptions of difficult situations" (student paper, 12/16/96). Through her relationships with those she tutored, she changed her perceptions about people from different racial and cultural backgrounds and identified her place in society in relation to the older adults, acknowledging the spaces they inhabit together as well as the spaces they do not share.

One of the benefits of service-learning for pre-service teachers is the ways in which this kind of experience can set up patterns for new teachers in which teaching is defined as a process of learning from students and from reflecting on their own teaching practice. Another potential benefit of service-learning for this population is that it can (at its best) provide future teachers with the opportunity to build relationships with people from other backgrounds—to be border crossers—and to interrupt previously held stereotypes about particular racial, ethnic, socioeconomic class, educational or age groups. This is one of the often-discussed positive outcomes of service-learning. As Eyler and Giles (1999) explain in their summary of the service-learning literature, "One of the most consistent outcomes of service-learning is in the reduction of negative stereotypes and the increase in tolerance for diversity" (p. 29).

However, we must be careful about assuming that just because students are working with people who are different from themselves, that they will automatically become cross-culturally competent and discard stereotypes. For as Schram & Mandel (1994, p. 255) suggest, "We tend to see what we expect to see" (as cited in Ward, 1997). In order to build meaningful relationships and "make a difference," students involved in service-learning programs need to move beyond a "charity" orientation through the building of caring relationships and critical reflection. Finally, if this experience is really going to influence their cross-cultural competence, they need to reflect not only on classroom experiences but on the relationship between structural inequities and schooling.

By the same token, it is valuable for adult literacy learners, particularly those who have had negative childhood experiences with schooling, to reflect on this experience as a way of re-locating the problem and seeing the ways in which their failure is not merely related to their shortcomings as learners, but also to the educational structures and practices they encountered as African American children in segregated schools. In the following quote, Catherine, an African American older adult in her 60's, shows how negative or nonexistent relationships with teachers in her early schooling—an absence of "someone that was really interested"—explains her earlier academic failure. Not only does this older adult show how important relationships have been in her learning process, she is also able to reflect on the ways that her educational experiences are not just a product of her own abilities, but also the educational and social structures she encountered years ago in the rural South. Catherine explained:

The teachers I had, because I'm not going to say all teachers, they weren't interested in [the students], that's right. The teachers had no interest.... they would just put the work up on the board and they would sit there and read newspapers.... I do believe that if I had someone that was really interested, I think I could have made it. At least to graduate. I really do (interview, 4/23/97).

Another older adult discussed that a farming economy and the circumstances of schooling for African Americans in the rural south during her childhood influenced her learning:

I went to school down south and by the time you would start learning something, your people would have to bring you out to work on the farm. You start and learn and you begin to like school and you had to come out to work on the farm. Plus...you get left back there with the little kids and you get disgusted. So when you old enough, you just quit school....I would love to go to school and I was learning real good, then you had to go back to the farm...(interview, 4/7/97, emphasis in the original).

In this interview, she is able to show her enthusiasm about learning and to reflect on the ways that her literacy practices have been shaped not only by ability but by a complex set of social and economic factors. Just as many older adults were able to see the complexity of schooling, the college students, as Kahne and Westheimer (1999) suggest, were sometimes able to "step outside dominant understandings" of teaching and learning through reflection. By providing course readings that discuss the strengths and abilities of adult literacy learners and by reading culturally-relevant texts with older adults, college students were able to see the capabilities of the older adults in new ways and reflect on the ways this challenged their assumptions. In addition, having caring relationships with the older adults made it possible for the college students to reflect more deeply on previous assumptions because they were faced with
teaching someone they came to know as a person.

The parallels that both college students and older adults experienced in learning new things often shaped college students’ abilities to see the strengths of those they tutored. One college student talked about how reading Lytle’s (1991) article, *Living Literacy*, which discusses literacy not as skills but as practices, changed how she was viewing literacy and how she viewed the older adults with whom she was working:

All three of us made improvements simply by gaining confidence in the abilities we already had. Once I stopped looking at literacy as skills and tasks but saw it as practices and critical reflection/action, my [older adult] learners’ strengths really stood out. I could then help them build upon those strengths. His past experiences have left Henry somewhat doubting his own ability and nervous about being asked to read...I too was having doubts about my own ability as a tutor. (student paper, 5/5/97)

What is interesting about this quote is that the college student and the older adults with whom she was working did not simply learn something new but instead transformed doubts about their abilities—as a tutor and as literacy learners—into strengths that they could build upon during tutoring sessions.

Although there are many instances in which the older adults assumed that the college students would know more about teaching and learning than they did, this was not always the case. One college student talked about a moment when some older adult learners realized that she was also a learner. Her “learner status” was influenced by the fact that they were reading a book called *Tumbling* (McKinney-Whetstone, 1996) about African Americans in Philadelphia in the 1940’s and 1950’s. Since most of the older adult learners in the program are African American and lived in Philadelphia at that time, they had real knowledge about what was happening in the book that the college students lacked. The college student explained the situation in this way:

I think my learners are surprised sometimes when I don’t understand and they ask me the meaning of a word that we’ve been reading...in this book and they’ll be like “Well, what does that word mean?” And I say I don’t know and I have to look it up too.... When I have to look it up, it puts me in the perspective that I don’t know everything. And there have been times that they’ve had to explain things to me and...she also had to correct my pronunciation of a certain name of a character...(taped class discussion, 4/28/97)

Through reflecting on her tutoring experiences and a text that the older adults had more background knowledge about, this college student was able to view herself not only as a tutor but as a learner. Thus, the learning relationship became more reciprocal, through reflection on texts and experiences and through caring connections with the older adults.

**Conclusion**

Our investigation shows the ways that service-learning can and should meet the needs of both those who are “serving” and those who are “being served.” However, in much of the literature on service-learning, the quality of the program is judged based on what the college students gained from the experience—how it helped them develop as citizens, how it aided them in learning academic knowledge, whether it increased their understanding of diversity. This is all valuable, and our study confirms that service-learning can be an excellent tool for enhancing the training of pre-service teachers. Service-learning is quite beneficial for college students, and that is very important.

However, it often seems that service-learning courses focus primarily on the outcomes for “those serving” and spend very little time looking at the impact on individuals and communities who are “being served.” If service-learning is to really make a difference in our society, the projects students do need to be useful ones for the individuals and communities being served. Programs need to think about how the advantages of a semester-long commitment from college students can be turned into something more than a huge limitation for those “being served.” This focus on the recipients of service needs to span not only the tangible benefits to participants in the programs, but also needs to be included in the theoretical and conceptual models used to study service-learning outcomes. Our understanding of Project WRITE has been greatly enhanced and changed by focusing on the perspectives of the older adults. We believe more of this kind of work needs to be done.

Theoretically speaking, we have found the metaphor of border crossing (Giroux, 1991; 1992) to be a useful one in understanding what it takes for both older adults and college students to build meaningful learning relationships despite their differences. Although we agree with Giroux’s assumptions that borders exist and that people have the ability to cross these borders, it was only through the development of caring relationships and reflection on those relationships that learning pairs were able to navigate their way across borders. Our work in this area has shown that Giroux’s conception of border crossing is strengthened by talking about the relationship and reflecting on it.
Project WRITE and other programs like it on college campuses around the country offer potential solutions for addressing the widespread attrition in adult education programs and the need for cross-culturally competent teachers. However, our work shows that the positive benefits of service-learning hinge on seeing the building of relationships as central rather than peripheral to the work that is being done. Building reciprocal learning relationships is a key element to achieving the more tangible outcomes that older adults and college students want from their participation in this kind of program. Older adult learners want to learn to read and write. College students want to learn how to teach. Neither of these learning goals can be achieved without both members of the learning pairs crossing borders and building relationships across the differences they encounter. In preparing both college students and those they are tutoring to participate in service-learning programs like this one, more time needs to be spent showing how this relationship-building is not peripheral to learning, but central to it.

Notes

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1. This project was created and implemented by the Center for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University through a Literacy Corps grant from the State of Pennsylvania. This project is one of more than 20 cross-age programs at the Center, many of which include a service-learning component for college students.

2. The first author was a participant in ALPIP (Adult Literacy Practitioner Inquiry Project) for the year that she collected data in Project WRITE. In this program, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and UPS and held at the University of Pennsylvania, adult literacy teachers and program coordinators conducted research in their own programs and classrooms and worked together to analyze data and use research findings to make pedagogical and administrative changes to current program practices.

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