

Distributed Agency and the Rhetorical Work of Essay Contests

by

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ABSTRACT

Distributed Agency and the Rhetorical Work of Essay Contests

by

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This dissertation shows how essay contests reveal the distribution of rhetorical agency among an array of actors who sponsor, judge, write for, and disseminate materials for these literacy events. Essay contests are an ideologically-inflected, cultural literacy practice that traverses school and community settings. Despite the fact that many libraries, schools, newspapers, civic organizations, literary societies and corporations regularly sponsor such contests, they have received little attention in the scholarly literature. This project draws attention to this previously unexplored literacy practice and to the social relations of writing that it illuminates. In addition to tracing the history of such contests, which emerged in the 1880's in conjunction with the British colonial and U.S. expansionist projects, this project presents a model of the dynamically-interacting, key features of essay contests. It also draws on cultural and rhetorical theory to highlight the key role that institutional sponsors play in shaping writing subjects and the production of knowledge. To demonstrate how agency is distributed in a contemporary contest of the global, digital age, the project offers an in-depth examination of the World Bank's 2009 Youth Essay Competition on "Green Entrepreneurship." Using methods of

discourse and rhetorical analysis, it considers the ways in which the contest prompt influenced the rhetorical choices made by the winning essayists -- who, hailing mainly from the Global South, conformed to specific expectations (related to genre, purpose, and identification), while simultaneously (1) taking up subject positions beyond those hailed by the contest announcement; (2) integrating concerns not explicitly raised by the prompt; (3) asserting their own rhetorical purposes; and (4) creating novel "intertexts" from both "center" and "periphery" in their work. Pedagogically, this project suggests that rhetorical awareness involves attending not only to the constitutive ways in which contest sponsors seek to direct the attention of writers, but also to the ways in which writers and other actors respond to this direction and positioning through rhetorical strategies of their own. Understanding the "push and pull" of these elements helps us to conceptualize the "rhetorical work" that such contests perform.

Chapter 1

The Essay Contest as a “Governmental” Literacy Practice

Essay contests are a common, yet largely unexplored cultural literacy practice. Typically, they are seen as character-building exercises that encourage young people to write about issues seen as having civic merit -- patriotism, freedom, and diplomacy, tolerance and empathy, or the appreciation of a major figure in history. Yet, despite the fact that many libraries, schools, newspapers, civic organizations, literary societies and corporations regularly sponsor such contests, they have received little attention in the scholarly literature. In this project, I draw attention to this previously unexplored, ideologically-inflected, literacy practice (Street 1993) and to the social relations of writing that are relevant to it. Specifically, I offer a model of this practice and an investigation into its history, as well as a close examination of one example of a contest in the digital age. In doing so, I highlight the key role that institutional sponsors play in shaping writing subjects and the production of knowledge. But simultaneously, I demonstrate ways in which writers use rhetorical strategies of their own to negotiate their discursive positioning. The complex tendencies of sponsors and variously situated other writers contribute, in large part, to what I am calling the rhetorical work of contests. And, as I will show, they ultimately reveal the distribution of agency among writers, sponsors, and an array of other actors who participate in writing tasks.

The Essay Contest as a Literacy Practice

Street (1993) coined the term, “literacy practice,” to refer to “both behavior and conceptualizations related to the use of reading and/or writing” (12). As the major proponent of the ‘ideological view’ of literacy, Street developed the concept in contrast to Shirley Brice Heath’s notion of a “literacy event” (12), which she defines as “any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes” (12). Street says that he intends “‘literacy practices’ as a broader concept, pitched at a higher level of abstraction” (12). The key difference, as I see it, between these two terms, is that the first refers to *specific instances* in which the activity of literacy is central to the people involved in that activity, and the second refers to *the practice (or complex of practices) itself*, and the meaning that people make of it. Hence, a singular essay contest may be viewed as a literacy event, whereas essay contests in general may be viewed in a more comprehensive way, as a literacy practice or even system of practices. In each case, literacy events and literacy practices reflect (dominant or non-dominant) ideas about what literacy itself entails.

I would like to suggest that a “literacy practice” is a repeated activity that involves meaning-making with a symbol-using system such as reading and writing—as well as the cultural assumptions that underlie that literate activity and make it one that people recognize as such. And, of course, essay-writing (e.g. in the context of a contest) is only one among many kinds of activity that fall within the category of literacy, even if it is one of the dominant ways in which literacy is expressed. The notion of the cultural, ideological, and social aspects of literacy has been central to the work of researchers in the field of New Literacy Studies, who have developed ethnographic approaches in specific geographic locations. But scholars like Brandt

and Clinton suggest there are “limits” to an approach to literacy scholarship that focuses too heavily on local aspects (“Limits of the Local”) at the cost of examining the materiality of literacy across multiple contexts and locations. That is, they call attention to the “transcontextualized and transcontextualizing potentials of literacy –particularly its ability to travel, integrate and endure” (337). Their emphasis on the globalizing aspects of literacy is increasingly relevant to literacy scholarship that focuses on literacy over the Web. Online essay contests make some of these transcontextual aspects of contests especially evident.

Essay contests offer a particularly revealing window onto these questions about the social, ideological and transcontextual aspects of literacy, a category which I understand to include a wide variety of ways of reading, writing, and making meaning with texts. Because they invite us to think about the (often unequal) social relations of literacy, they are also a uniquely productive site for the analysis of rhetorical agency, which Campbell (2005) defines as the “competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded” (3). Not only do they help us to see how influential sponsors, prompts, and genres position writers discursively, but they also help us to recognize some of the rhetorical choices that variously positioned writers make. They help us to think through the multiple actors who participate in complex communicative ecosystems and invite us to consider the kinds of constitutive rhetorical work that such contests perform.

Essay contests can be distinguished from other types of writing contest (such as contests inviting submissions of poetry or short stories, for example) in that they give prominence to the essay, a “schooled” genre -- that is, a genre that is primarily taught, read, and written in schools (Bloom). In doing so, they have a tendency to reinforce cultural values

linked to schooling and essayist literacy, as well as other values implicit in specific writing tasks. Additionally, because of this emphasis, they always explicitly or implicitly bridge school and community settings. This study therefore responds to Hull and Schultz' (2001) "call for an examination of the relationships between school and non-school contexts as a new direction for theory and research" (603). This project's focus on the civic dimensions of essay contests and on the role of community sponsors additionally calls attention to some of the ways in which "the distinction between in-school and out-of-schools sets up a false dichotomy" (577). This study, therefore, undermines the boundaries between these locations for literacy learning by de-emphasizing the distance between them.

Foucault's work serves as a useful theoretical frame for such a study because it can help us to see how the power of essay-writing – an activity frequently associated with schools -- can be harnessed as an ideological tool for the maintenance and construction of publics. It can additionally help us see how such contests and the writing they encourage promote specific kinds of knowledge, subjectivity, and civic virtue. Moreover, such a framework can help us to recognize certain tacit assumptions associated with these activities. For example, today, the use of essay-writing as a way of testing one's mettle (note the relationship of the word "essay" to the English "assay") has become something so familiar, so natural, so seemingly benign -- that we barely take notice. But, as we will see, this notion of essay-writing as a kind of "test" is built in to the very fabric of ideas about the genre. And when competitive essay-writing is extended to groups of individuals, it becomes a way of engaging the whole group in a simultaneous process by which they agree upon certain standards for thinking, writing, and doing. That is to say, it becomes a highly efficient tool for the creation of certain kinds of

publics -- “imagined communities” (Anderson) with whom individuals feel a common interest and affinity, even if they have never met face-to-face. And, in the age of the Internet, some of these tendencies are even more pronounced. A Foucauldian analysis of the essay contest – and of the genre it highlights, the essay -- therefore, becomes a way of making strange the familiar, and of pointing to some of the assumptions that underlie these common literacy practices.

Montaigne and Essay Writing as a “Technology of the Self”

Even though the first essay contest did not take place until about 1880, the history of the essay contest is nonetheless necessarily bound up in the invention of the essay genre by Montaigne in the late sixteenth century -- a period in which, as Foucault (1991) suggests, changes were occurring in the nature of governance. The growth in population, the end of feudalism, the centralization of states, and the religious conflicts of the period required new methods of leadership and approaches to governing. According to Foucault, numerous treatises on questions of “[h]ow to govern oneself, how to be governed, how to govern others, by whom the people will accept being governed, how to become the best possible governor” (87) were published between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Many advised against earlier techniques that included coercion and the rule of law, emphasizing instead “a range of multiform tactics” (95) reliant upon the consent of the governed. As Foucault puts it, “With government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics rather than laws, and even using laws themselves as tactics – to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved” (95).

Key to this broad notion of “governing,” for Foucault, is the idea that populations should govern themselves. The sponsors of governmental action are seen as responsible for developing interventions that direct or manage the efforts of the public in ways that are reliant upon their own capacities. What differs from earlier, more coercive (Machiavellian, for instance) conceptions of government, then, is the role of the populace in their own self-monitoring. Individuals were to be held accountable to the aims of governing bodies via a range of “governmental” mechanisms and “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 1988), which, over time, came to include various literacy practices, like essay-writing and the modern essay contest.

As Foucault implies, one of the historical developments leading up to this sea-change in attitudes relates to the Renaissance revival of interest in questions of the ‘care of the soul’ or ‘the self’ in the classic Greek texts: that is, the “question of the government of oneself, that ritualization of the problem of personal conduct which is characteristic of the sixteenth century Stoic revival” (87). Foucault (1998) refers to such rituals of personal conduct in another lecture, published posthumously, as “technologies of the self.” With this term, Foucault seeks to make visible a range of everyday practices through which individuals learned to assess and monitor their own attitudes and behaviors. Among such schemes, writing plays an important role; methods such as journaling, letter-writing, and commonplacing were common. “[B]y the Hellenistic age...[t]aking care of oneself became linked to constant writing activity....A relation developed between writing and vigilance” (27), he explains. Writers like Marcus Aurelius developed a nightly routine that involved writing letters to their mentors, offering an account of themselves. This practice of considering one’s conscience – “to acknowledge faults, to

recognize temptations, to locate desires” (40) and reflect upon acts left undone, developed into Christian confession, he suggests. These were practices aimed at the individual’s own intellectual and spiritual self-governance and/or improvement.

The stoics even developed exercises to prepare themselves for hypothetical situations. They used meditation, mnemonic devices and self-imposed exams to test their readiness for debates “by thinking over useful terms and arguments” (36); they also developed practices of self-discipline and the renunciation of various kinds of temptation. In Epictetus, Foucault says, there were question-and-answer games that taught a moral lesson. Based on the Socratic method, such exercises prompted particular kinds of reflection and conceptions of spiritual wellness. These were often linked to walking exercises: “In the morning you go for a walk, and you test your reactions to that walk” (38). Other technologies of the self in Christianity included self-purification, penance, and prayer.

The earliest essay-writers would have been familiar with many of these techniques. In his essay, “On the Education of Children,” for instance, Montaigne (the first writer to coin the term “essay”) makes reference to the practice of commonplacing. This was a practice of jotting notes about memorable aphorisms, sayings or quotes in a notebook. Montaigne also makes reference to the practice of walking reflection, which was common among a number of the earliest essayists (Good). Often the goal of these practices was self-improvement, which demanded self-reflection by the author about his (or, more rarely, her) shortcomings. The importance of such self-reflection can be found in the very etymology of “essai,” which translates from the French as “an attempt,” “a test,” or “a trial.” It can also be seen in the

following passage from Montaigne, in which the writer discloses his thoughts about writing as a quest for self-understanding:

My ideas and my judgment merely grope their way forward, faltering tripping, and stumbling; and when I have advanced as far as I can, I am still not at all satisfied. I can see more country ahead, but with so disturbed and clouded a vision that I can distinguish nothing. And when I venture to write indifferently of whatever comes into my head, relying on my own natural resources, I very often light upon the matter I am trying to deal with in some good author, as I did just now in Plutarch....Then I realize how weak and poor, how heavy and lifeless I am, in comparison with them, and feel pity and contempt for myself" (50).

In this excerpt, Montaigne speaks of his dissatisfaction with his own intellectual processes. He speaks of traveling forward with difficulty, of seeing the development of his own thoughts with a "disturbed and clouded vision." He understands writing as a method of self-clarification by which he gains awareness of his own inadequacies in relation to writers who have come before. In this sense, essay-writing can be seen as emerging within a cultural and historical context in which writers saw writing as a means of self-analysis or improvement. This excerpt from Montaigne suggests that this was indeed a period in which individual writers valued, among other things, what Foucault might call a neo-stoic approach to the care of the self. When, in the late nineteenth century, the technology of essay-writing was applied at the level of larger population groups, it was transformed into a technology for the construction and administration of publics -- and, I suggest, this is the technology of governance that we have now come to know as the modern essay contest.

Governmentality and Essay Contests

Essay contests therefore represent a shift in terms of harnessing the power of writing to shape not only individual attitudes and behaviors but also those of collectivities. That is, they

make possible the extension of essay-writing as a technology of the self to one of governance – a technology aimed at the coordination of groups as well as individuals. Targeted groups (prospective essayists) are invited to think through certain topics of interest, often in pre-determined ways, and, in so doing, the patterns of thinking and writing that they develop shape the “self” but also the construction of publics. To view essay contests from the framework of Foucauldean “governmentality,” then, is to consider the ways in which this literacy practice is used to govern large and small populations in ways that depend upon the powers, capacities, consent, and/or input of the governed. It is to see essay contests as one of numerous apparatuses that manage or direct public action and sentiment in ways that uphold not only standards for the “self” but also particular visions of the just or thriving society.

As a “governmental” intervention, then, essay contests are focused on the literate development of subjects, which is to say, their formation as actors with particular attitudes, values and characteristic patterns of thinking, writing, and acting. Such contests rely on mechanisms, such as the contest prompt, along with prizes and incentives that encourage or promote specific kinds of literacy (civic, economic, environmental, etc.) in a particular population group. Additionally such contests provide a platform for distinguishing judges, as well as a measure or guidelines for evaluating their participants’ success. Typically, they share the goal of fostering particular kinds of problem-solving, attitudes, and behaviors seen as benefitting society as a whole, even as the values of a particular interest group, class, industry or party are frequently treated as collective virtue.

Moreover, the competitive nature of this activity tends to reinforce notions of writing as individualist practice. Writers are typically hailed as individuals who compete with one another

for the prize. But additionally subjects are hailed as particular kinds of people, with particular identity attributes. That is, the topics, genres, and forms of argumentation (e.g. causal, problem-solution) interpellate the subject in particular ways. The essay contest thus constitutes a unique form of “governmental” action, in which the prompt serves as a kind of frame or “terministic screen” (Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action*, 50) that *filters in* sponsored ways of writing and thinking and also, potentially, *filters out* undesirable thought and identification patterns. As a technology of governance, then, the essay contest serves to constitute, shape, or cultivate the subjectivities of particular groups by constructing discourse patterns and channels of inquiry. Because they are aimed at the “self-governing” attitudes and inquiries of likeminded individuals, essay contests therefore promote a version of rhetorical citizenship that is prompted by sponsors and constitutive of publics.

“Governmental” schemes thus position the subject in particular ways, towards particular ends, and they are typically rationalized as schemes that improve or promote the ‘general welfare.’ Literacy programs have long been a favored intervention among “governmental” actors. Much like the purveyors of Althusser’s “ideological state apparatuses,” however, these actors need not strictly be representatives of the state. Rather these “governmental” actors today include a diverse array of organizations and individuals who may or may not be aligned with agencies of government. In the case of the essay contest, as this chapter will show, “governmental” actors include a wide array of sponsors, endorsers, advertisers and participating organizations. However, what “governmental” sponsors of essay contests all share in common is the goal of shaping participants (and, by extension, society) towards some end.

In brief, essay contests have a civic orientation. They work to promote forms of character, inquiry, and behavior that are sanctioned by particular communities. The sponsors of contests include multiple types of organization that rely on the essay contest as a mechanism for engaging participants' subjectivities as writers and readers. In this dissertation, I suggest that such contests, with their emphasis on contributing to the development of responsible, ethical citizens, can best be theorized from a "governmental" perspective – that is, one which considers how "human beings are individuated and addressed within the various practices that would govern them..." (Rose, 1999, 43). At the same time, such an approach allows for gaps in the interpellative processes of sponsors, whose efforts – precisely because they rely on other actors -- can never be totalizing. They are a literacy practice in which rhetorical agency – or the power to effect change via writing or speaking – is necessarily distributed among multiple actors.

The Distribution of Agency in Essay Contests

As an everyday literacy practice, essay contests can be seen as an everyday practice that indexes ideological assumptions about the meaning of literacy. Ironically, one of the cultural assumptions that essay contests make plain is the way in which they promote a view of writing as individually competitive activity. But, as this dissertation will show, essay contests are also useful in that they reveal the multiple actors, including the sponsors, essayists, judges, incentives and material technologies that influence the direction of writing. To reduce writing to a competitive, individual activity – or to one in which meanings are determined by any one influential entity, like that of the literacy sponsor -- is to overlook the ways in which it is social and involves the distribution of agency among multiple actors. This is an observation made

decades ago by Karen Burke Lefevre (1987) in her seminal *Invention as a Social Act*. In this book, Lefevre described the people behind the scene of writing -- the groups and individuals who help create the conditions that support the writer's creative work. According to Lefevre, the production of writing "requires people who act as Steloff has, whether they be called enablers, resonators, friends, *sponsors*, liaisons, or brokers of arts and letters" (78, italics mine). All writing, for Lefevre, is collaborative in the sense that writers necessarily depend on the practical support of patrons, sponsors, and friends. This dissertation builds upon Lefevre's work by accounting for some of the ways in which rhetorical agency is necessarily distributed among multiple actors in essay contests. At the same time, it suggests that this distribution is often highly unequal and shows how such contests make visible the ways in which writing is socially negotiated, even in the context of a competition.

Literacy sponsorship

One of the most visible ways of zeroing in on the social nature of writing in an essay contest is to point to the key role of institutional sponsors. Indeed, the working model of the essay contest that follows places the emphasis on sponsors as crucial to our understanding of the "governmental" function that essay contests play. The emphasis on sponsors owes itself to the pioneering work of Brandt (2001), for whom "literacy sponsors" are the institutions, mentors or teachers who provide the necessary support for literacy learning. For Brandt, these sponsors are the groups and individuals, either inside or outside of school settings, who make it possible for people to develop their proficiency at reading and writing. But, as she explains, literacy sponsors "can be benefactors but also extortionists—and often both in the same form" (Brandt 193). Such an observation rightly recognizes the power differential often present

between “governmental” sponsors and the writers whose literacy activity they direct and support. But one of the limitations of such a difficult-to-pin-down definition of sponsorship is that it raises questions about who these sponsors are, how they wield influence, and how we might identify differences among them. In short, it raises questions about how we approach sponsors as a meaningful category of analysis.

Analyzing the Essay Contest

To arrive at a clear understanding of how essay contests, and -- in particular, their sponsors, direct rhetorical action – and, simultaneously, to begin to conceptualize how multiple actors participate in the construction of meaning in contests, it is necessary to begin to construct a working model of this cultural practice. To that end, this chapter discusses the results of my analysis of approximately 140 essay contests, the announcements for which I was able to access via the Internet during the Summer of 2012. These were among the first “hits” that a google search retrieved, using the compound term “essay contest,” which yielded several million results. Additionally, my sample included a handful of essay contests the announcements for which I received in my email inbox. The following model was developed based on my analysis of the various features I identified in those contests. My decision to stop collecting announcements was based on the sense that I had achieved a high degree of data saturation, or repetition of the same basic information. And, of course, any claims to representativeness must be qualified by the limited nature of this search, which was reliant on the algorithms of the search engine involved, and likely privileged contests originating in the U.S. because it was conducted in English from a U.S. location. But despite these limitations, this analysis makes it possible to offer some preliminary observations about the “governmental”

function of essay contests, and specifically the ways in which they encode specific kinds of knowledge and notions of civic virtue.

The Blurring of Civic/Educational and Commercial/Partisan Agendas

First, it would seem that, regardless of their actual purposes, essay contests must at least proclaim either a civic and/or educational mission. Such contests often, for example, promote values such as civic involvement peace, freedom, critical thinking, or empathy. They also often promote appreciation for well-known writers and/or leaders, historical events, or problem-solving related to issues of social importance (e.g. civil rights). Civic and educational values must be present, even if other values (of a political or commercial nature) are also touted by the contest. Because of this civic and educational emphasis, the sponsors of essay contests therefore must at least nominally subscribe to a philosophy that values and promotes civic engagement. That is, they must at least seem primarily interested in the ideal of education for democratic citizenship, even if their primary motivations lie elsewhere. Contests that promote character-building and critical thinking can also be included in this camp.

But the question of what is coded as civic engagement or civic virtue in contests can vary significantly. In the case of contests sponsored by for-profit entities, partisan or commercial goals frequently masquerade as civically-minded. They regularly ride the coattails of the “civic” and borrow the prestige of literacy to further their commercial purposes. This can be seen, for example, in the case of groups that represent particular businesses or industry agendas. Often these groups commingle with non-profit entities, and so participants must be attentive to the differences between types of sponsors. Additionally, the websites of institutes and foundations that resemble educational organizations occasionally end with the descriptor

“.com.” Similarly, economically-motivated groups have developed non-profit arms that end in “.org.” For instance, a sponsor like the “Achievement Academy”¹ is a commercial entity, even though it appears to be some type of school, and the Center for Private Enterprise² is identified as a non-profit organization, even though it appears to represent business or industry. In fact, some of the non-profit professional associations that regularly sponsor contests clearly represent specific industries.

This kind of blurring of the lines between non-profit and for-profit entities can make it difficult for writers who participate in contests to distinguish among the various agendas they represent. In the case of private/ public partnerships, too, civic and educational goals may be confused with those of a commercial or partisan nature. That is to say, even though many contests support goals that can be clearly identified as civic or educational, occasionally goals of a commercial and/or partisan nature are additionally brought into the mix. As a result, contest participants, their teachers, and audiences must have access to strategies that assist them to attend carefully to the sponsors of contests and be able to identify distinctions among them. In the final chapter, I offer some strategies that can help build writers’ **rhetorical awareness** in ways that assist them to be alert to the deliberate blurring of the “civic” or “educational” with the economic interests of particular groups. Because these agendas frequently masquerade as civic or educational, it is important for those who participate in contests to have some sense of what they might expect, so that they can respond in rhetorically aware and agentive ways. The

¹ “2012 Spring Contests Winners.” The United States Achievement Academy 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

² “C.I.P.E. Youth Essay Contest 2011.” Center for International Private Enterprise 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

graphic in Figure 1.1 is a visual representation of four kinds of agendas that may be present to varying degrees in essay contests.

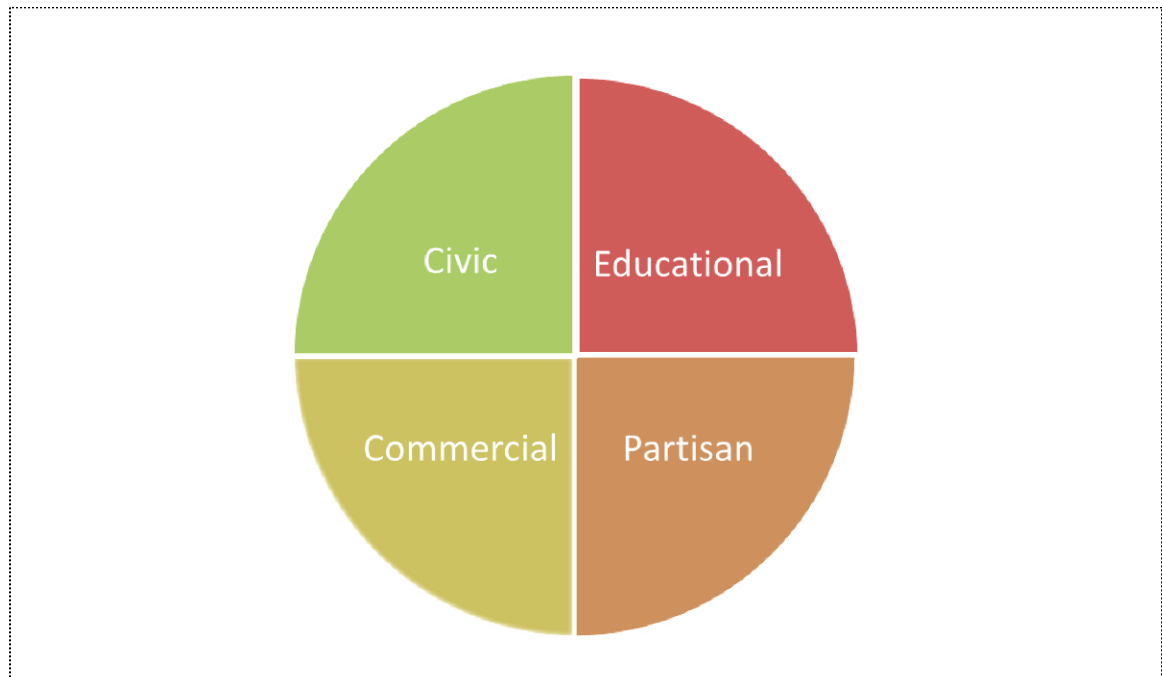


Figure 1.1 A Visual Representation of Agendas In Essay Contests

Considering these four possibilities may help writers and readers to determine the types of goals that are most pronounced in specific contests, and, in the last chapter, I will suggest that an awareness of some of the likely types of potential agendas of sponsors can be useful to those who educate for rhetorical awareness.

To demonstrate the variety of agendas that can be found in contemporary essay contests, let me begin by offering a few examples of contests organized around civic themes. As I mentioned, this general notion of educating for citizenship, or preparing young people for engagement in the civic life of their communities, is one of the principal motivations given by

contest organizers for holding a contest. Patriotic themes, in particular, seem to enjoy wide popularity in essay contests, but, it should be noted, patriotic themes merely represent one among multiple ways of interpreting the “civic.” Because of the ways in which they cultivate feelings of national pride by drawing on discourses of nationalism and patriarchy, such contests make linkages between these discourses and that of civic involvement in ways that are hardly self-evident or transparent.

In some contests, these patriotic themes are subtle, as in the “Profiles in Courage”³ and the National Peace Essay Contest⁴, for instance, but in others, the patriotic themes are bolder or made more central or explicit. Sometimes this explicitness may be a function of attempting to match the theme to the interests or developmental level of a younger student population; a contest held by the Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks,⁵ for instance, sponsors a contest for middle school students, the theme for which is “Why I am Proud to Pledge Allegiance to our Flag.” This contest promotes the activity of pledging allegiance as a social norm, while it simultaneously invites students to offer their own reasons for feeling pride when they are engaging in this activity. Similarly, the Fairfax County Public Library and the For Love of Country Foundation also run a contest aimed at promoting the characteristic activities of citizenship⁶: this contest encourages “rising 7th, 8th, and 9th graders” to write about “why every

³ "Contest Information and Topic Guidelines." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁴ "National Peace Essay Contest for High School Students." United States Institute of Peace 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁵ "Americanism Essay Contest." The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁶ "For Love of Country: In My Own Words--the 4th Annual Essay and Poetry Contest." The Fairfax County Public Library and the For Love of Country Foundation 2012.

American citizen needs to vote,” in the student’s own words. Contests like these seem to want to strike a balance between promoting a specific patriotic worldview and offering students the opportunity to express their own views and sentiments. Such contests tend to promote the elision or conflation of the discourse of civic involvement with the discourse of patriotism, more generally. Other contests focused on civic engagement champion the promotion of peace, global awareness, civil and human rights, the full inclusion of all members of society in decision-making, and issues of diversity and social justice, for example -- but patriotism represents perhaps the most common way of interpreting the civic theme in contemporary essay contests – especially those targeting students in the early grades.

Contests focused on particular character traits are also common; some of these are inspired and funded by the Templeton Foundation, an organization founded after the ideas of John Templeton, a philanthropist and writer, who urged individuals to discover their life purpose. The “Character Matters” essay contest⁷, for example, is based on the model of the Templeton Foundation’s “Laws of Life” essay contest⁸, and is sponsored by the Character Development Center at the University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences. (The main focus of the center, which offers a certificate program in character development, is to provide assistance to K-12 educators who want to integrate character education into their classrooms.) This contest asks students, grades 4-12, to write about why character matters to them. In particular, it motivates students to consider this question in the context of learning experiences designed to prompt reflection about the following ten

⁷ "Character Matters Essay Contest." University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁸ "Welcome to Connecticut's *Laws of Life* Essay Contest." The School for Ethical Education 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

character traits: “respect, responsibility, compassion, courage, perseverance, trust, honesty, gratitude, self-discipline, and citizenship.” These “Badges of Character” figure prominently in the instructional materials, designed for classroom use and are made available to educators for free. They include a convenient, month-by-month timeline, which includes recommendations to, for instance, choose one of the ten “Badges of Character” upon which to focus every other week. One of the prizes for the contest is a “Badges of Character” poster, which is awarded to the winning student’s classroom. Because teachers are intimately involved in this contest, they have a key role in the selection process; they are expected to conduct the first round of ‘judging’ and send in only the very best. This contest draws on well-established organizational resources to promote Templeton’s views on character education.

Another contest based on the “Laws of Life” model is Connecticut’s Laws of Life Essay Program⁹. This contest is run by a not-for-profit organization called the School for Ethical Education that promotes strategies for ethics and character education. This contest is targeted towards students in grades 5-12 and encourages students “of all writing ability to participate.” Students are urged to “write from the heart” and to identify the ‘laws of life’ related to the instruction they have received on issues of character. This contest, which is also supported by the Templeton Foundation, is aimed at calling attention to the writings of “our founder’s ancestor, John Winthrop, colonial governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.” In addition to the character-based agenda, there is also a patriotic agenda related to historical literacy. This merging of character-based and patriotic contests is not unusual; in fact, one of the “Badges of Character” in the Templeton model is citizenship. Contests also occasionally deal with the

⁹ “Welcome to Connecticut’s *Laws of Life* Essay Contest.” The School for Ethical Education 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

molding of religious character; the Knights of Columbus, for instance, sponsor a contest entitled “The Responsibility of the Catholic Citizen in a Free Society.” All of these contests hope to shape the development of responsible, ethically-minded citizens who hold values sanctioned by a particular community. Typically, too, they encourage the essayist to present their own views on a topic; at the level of high school and beyond, these contests often encourage what has been called “critical thinking.”

Contests that ask writers to engage in critical thinking or problem-solving run the gamut and range from the relatively simple to the highly complex. One contest¹⁰, for instance, asks middle and high school students to think about the number of hungry people in the world and consider ways of addressing the problem. Another, which is sponsored by NASA and directed towards high-school students who are considering careers in science and pre-engineering, asks students to focus on one of five possible solutions to the environmental impacts of aircraft noise and emissions and to write a well-documented, 12-page research paper on the topic.¹¹ Other contests ask writers to apply a particular ethical orientation in relation to a real-world problem. The United States Institute of Peace and the Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding, for instance, ask high school students to elaborate upon various “[d]evelopments around the globe and at home” and to write about best practices for promoting specific values: respect for human rights, freedom, justice, international security, and peace around the world.¹² The organizers of the contest explain that they understand

¹⁰ “Olive Garden Asks Student Writers to Take a Bite out of Hunger for the 17th-Annual Pasta Tales Essay Writing Contest.” Olive Garden 2012.

¹¹ “2011-2012 Competition.” National Aeronautics and Space Administration 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

¹² “National Peace Essay Contest for High School Students.” United States Institute of Peace 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

these values to be vital to civic education, and they describe their desire to inculcate these values in the next generation of leaders as their rationale for establishing the contest.

Questions that deal with both practical and ethical issues are common in the contemporary essay contest.

Some of these contests raise controversial questions; for instance, one that is sponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) asks students to consider, “Under what circumstances, if any, can the Ten Commandments or another sacred text be taught or brought up for discussion in the classroom.”¹³ Students are encouraged to study court precedents and draw upon their own experience in answering. Some of these “critical thinking” contests seem to be wide open in terms of the kinds of responses that would be welcome, but others seem to have the “correct” response built-in. The “Matters of Life and Death Scholarship Writing Contest,” for instance, asks students to write in response to the following prompt: “Why should I have an advance directive by the time I turn 18?”¹⁴ Students have to think about *why* they should have an advance directive, but, for the organizers of the contest, *whether* they should do is not considered a matter of any dispute.

Foreclosure of Meaning in Prompts

The “governmental” aspects of contests can frequently be seen in the level of directiveness of contest topics and prompts, and, in particular, the extent to which these foreclose upon meaning. In some contests, the prompt may appear open, but a “correct”

¹³ “First Amendment Essay Contest.” American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut 2012.

¹⁴ “Announcing Winners for the Matters of Life & Death Scholarship Writing Contest 2011-2012.” Compassion & Choices of Northern California 2012.

response may be nonetheless implied. Sometimes these contests are posed as yes-or-no questions. The Veterans of Foreign Wars, for instance, sponsor a “Voice of Democracy Audio-Essay Contest” in which students in grades 9-12 are asked to read an essay onto a CD in which they respond to the question, “Is our Constitution still relevant?”¹⁵ Students are, of course, expected to conclude that the constitution is, indeed, still relevant, and post submissions suitable for the public to hear. Another contest sponsored by the Intercollegiate Studies Institute, whose motto is “Educating for Liberty: Inspiring college students to discover, embrace, and advance the principles and virtues that make America free and prosperous”¹⁶ asks students to become familiar with the ideas of Austrian economist, F.A. Hayek, who wrote about the dangers of centralized planning, and to respond to the question, “Are we back on the road to serfdom?” In each of these questions, there seems to be a kind of “weighting” of the question towards an affirmative answer, such that the question, while appearing to allow equally for a range of responses, actually favors those who take up the desired response. These contests seem aimed at facilitating a process in which the writers are expected to convince themselves of the goals that the organizers intend.

Here we can see some of the ways in which contests that seem to espouse goals related to critical thinking, character-building, civic engagement, or democratic citizenship -- in actuality, espouse economically-motivated or partisan goals that have already predetermined answers. The irony, here, is of course that, rather than promoting intellectual freedom and legitimate rhetorical citizenship, such contests ask writers merely to elaborate upon conclusions

¹⁵ "Voice of Democracy." Veterans of Foreign Wars 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

¹⁶ "2011-2012 Scholarship Essay Competition for American College Students "Are We Back on the Road to Serfdom?"" Intercollegiate Studies Institute 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

that have been identified by the contest organizers. Because they build a template that merely encourages the adoption of pre-ordained views, we might call such topics or prompts highly directive or “closed” in terms of the range of possible meanings that they invite; on the other end of the spectrum, contests that encourage the rhetorical agency of participants might be considered “open,” from an interpretive perspective.

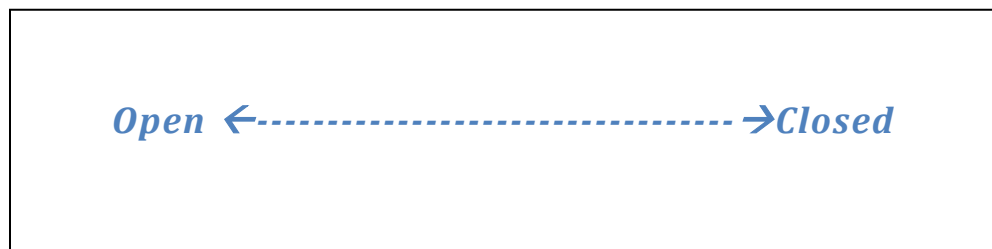


Figure 1.2 Foreclosure of Meaning in Contests

Prospective essayists need to cultivate an awareness of the range that exists among contests in terms of the degree of rhetorical and intellectual agency that they facilitate, and I will offer some strategies for developing this kind of awareness in the last chapter.

Alignment Between the Missions of Sponsors and Contest Goals

One of the ways in which writers can attend to the differences among various types of contest is to cultivate their rhetorical awareness, and this includes paying close attention to the mission(s) of the organization(s) that host contests. This kind of awareness can be useful because the missions of sponsors and the goals of contests seem to align fairly closely. To demonstrate the alignment of the mission of the sponsor and the goal of specific contests, consider, for example, that the Optimist Club International asks individuals 18 and under to

write about how their positive outlook benefits their community,¹⁷ in keeping with its mission to tout the advantages of a positive outlook. And the “Profile in Courage” essay contest,¹⁸ sponsored by the John H. Kennedy Presidential Library and museum (and “generously supported by John Hancock Financial”) asks high school students to consider the concept of political courage by writing an essay on a U.S. elected official “who has chosen to do what is right rather than what is expedient.” This contest supports the goals of the Presidential Library by venerating a major figure of historical importance (John F. Kennedy) and fostering the value of ‘political courage’ in relation to Kennedy’s memory. Each of these contests forwards an educational or civic goal in line with the mission of the sponsoring organization.

Lifespan of Particular Contests

Some contests have a long history and take place year after year, while others may be one-time events. Those that take place on an annual basis over a period of years may become relatively institutionalized. These contests take on a life of their own, with sponsors, essayists and other participants anticipating the release of its announcement each year. Some of these contests have lengthy histories and have been running for decades, while others, aided by the Internet, have sprung up in just the last five or ten years. As I will explain more fully in Chapter Two, perhaps the longest continually running essay contest in the United States is sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute,¹⁹ which began its essay contest in 1878. This contest was developed in response to similar initiatives in the French and British navies. These initiatives reportedly

¹⁷ "Optimist International Essay Contest." Optimist International 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

¹⁸ "Contest Information and Topic Guidelines." John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

¹⁹ "The General Prize Essay Contest." U.S. Naval Institute 2014. Web. 2 March 2014.

developed in response to the idea that essay-writing was central to the character formation of a naval officer. Contests like these take their mission of shaping young leaders seriously and view efforts to assist their constituents to express their thoughts logically in writing as one way of achieving that goal. Such long-running contests become part of the sponsor's institutional memory; they are a matter of pride, something that the organization often becomes known for. Those charged with administering the contest may develop a special niche within the organization dedicated to keeping the spirit of the contest alive. Over the long term, well-established contests may become well known for the specific character of their themes, prompts, or for the participants they target, and such contests may both reflect and help develop close affiliations among their institutional partners. The institutionalization of contests over time also helps groups more effectively to promote their governing agendas.

Key Features of Contests

All essay contests share some key components. First, they must all rely on some form of announcement in order to make prospective writers aware that the contest is taking place. In such contests, typically, there is a title for the contest. (Some of these are rather generic; others engage more creativity – such as the “Be Water SmART Contest.”²⁰) In these announcements, there is frequently a section that introduces the age or interest group being targeted by the contest, such as middle school youth or Erma Bombeck fans.²¹ And there is information about the sponsor and any other participating organizations, advertisers, and occasionally endorsements. A general topic or a specific prompt is typically provided,

²⁰ "Be Watersm'ART' Essay Contest." San Diego Water Authority 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

²¹ "Erma Bombeck Writing Competition." Washington Centerville Public Library 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

sometimes with accompanying information that contextualizes the prompt or topic by providing background material that the essayists may consult as they craft their essays. The prize for the contest is also typically specified, as is the length of essays, the deadline for submission, and other contest rules. These rules may include a rubric that explains the criteria that judges will use for evaluating the essays, including standards related to organization, grammar, and style, as well as cautions regarding plagiarism. Many contests place a high value on originality, and teachers or parents are often required to sign a form attesting to the fact that the essay is the essayists' original work. Additionally, many contests aimed at a high school or college audience require some amount of research, and these contests frequently specify that plagiarism will not be tolerated and that sources must be properly cited. As I suggest in Chapter Two, this emphasis on original research harkens back to some of the first essay contests in history.

Supplemental materials are sometimes made available to teachers who may wish to incorporate the essay contest into their classrooms. In online contests, this information sometimes appears on the homepage for the contest. But lengthier rubrics, rules, and other materials that may include past winning essays are often hyperlinked or made available by following other 'tabs.' These kinds of materials can be crucial in terms of clarifying the expectations of sponsors. At the same time, they necessarily delimit the approaches, and sometimes the sources, that the essayists will consider. From this perspective, these supplementary materials often play a crucial "governmental" function. And all of these aspects of essay contests play a role in co-constructing the kind of writing that will be socially and culturally valued by the discourse communities represented by the organizational sponsor.

Towards a Working Model of the Essay Contest

I have begun to allude here to some of the key features of essay contests. Below, I describe some of their key facets in detail, with the goal of developing a preliminary working model of the various actors or agents involved in this literacy practice. In doing so, I highlight the following key actors: the prospective essayists; sponsors and participating organizations; missions of the sponsors; contest goals and guidelines; topic/ theme/ prompt; prize(s); judges; tools and technologies; audience or public(s); and other partners in invention. In my analysis, these are the features that repeatedly seemed to assert themselves as the most distinguishing aspects of this literacy practice. (See Figure 1.3 for a visual representation of these features).

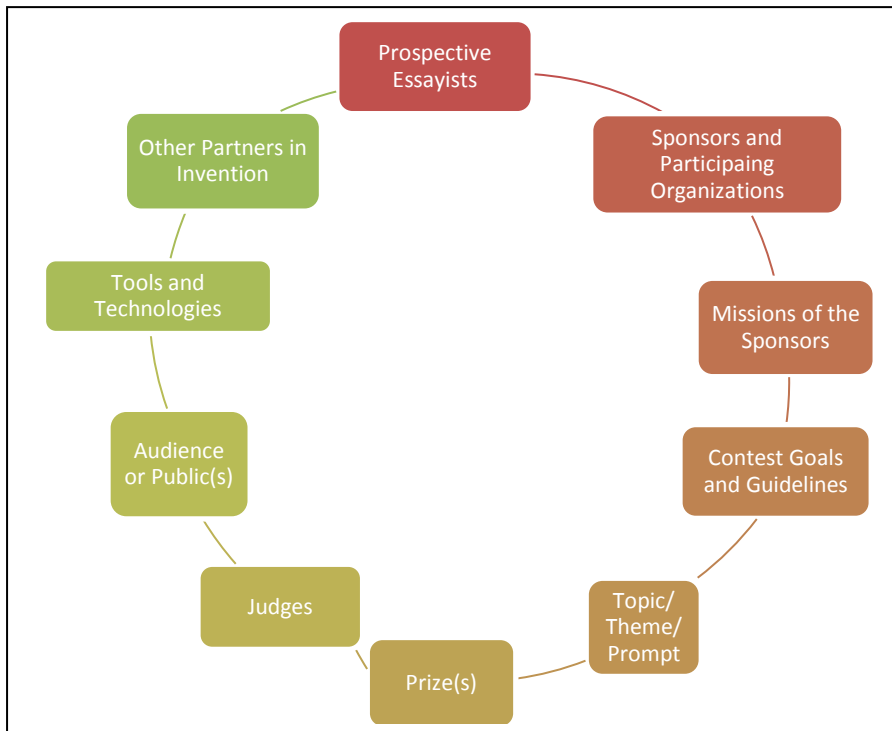


Figure 1.3 Key Features of Essay Contests

In the section that follows, I describe each of the other aspects in turn, and, give special attention to the category of organizational sponsors because of their centrality to my exploration of the “governmental” function that essay contests serve.

Prospective Essayists

The first of these categories is that of the prospective essayists. The prospective essayists are the key targeted participants in an essay contest. Essay contests are typically targeted at students in the K-12 and college student age range, although there are contests that are broader in scope, aimed at graduate students and/or faculty, a particular interest group or constituency, or in some cases, the public at large. The “Life Lessons Essay Contest,” for instance, sponsored by *Real Simple* magazine is an example of a contest that is open to anyone; essayists are asked to write in response to the prompt: “If you could change one decision that you made in the past, what would it be?”²² This type of contest has widespread appeal, and is intended to be accessible for writers of multiple ages, backgrounds and abilities. But most frequently, the intended participants in essay contests are: high school students, middle school students, kindergarten through eighth grade, college students, or some sub-section of these groups (e.g. grades 4-12 or juniors and seniors in high school). Some contests expressly include home-schooled youth and/or make a point of including students from private and parochial schools. This level of specificity regarding the groups targeted reflects a self-consciousness on the part of sponsoring organizations related to the audiences they hope to reach.

²² “The Fifth Annual Life Lessons Essay Contest.” *Real Simple* 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

For example, some contests specify a particular grade of students because that is the age at which the topics fit into the school curriculum. The Indiana Statehood Day contest²³, for instance, is open to all Indiana 4th graders because that is when they are taught Indiana state history. And a good many contests offering scholarships tend to target students in the twelfth grade because that is the age it makes sense to attract the attention of college-bound students. These contests may be locally-based; they may target a specific geographical region, school district, or jurisdiction of a particular country; or, in the age of the Internet, especially, they may be international in scope. They may also be aimed at community college students or undergraduates enrolled in specific training programs. There are contests that are specifically aimed at students in the legal or health fields, for instance. There are also contests aimed at a particular group within the population – individuals who either belong to a particular group or profession (e.g. the Charles S. Peirce Society²⁴ or members of American Indian tribal communities²⁵), or who share a particular kind of life experience (e.g. having undergone fertility treatments²⁶ or who have lost a parent as a child²⁷). All of these contests have a specific group of prospective essayists who can potentially support the contest's larger agenda in mind.

²³ "Indiana Statehood Day Essay Contest: What Indiana Means to Me." Indiana Statehouse Tour Office and Indiana Center for the Book 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

²⁴ "The Charles S. Peirce Society Essay Contest." Charles S. Peirce Society 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

²⁵ "Young Native Writers 2012 Writing Prompt." Holland & Knight Charitable Foundation, Inc. 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

²⁶ "My Little Miracle Essay Contest." Ferring Fertility 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

²⁷ "Announcing Winners for the Matters of Life & Death Scholarship Writing Contest 2011-2012." Compassion & Choices of Northern California 2012.

Typically, contests hail writers as individuals, but even though invitations to collaborative writing are rare, occasionally it is possible to find a contest that encourages essayists to submit a jointly-authored piece. These essay contests call into question the assumption that essay-writing is a solo activity and make an implicit argument for the value of collaborative writing. Contests that invite jointly-authored submissions serve to highlight some of the non-hegemonic definitions of literacy and governing agendas that exist. My favorite example of a contest that invites co-authorship is the Rachel Carson "Sense of Wonder"²⁸ contest, which invites submissions from "an intergenerational team of two or more persons that are not the same age – a young person and an older person." This contest invites adult participants to seek inspiration in Carson's call to engage children in meaningful opportunities to learn about the natural world -- or, in Carson's words to endow each child with 'a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life'" (Carson 54). In this contest, intergenerational teams of participants are expected to work together on a written project of their choice. And unlike many essay contests, this one is not restricted to the essay genre; rather, it invites creative projects in the form of songwriting, poetry, photo, and dance video, as well. This range of options gives the participants greater latitude to engage in the form of writing that best suits the opinions and sentiments that they would like to express. These multimodal options permit a range of expression, even though the essay remains an option for those teams that find it best suited to them. Moreover, this type of contest provides a model for how writing might be viewed collaboratively even within a competitive context. It shows the range of ways in which contemporary contests hail or interpellate writers.

²⁸ "Rachel Carson Sense of Wonder Contest." U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2013. Web. 2 March 2014.

The participants in an essay contest, whether they are individuals or teams, young or old, etc., all have one thing in common. To some degree, they must engage in acts of both reading and writing in order to participate. And they must be drawn to the contest for some reason. Either a teacher has encouraged their participation, or they have been lured by the prize(s), the promise of publication, or other intangible reward. To actively engage in the task before them, they must, first and foremost, be able to identify with the principal subject position that is implied by their participation in the contest: that of essayist or writer. This subject position may complement other identifications that the contest assumes: that of fourth grader, or one who pledges allegiance, or member of a professional society, for instance. But the literate subjectivity of the writer is front and center in an essay contest, and this emphasis on literacy corresponds to a valuation of the “literate” citizen-subject in contests. Despite the many factors that come into play, the writers perceive their own ability, their merit as writers, as the key variable in the contest. And to the degree that writers are motivated to please the judges, they will presumably study the contest materials carefully so as to do their best to match their criteria for success.

The contest materials say a lot about the kinds of subject positions and responses that will be deemed acceptable by the judges. The prompt and accompanying information, especially information about the mission of the sponsoring organization, often contain valuable cues about the kinds of responses that will be valued by judges. They give potential essayists an idea of the goals of the sponsoring organization and the degree to which those goals align with their own. Students at the younger end of the grade scale may find it difficult to assess or articulate whether these goals are compatible with their own. Developmentally, they are likely

to view the viewpoint of authority figures as necessarily 'right' and worth emulating (Kohlberg and Hersch 1977), especially if a teacher has selected that contest for their participation.

However, students in high school and college are more likely to read contest materials from a critical perspective and, to varying degrees, to be able to evaluate the goals of these contests in relation to their own. They may find that their own viewpoints converge in important ways with the viewpoints represented in the contest -- or they may find that they diverge, or some combination of both. Then they are faced with the task of creating negotiated meanings, if they are to engage in any intellectually serious way with the given problematic. To counter the uneven influence of governing agendas, teachers can play a role in helping prospective essayists consider their own rhetorical choices within a context of negotiated meaning.

There are a number of reasons why prospective essayists may be motivated to participate in contests. Sometimes their participation is encouraged by teachers in schools, who see contests as a way of helping students imagine an authentic audience for their work. At other times, the lure of a scholarship or a prize is sufficient incentive to secure the writer's participation. But, generally, it seems difficult to imagine that a writer would enter a contest *merely* for the financial reward – unless the need for that reward was great and the costs related to their participation were minimal. Writers are most likely additionally drawn to the status or prestige that may be associated with the reward, and, as a result of their participation, they may also receive other psychological benefits such as praise, recognition or approval. Winners who receive certificates of merit and/or those whose work is published may also include this information on college applications or résumés, where this information may serve the contestants' career and educational goals. Contests, moreover, allow entrants to

participate as members of imagined discourse communities, and they encourage writers to try out certain facets of their identities -- both as writers and thinkers. Additionally, they allow writers to try out the frame that is offered by the contest for making sense of the world around them. Contests therefore speak to the desire to be recognized by the contest judges, organizers, or various public(s) as worthy of their notice or acclaim.

Sponsor(s) and Participating Organizations

Most of the organizations that sponsor essay contests are non-profit organizations, and there are many types of these represented -- but government agencies, businesses, and educational institutions sponsor essay contests, as well. The breakdown in terms of the types of sponsors represented in my sample is demonstrated in Figure 1.4. In my sample, the most popular ending for the website addresses of organizations hosting contests was *.org*, followed by *.com*, then *.gov*, and finally *.edu*. Because it was not always clear which type of organization was sponsoring the contest, I found it useful to attend to distinctions among these.

Methodologically, this involved recording and categorizing the website addresses based on the categories above, and cultivating an awareness of the ways in which the organizational type of sponsor (whether *.org*, *.com*, *.gov*, or *.edu*) seemed to be reflected in the contest goals.

As I have mentioned, one thing that all of the contests seemed to have in common, regardless of the type of sponsor(s) involved, was the fact that they always seemed to have some discernible relationship to institutional goals, even when that relationship was subtle or indirect. But this consistent alignment did not preclude a range of goals to be found within each category of sponsor. Figure 1.4 shows a breakdown of the various kinds of organizations that sponsored contests in my sample.

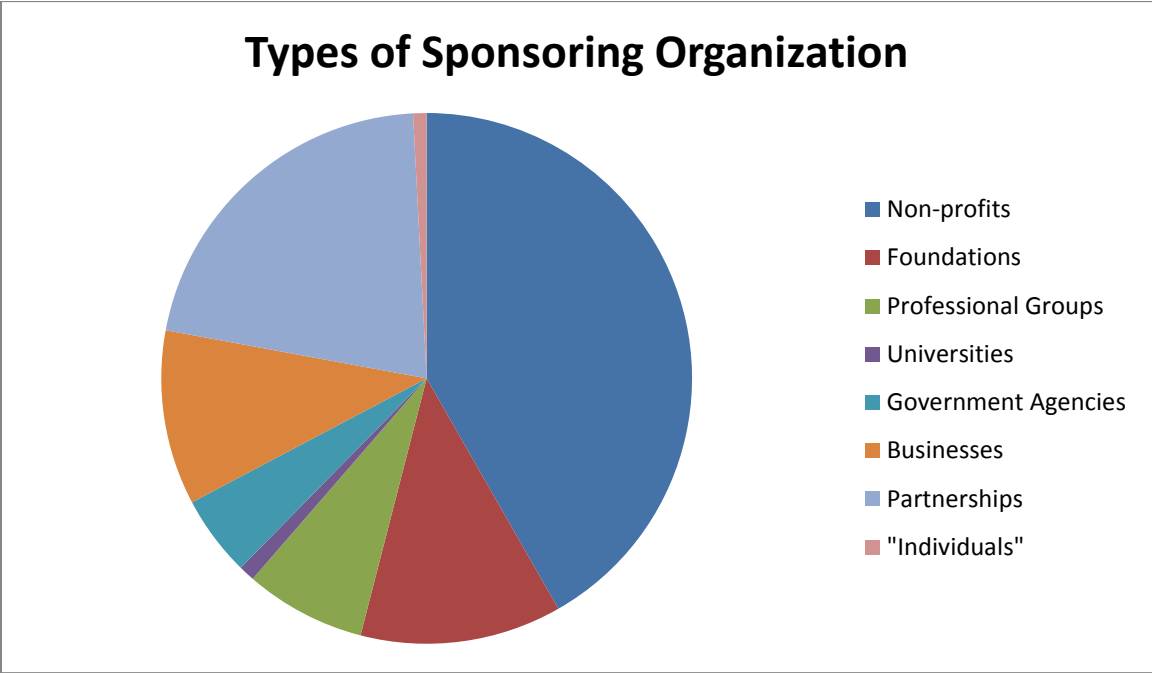


Figure 1.4 Types of Sponsoring Organization

In the description that follows, I provide some examples of the various kinds of sponsors that host essay contests and some of the kinds of goals that these sponsors forwarded. I have found the following categories useful for my analysis, and I treat each of the following in turn: Non-Profit Organizations; Foundations; Professional Associations; University-Affiliated Centers; Agencies of Government; Businesses; Partnerships, Teachers and Schools; and Individuals. (Please see the Appendix for a complete listing.) After a description of each of these types of sponsors, I briefly discuss technology and sponsorship, and the role of endorsements and advertisements.

Before proceeding with this description, however, it is important to underscore that this is an imperfect classification system. Not all organizations fit neatly within a particular

category, and many of the organizations might have been classified otherwise. For example, the Washington Centerville Public Library might have been categorized as an arm of local government, but those entities that I categorized as “agencies of government” had a website address ending in *gov*, and the Library’s address ended in *org*, so I chose to classify it as an organization. Similarly, some of the groups that I coded as “professional groups” are rather less well-recognized than others; the Society of Plastics Engineers seems a little out of place next to the American Medical Association, but I chose to include both organizations in the same category because doing so reflected the ways in which they referred to themselves. Additionally, some of the groups categorized under “non-profit organizations” might have been more appropriately classified as think-tanks, such as the World Energy Forum and the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies; however, I lacked sufficient information to differentiate among these groups with any greater specificity. Similarly, some of the organizations seemed to have close ties with universities, but I did not list them as “university-affiliated” unless I was able to determine that the organization or center was directly affiliated with a university. And I must emphasize that these categorizations are based primarily on the information that was available in the contest announcements, so, for example, the partnerships listed most likely underrepresent the complexity of actual co-sponsoring relationships.

Non-profit Organizations

Most of the sponsors of essay contests are non-profit organizations. Among the non-profits in my sample were various kinds of institutes, advocacy organizations, civic organizations, foundations, historical societies, interest groups, sororities, religious organizations, and literary clubs. In my analysis, I separated out foundations so as to consider

them apart from the others because they represent a fairly common type of contest sponsor and have a particularly interesting story to tell. But institutes, advocacy organizations, and civic organizations are also quite commonly represented among sponsors of contests. Some of the lesser known institutes that sponsor contests are the Golf Course Superintendents of America Environmental Institute for Golf; the Williams Institute; the Intercollegiate Studies Institute; and the Gulen Institute Youth Platform. Advocacy organizations include the ACLU, the Chinese American Citizens Alliance, and the Center for Alcohol Policy. Some of these advocacy organizations have active lobbying campaigns; one of these, for instance, the Fleet Reserve Association National Committee on Americanism-Patriotism, represents the interests of the Sea Service community before the U.S. Congress, sponsors a contest for 7 to 12th graders each year. Its essay topics such as freedom of speech support the ideological aims of the organization and its constituents. But other contests sponsored by institutes are focused on forging a constituency, consumer, and/or intellectual base for a particular industry.

For example, the Environmental Institute for Golf holds a contest for college student members of the Golf Course Association of America who are “pursuing degrees in turfgrass science, agronomy, or any other field related to golf course management,”²⁹ for instance. This contest has a public relations angle; it wants to begin to generate associations between the field of golf course management and environmental sustainability. Civic organizations like the Lions Club, Elks, Rotary, Knights of Columbus also sponsor contests, the goals of which are closely aligned with their organizational missions. Historical societies and interest groups such as the Abraham Lincoln Brigade and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas also sponsor essay

²⁹ "G.C.S.A.A. Student Essay Contest." Environmental Institute for Golf 2012.

contests, as do sororities like Sigma Gamma Rho and religious organizations, such as Oakseed Ministries. These contests run the gamut of possible targeted participants, prizes, and themes, a fact which makes it difficult to generalize about the goals of specific categories of non-profit sponsor.

Literary clubs such as the Jane Austen Society of America, Worldwide Waldens, and the Ayn Rand Institute are among the non-profit entities that run contests. The Ayn Rand Institute, in fact, sponsors several contests: one based on the novel, *The Fountainhead*, one on *We the Living*, and another on *Atlas Shrugged*.³⁰ These contests carry significant cash rewards and are targeted towards students in the 12th grade. And this organization even has an international wing that, according to its website, is focused on the following goals: 1)introducing these modern classics to India, 2)providing incentives to study Ayn Rand, 3)inculcating the virtues of independence and inquiry, 4)identifying students who are interested in ideas about freedom, and 4)identifying teachers and schools interested in promoting similar activities.³¹ Books are made available to teachers at the lowest possible price, and a teachers' guide to the *Fountainhead* is available on demand. Contests like these seek explicitly to further civic-minded goals, but these goals are rarely without their ideological charge. Some of these contests use particular key words to convey their particular ideological framework – words such as “private enterprise,” “independence,” and “freedom” are not uncommon. Other concepts work on a potentially more ambivalent frequency: “peace,” “interfaith dialogue,” “awareness,”

³⁰ "Essay Contests." Ayn Rand Novels 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

³¹ "The Fountainhead Essay Contest for High School Students in India." Liberty Institute, New Delhi 2012. Web. 2 March 2013.

“appreciation,” the advancement of ideas and/or historical memory. These are just some of the widely varying kinds of agendas that are advanced the non-profit sponsors of contests.

Foundations

One type of non-profit that deserves special consideration is that of memorial funds or foundations because they represent one of the most common impetuses behind essay contests. Among the foundations that sponsor essay contests are the National Park Foundation, Al-Rawiya (‘empowering Muslim women thru education, arts and integration’³²), the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees, and the Elie Wiesel Foundation, to name just a few. Many contests begin because there has been an endowment or bequest that has been slated for a particular purpose, and an essay contest is seen as a practical way of engaging the public to that end. Sometimes, an essay contest is seen as a way of honoring the memory of a prominent contributor or contributors. The Freedom from Religion Foundation,³³ for instance, sponsors three different contests dedicated to the memory of three FFRF members who endowed the scholarships. The photographs and brief bios of their members appear on the home page for the contest, and the contests are named after these individuals. Other contests simply honor the Foundation’s goals, which cover a wide range of interests; the Holland and Knight Foundation, for instance, sponsors several contests for high school students based on themes of diversity. This foundation is the charitable arm of the global law firm of the same name. One of its contests awards scholarships to writers who

³² "Artlit Competition." Al-Rawiya 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

³³ "F.F.R.F. Student Scholarship Essay Contests." Freedom From Religion Foundation 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

write essays to honor the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.³⁴ Another of its contests awards scholarships and a trip to the National Museum of the American Indian to young Native American writers who write about issues facing their tribal communities.³⁵ The different kinds of foundations that exist within this category, too, make it difficult to generalize about their goals.

As evidence of this variety, consider the contest sponsored by the Gravity Research Foundation, an organization that was founded by an MIT graduate and businessman, Roger Babson, who reportedly found inspiration in Newton's theory of gravity and wanted to stimulate further interest in the topic. Because Babson was apparently able to predict the 1929 stock market crash, thanks to the dictum that 'what goes up must come down,' he decided to establish a Foundation dedicated to the study of gravity.³⁶ This contest, which is in its 64th year, tends to attract scholars from universities all over the world. The top prize is \$4000 and publication in a special issue of the International Journal of Modern Physics. This contest demonstrates how one foundation's vision can sustain interest in a particular area over a period of time. Like other types of non-profit organization, foundations also work in concert with other governmental, educational, corporate, or non-profit organizations to achieve their aims. For instance, the Washington Regional Transit Authority, the organization responsible for organ recovery in the D.C. area, sponsors a contest that asks writers of all ages to "[p]ersuade

³⁴ "The Holland & Knight Dream Scholarship: A Call for Tomorrow's Leaders." Holland & Knight Charitable Foundation, Inc 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

³⁵ "Young Native Writers 2012 Writing Prompt." Holland & Knight Charitable Foundation, Inc. 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

³⁶ "2013 Awards for Essays on Gravitation." The Gravity Research Foundation 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

someone to give the gift of a lifetime.”³⁷ This contest, which is “dedicated to educating people from all walks of life in our community about the benefits of organ and tissue donation,” is endowed by the Leslie Ebert Memorial Fund. It calls for 1000-word persuasive essays on the topic, based on a fictional or non-fictional account of organ donation, with sources cited. These examples point to just a few of the many kinds of contests that are sponsored by the work of foundations.

Professional Associations

Professional associations such as the American Bar Association and the Association for Career and Technical Education, also hold essay contests, as do publications affiliated with these organizations. Overall, these associations tend to sponsor contests focused on the concerns of members and the development of their profession, and they especially encourage the development of student interest in topics relevant to that particular field. The Dispute Resolution Section of the American Bar Association, for example, holds a contest that invites college students to write on any topic relevant to legal dispute resolution.³⁸ The American Psychological Association Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (APA TOPSS) has a contest that asks high school students to write about psychological principles as they relate to the reactions of people who have experienced a natural disaster.³⁹ But there are also professional associations that seem to mix the goals of industry and their profession. The

³⁷ "Legacy of Life Scholarship Endowed by the Leslie Ebert Memorial Fund." Washington Regional Transplant Authority 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

³⁸ "James B. Boskey Law Student Essay Contest on Dispute Resoution." American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution 2012. Web. 16 Julyw 2012.

³⁹ "A.P.A. T.O.P.S.S. Scholars Essay Competition." American Psychological Association Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

Society of Plastics Engineers, for example, holds a contest that invites high school students to write on topics such as: “How Plastics Improve Our Lifestyle,” “How Plastics Benefit Humankind,” and “Why the Bad Reputation of Plastics is Wrong.”⁴⁰ Contests like these seek to promote the views and interests of an entire industry more than they do a profession. Some of these, too, like the Society of Plastics Engineers contest, also tend to shape these views with a slightly heavier hand than the others. While the ABA and the APA set the theme but tend to leave the direction of the argument open, the Society of Plastics Engineers makes clear that a particular perspective on plastics is to be advanced. Prospective essayists must therefore pay close attention to the directions in which “professional associations” lead them.

Universities

University-affiliated centers or departments also sponsor contests. These include the University of Texas at Austin, the George Bush Presidential Library at Texas A & M, the Dickens Project at UC Santa Cruz, and America’s Freedom Festival at Provo, UT, based out of Brigham Young University. These university-sponsored contests tend to focus on issues of education, literary appreciation, historical awareness, or civil rights, and they may target students at any grade level, but especially college. An example of a contest developed with an audience of grade school essayists in mind is a contest established by the Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies at the University of Rhode Island, which offers eighth graders information about Gandhi’s life and work, and asks them to “Write a personal essay in which you explain what you

⁴⁰ “Wonders of Plastics’ International Essay Contest.” Society of Plastics Engineers 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

think Gandhi meant by the quote, 'An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.'"⁴¹ Essayists are then asked to "discuss how you think this saying has meaning for our world today." This contest reaches beyond the walls of the university to encourage reflection among eighth graders about the contributions of Gandhi and the ideal of peace. All of these contests rely to some extent on the prestige of their institutional sponsors and seem typically to forward civic and educational goals.

Agencies of Government

Various agencies of federal, state and local government also hold contests; typically these contests share the goal of fostering particular kinds of problem-solving, attitudes, and behaviors that benefit society as a whole. The Animal Services Department for the City of Arlington, Texas, for instance, holds a contest for students in grades 3-6, who reside in the City of Arlington. This contest is focused on encouraging responsible pet ownership, and asks students to respond to developmentally appropriate questions like the following: (Grade 3) "If animals could talk, what would they say?" (Grade 4) "What feelings do you think animals have?" (Grade 5) What are some ways that you can make life better for animals in your community? (Grade 6) How do animals benefit us in our daily lives?⁴² Other state and local entities, such as the Historical Society of the Courts of NY, also hold contests, as do federal agencies, such as NASA. These contests are aimed at furthering public involvement in their missions, and they take a range of approaches for doing so. For example, a contest sponsored

⁴¹ "The U.R.I. Honors Program Present the 2011-2012 8th Grade Gandhi Essay Contest." Center for Nonviolence & Peace Studies 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁴² "Animal Services: Encouraging Responsible Pet Ownership Annual Animal Essay Contest." City of Arlington, TX 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

by the Historical Society of the Courts of the State of NY invites essay submissions by community college students on the theme of the “New York during the Civil War.”⁴³ And the Brookhaven National Laboratory Office of Educational Programs runs a contest, which invites high school students to write about particle accelerators; it “aims to challenge high school students to question and deliberate the purposes and social implications of scientific research.”⁴⁴ These contests emphasize such topics as the ethical imperative of preserving a state’s legal history and deliberating the social implications of scientific research. Agencies of government like these embrace their civic and educational missions and see essay contests as a worthwhile way to foster interest in their institutional activities and aims.

Businesses

Many businesses also sponsor essay contests. These occasionally include local operations, such as the Ketchum Sun Valley Ski and Heritage Museum in Ketchum, Idaho, which sponsors a contest in which students are invited to write about “What I learned through my visit to the Ski and Heritage Museum and why the museum benefits my community,”⁴⁵ but more typically these commercial sponsors are national chains of banks, restaurants, bookstores, periodicals, food and agricultural distributors, and laboratories, for example. Examples of corporate sponsors include the Olive Garden, Barnes and Noble, and the Smithsonian Channel. Often, these contests aid the company’s public image by embracing a cause that is widely shared. For example, the Olive Garden’s contest asks students to write on

⁴³ "David A. Garfinkel Essay Contest." The Historical Society of the Courts of New York 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁴⁴ "(O.E.P.) Essay Contest - Science and Society." Brookhaven National Laboratory Office of Educational Programs 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁴⁵ "Essay Contest." Ketchum Sun Valley Ski and Heritage Museum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

the topic of how they might help end hunger in their community. This contest, along with the chain's donations to food banks, reflects the kind of corporate image that the restaurant and its parent company want to project: one that is "committed to helping fight the battle against hunger in North America."⁴⁶ The contest organizers work together with community partners by recruiting judges from the Quill and Scroll Society of the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Iowa, and the winners, who are selected by Olive Garden, receive a trip to Olive Gardens in Times Square, a \$2500 savings bond, and \$5000 to support education in the winner's local community. Contests like these take on an issue that has broad public appeal and are seen as making a positive contribution to the community. They may be considered to be political only insofar as they promote a widely accepted ideology like social justice or civil rights.

But some contests try to avoid political topics altogether, preferring themes related to inventions that have changed history, or supporting individuals in the community who make a difference. Thomas Built Buses runs one of these contests; for years, it has encouraged U.S. and Canadian children to nominate their school bus driver for "School Bus Driver of the Year" award.⁴⁷ The top young essayist is awarded a laptop, and runners up receive "Thomas Built Buses" lunchboxes and jackets, as does the Bus Driver of the Year, who also receives \$1000. Contests like these promote their public image among a certain constituency (school bus drivers and students) and embrace a theme considered publically beneficial without generating

⁴⁶ "Olive Garden Asks Student Writers to Take a Bite out of Hunger for the 17th-Annual Pasta Tales Essay Writing Contest." Olive Garden 2012.

⁴⁷ "Children's Choice School Bus Driver of the Year." Thomas Built Buses 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

any controversy. Other contests may embrace a more contentious issue, with the goal of shaping public opinion in ways that more directly benefit that industry.

For example, the Houston Branch of the Federal Reserve Bank says the theme for the 2012 contest was prompted by the Occupy Wall Street protests. The prompt for this contest asks students in the 11th and 12th grades, “What role, if any, should the government play in addressing income inequality?”⁴⁸ Lengthy accompanying material, entitled “Economic Principles to Keep in Mind,” was provided to potential essayists so as to shape the responses received. This sponsor, of course, had a vested interest in generating challenges to the critiques levied by the “Occupy Wall Street” movement, and the accompanying materials were meant to coach prospective essayists to craft compatible responses to the question. In contexts such as these, the power of literacy is wielded in order to support of the goals of a particular industry as a whole -- in this case those of the banking industry.

But corporate sponsors may also establish contests to secure specific purposes that serve the commercial needs of a particular company. Ferring Fertility, for example, holds a “My Little Miracle” contest for families who have given birth using Ferring Pharmaceuticals’ fertility products.⁴⁹ Education funds ranging from \$5 - 10,000 are awarded to families who submit essays responding to the theme of “If I Knew Then What I Know Now,” accompanied by a photo of their child. Examples of past successful essays are available, and writers are coached to “offer guidance to others who are seeking to build their own families and how using Ferring’s fertility products helped you achieve your dream of parenthood.” Excerpts from these

⁴⁸ “Income Inequality: Federal Reserve Bank, Houston Branch Essay Contest 2012.” Katy (TX) Independent Study Mentorship 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁴⁹ “My Little Miracle Essay Contest.” Ferring Fertility 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

testimonials are used on the website to encourage other families who are considering Ferring's services. Contests like these, therefore, promote specific purposes related to the company's for-profit mission. Corporate sponsors in this camp also include magazines and periodicals that are seeking material to publish.

Partnerships

Additionally, various kinds of partnerships comprise the institutional sponsorship of essay contests. These include partnerships between or among two or more non-profits, community groups, businesses, foundations, universities, governmental agencies, and/or individuals. There is a lively variety among these partnerships. For example, there is a creative partnership between the San Diego County Water Authority and various corporate and non-profit sponsors that have joined forces to encourage water safety among the city's 2nd – 4th graders. This contest asks young essayists to finish the following sentence: "Being watersmart is cool because..."⁵⁰ Winning essayists are awarded game passes to various establishments, including Boomers, Atlanta Laser Tag, the San Diego Zoo, and Sea World – private businesses and/or non-profits that have donated free passes, to both promote water safety and ongoing attendance at their establishments, as well as a corporate image of civic responsibility.

Another example of a collaborative effort is a contest sponsored by the Howard County Library in Columbia, Maryland, which holds a Sherlock Holmes essay contest⁵¹ in collaboration with a literary society called Watson's Tin Box Society. This society was founded in 1990 for the purpose of discussing Sherlock Holmes short stories at monthly dinner meetings for enjoyment,

⁵⁰ "Be Watersm'ART' Essay Contest." San Diego Water Authority 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁵¹ "Sherlock Homes Essay Contest." Howard County Library 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

as well as historical and literary interest. Seventh grade students are recruited from surrounding schools (the Howard County Public Schools are also listed as a co-sponsor), and winning essays are published in the annual publication of the Tin Box Society. Contests like these draw on the specific resources of a particular locality to come together around a civic- or educationally-minded goal.

But, occasionally, these educational- or civic-minded imperatives precariously intermingle with other agendas of a commercial or partisan nature. And this kind of precarious intermingling can be seen in a somewhat unlikely partnership between the National Foundation for Women Legislators and the National Rifle Association, for example. For 25 years, these two organizations have sponsored an annual NFWL-NRA Bill of Rights Essay Scholarship Contest.⁵² This contest is directed towards college-bound female high school juniors and seniors, who are asked to “[d]escribe how various public policies impact women and underrepresented populations when decided at the state or federal level.” The influence of the NRA can be seen only indirectly in the requirement that writers are expected to apply knowledge of the U.S. Bill of Rights in their essays. This contest, which awards a college scholarship and an all-expense paid trip to the Annual Conference of Women Legislators, seems to reflect some degree of hard-won negotiation between these two co-sponsors and their goals. Evidence for this is the fact that a contest sponsored by only one of these organizations differs in significant ways. For example, the NRA holds its own contest, over which it is able to exercise a greater degree of

⁵² "Student Scholarship Program 15th Annual Bill N.F.W.L.-N.R.A. Bill of Rights Essay Scholarship Contest." National Foundation for Women Legislators 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

authority. Its so-called “Civil Rights Defense Fund” held a contest in 2012, the theme for which was “The Second Amendment to the Constitution: Why it is important to our Nation.”

Teachers and Schools

Another kind of partnership that figures prominently in many essay contests is the kind of partnership that is made between the sponsoring organization and participating teachers and/or schools. Schools and teachers are important partners or co-sponsors of essay contests, even when they are not mentioned as such in the contest announcement. Many of these contests could not be conducted without the participation of teachers, who select contests in which their students may participate, introduce instructional materials into the curriculum, and serve as preliminary judges for the contests by deciding which essays to send in for the next round of judging. There are intrinsic rewards for the teachers who participate, but there are also tangible prizes, as well. Teachers often play a key role in assessing the value of particular contests for their students and aligning the goals of contests with their instructional aims. Some contest sponsors take the role of teachers into account by developing curricular materials that support instruction. The National Peace Essay contest and the “Profiles in Courage” contest even meet national content area standards, for example.

Individuals

Occasionally, individuals sponsor their own essay contest. Sometimes they do so of their own accord or initiative, but typically their efforts are underwritten in various ways by the organizations to which they belong. For example, in 2012, Nicolas Kristof, the editorial writer for the New York Times, initiated his own contest to engage high school students in a

conversation about bullying.⁵³ This idea for this contest was reportedly inspired by Lady Gaga's campaign against bullying, and it was intended to engage the people who knew the most about the phenomenon being discussed (high school students). As for prizes, he explains, "There's no real prize, except immortal glory: I'll publish excerpts from the best essays in my column or blog. Some winners will also be published on the Learning Network site and in *Teen Ink*." As this example suggests, the promise of publication points to invisible partnerships with publication outlets, and, for potential essayists, it is no small matter; in fact, the power it wields for attracting participation can be significant. Even a contest initiated by an individual typically relies on some organizational backing, and often the goals of the individual and the entity s/he represents necessarily intermingle in the process. However, the main difference between an organizational and individual sponsor is that individually-sponsored contests, because they are less established, tend to be more informal and personal in tone.

The corporate blogger for Knoepfler Lab's stem cell blog, for instance, solicited essays to be published on the company website "for 1000's of the top scientists, patient advocates, grant funders, politicians, and educators in the world interested in stem cells to read."⁵⁴ The tone of this blogger's prompt is surprisingly personal; as he explains, "The sole judge will be me and all decisions are final." The use of the first person pronoun carries through to the prompt for this contest, as well: it asks participants to craft an essay on stem cells "thinking entirely outside the box. Otherwise the angle you take is totally up to you. Surprise me. Make me think." The fact that only one individual is the judge for the contest, and that this individual foregrounds the

⁵³ Kristof, Nicholas. "Teen Essay Contest on Bullying." The New York Times 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁵⁴ "Stem Cell Essay Contest: \$50 Prize & Essay Is Published." Knoepfler Lab Stem Cell Blog 2012. Web. 7 July 2012.

desire to read something that makes him/her think, is suggestive of a less established contest – one that has been rather spontaneously crafted for the purpose of developing content for a blog. Well-established contests usually state aims that are more civically minded or public in nature, and they are often explicit about the ways that the goals of the contest link to a larger institutional or civic mission. And once again, this type of individually-sponsored contest is, in many ways, a misnomer, since it is really not individual at all; the sponsor in this case writes for a blog that represents Knoepfler Lab, a firm that conducts stem cell research and is affiliated with the UC Davis School of Medicine. Presumably the blogger has been hired by the lab in question, and the blog itself is managed via larger company operations. Hence, it is not the individual blogger who ultimately has sole authority or discretion over contest decisions. At any rate, contests sponsored by individuals tend to be more personal in tone, focused around one charismatic individual, and to have a short lifespan.

Technology and Sponsorship

Sponsors may change over time, as may the technologies they use to announce the contest and its annual winners. In particular, the shift from print to online publishing has had an impact on the role of sponsors in more established contests. For instance, the *Louisville Courier Journal* assisted in the sponsorship of a contest on environmental conservation for many years,⁵⁵ during which time it contributed U.S. savings bonds for the winners and took responsibility for printing contest materials. This contest then moved online in 2008, when Kentucky's Energy and Environment Cabinet for Natural Resources took over this role, but the

⁵⁵ "Division of Conservation Art and Writing Contest." Energy and Environment Cabinet Department for Natural Resources 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

Courier is still recognized on the website for its key contributions during the years in which contest organizers had to rely on print. This well-established contest, introduced in 1944, and then again in 1974, has multiple co-sponsors, including the Kentucky Farm Bureau Federation, the Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts and 121 conservation districts across the state. It is intended to educate students about soil, water, forestry, and wildlife conservation -- and makes available a teacher's guide. Other contests owe their existence to the affordances of the Internet and the networks of writers and readers that the World Wide Web makes possible. The individual blog mentioned above is just one very recent example of a fledgling contest that owes its very existence to the Internet, and there are, undoubtedly, other contests that have come online or have started up online in much the same way as these contests have.

Endorsements

Sometimes contests sport the endorsements of organizations that are not directly involved in the sponsorship of that particular contest. For example, for 19 years, the agricultural company, Growmark, has sponsored a contest for Future Farmer of America members in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin, and it makes clear in its promotional materials that "We are proud to support Future Farmers of America."⁵⁶ As this endorsement suggests, sponsors of contests occasionally seek endorsements by organizations whose constituencies matter to them. In many cases, these endorsements are sought to gain the confidence of parents and teachers whose children will be participating in the contest. An example of a school-based endorsement can be found on the webpage for a contest sponsored by the

⁵⁶ "2012 Essay Contest for F.F.A." Growmark 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

George S. & Stella M. Knight Foundation.⁵⁷ This contest, which deals with themes of the American Revolution, Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution, wants parents and educators to know that “the National Association of Secondary School principals has placed this program on the NASSP National Advisory List of Contests and Activities for 2012-2013.” Endorsements like these can play a powerful role in ensuring that a contest will be seen as trustworthy by their young participants and their families.

Advertisers

Advertisers also play an important role in supporting the circulation and distribution of contest announcements. On webpages, for instance, advertisements are occasionally part of the visual design, and their content is targeted towards the intended participants in the contest. Sometimes the logos of sponsoring organizations are placed prominently on the page; at other times, advertisements publicize wares that are made available for sale by the sponsoring organization. For instance, the Independent Institute has a contest that asks essayists to generate ideas for alerting the public to their contention that the government ‘wants to live at the people’s expense.’⁵⁸ Although this organization claims to be a “non-profit non-partisan scholarly organization, supported by foundations, business, individuals, and by the sale of its publications,” one of its publications, a book against “Obamacare,” is simultaneously being advertised across the top of the page. Advertisers represent a kind of sponsorship, too, even when that sponsorship may have little to do with the literacy aims of the contest and, instead, much more to do with selling a product.

⁵⁷ "George S. & Stella M. Knight Essay Contest." National Society, Sons of the American Revolution 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁵⁸ "Essay Contest." The Independent Institute 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

Missions of the Sponsors/ Goals of the Contest

All sponsoring organizations have a mission statement of some kind, and, quite often, these statements appear somewhere in the contest announcement. Sometimes, the mission statement appears in a prominent position, but, at other times, one has to search for it. Occasionally, it is necessary to use the “About Us” tab on an organizational webpage to glean the necessary information about the sponsor’s organizational mission. But, often, it is necessary to infer the logical connections between an organization’s mission and the goals of the contest. This is a necessary step for participants in these contests, who must develop a certain critical literacy about these contests’ aims and purposes. Sometimes the links between an organization’s mission and the goals of a particular contest are easy to follow because the purpose of the sponsoring organization is written right into its name. For example, the mission of The Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees is clear, and the links between its organizational goals and the aims of its contest is obvious; the contest for 2012 invites essay submissions on the theme of “Reducing the Usage of Beekilling Pesticides in my Community,”⁵⁹ for example. Likewise, the Association for Women in Mathematics sponsors a contest for 6th - 12th graders, which encourages them to interview a woman currently working in a mathematical sciences career and to write her biography. This contest aims to “increase awareness of women’s ongoing contributions to the mathematical sciences” – a goal which complements the organization’s mission, which is “to encourage women and girls to study and

⁵⁹ "4-H Beekeeping Essay Contest." The Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

to have active careers in the mathematical sciences, and to promote equal opportunity and the equal treatment of women and girls in the mathematical sciences.”⁶⁰

But in other contests, these links are less obvious and may require explanation because they are more difficult for readers to unpack. For example, the SEVEN fund, a non-profit organization that “encourages...enterprise-based solutions to poverty”, hosts a contest in partnership with the Washington-based Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (CIFA), in which writers are asked to submit an essay in the form of a “first-person narrative describing enterprise solutions to poverty that are faith-based, faith-inspired, or interfaith efforts. Illustrations may come from any domain, including health care, education, consumer products, human rights, and others; examples must represent innovative private solutions to public problems.”⁶¹ In its Frequently Asked Questions, the contest organizers pose the following question: “Does this program support a preferred philosophical or scientific agenda?” Their response is to reiterate the names of the sponsors and to clarify that they are interested in exploring relationships between business and faith. It seems that the FAQ question is intended to help potential contest participants understand the convergence between the goals of the first sponsoring organization and the second. Deciphering the goals of a contest with more than one sponsor may pose extra challenges for writers who must educate themselves about the missions of each. But whether there is one sponsor or many, one thing is clear: in an essay contest, sponsors play a vital role in charting the intellectual or political course that written

⁶⁰ "Essay Contest: Biographies of Contemporary Women in Mathematics." Association for Women in Mathematics 2012.

⁶¹ "2010-2011 Seven-Cifa Essay Competition." SEVEN Fund 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

submissions will take. That is, they set the “governmental” framework or trajectory that these contests’ participants must negotiate and engage.

Topic/Theme/Prompt

Besides essayists and sponsors, all essay contests feature a topic, theme, or prompt on which prospective essayists are expected to write. These reflect the goals of the contest and range from broad to narrow, depending on the kinds of decisions that are made by contest organizers. As I have suggested already, for example, some contests offer a rather open prompt, delimited only by standards of style, or the rather vague criterion of ‘suitability for publication.’ The American Humanist Association, for instance, explains that essays “applying head and heart to any subject or field of endeavor are welcome” as long as they are on “topics suitable for publication.”⁶² This contest gives writers a good deal of latitude with regards to the topic but requires that they use their judgment about what the organization might find appropriate to publish. Other contests delimit the topic to a particular area but leave the approach to that topic open. For example, one contest solicits essays on “[a]ny topic on or related to the work of Charles S. Peirce” as long as it “[m]ake[s] a genuine contribution to the literature on Peirce.”⁶³ Some contests introduce the specificity of the theme by offering an opening quote or some introductory informational material, and then asking a question or series of questions that are related to that material. For example, the “Live Deliberately” essay contest⁶⁴ offers a quote by Thoreau, “To be awake is to be alive,” along with some explanatory

⁶² “Humanist Essay Contest.” *The Humanist* 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁶³ “The Charles S. Peirce Society Essay Contest.” Charles S. Peirce Society 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁶⁴ “Live Deliberately Essay Contest.” World Wide Waldens 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

material. Writers, ages 13-21, are asked to respond to the following question, “What does this quotation mean to you? When do you feel most awake and alive? Have you ever met or encountered someone who is quite awake?” This list of questions, for example, seems to suggest a kind of brainstorming list, to get writers started thinking about the question. Other contests, as I mentioned earlier, leave the topic open but are specific about the kinds of ethical, intellectual, or political conclusions that may be drawn from the topic at hand.

A handful of contests have developed elaborate prompts that one might come to recognize as a kind of signature prompt that is unique to that contest. The Cornell Club of Rochester, New York,⁶⁵ for instance invites students to choose from a number of paired quotations that represent opposing viewpoints on an issue. Students are asked to select one of those quotation pairs, then to choose one of the quotations and write an essay demonstrating “the relevance of the quote to life.” Students are then asked to use the opposing question and “outline 6 key points to rebut the case you’ve just made.” The goals of this contest are to develop critical thinking and the ability to consider opposing viewpoints, in order to prepare them for college success. The first place winner of the contest is awarded a \$5000 scholarship to Cornell University, if s/he is accepted into Cornell University and decides to attend. Prompts like these steer writers towards specific paths of inquiry and lead them toward particular educational futures, at the same time as they define the goals and qualities of particular organizations. They, too, have a certain power-- independent of the organizations that design them and the essayists who rely on them for writing -- as they are repeated in multiple web venues, taken as valid models, and re-inscribed in various ways.

⁶⁵ "Essay Contest 2011-2012." Cornell Club of Rochester 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

Prize(s)

An additional feature of essay contests is that they award a wide range of prizes to winning essayists. Most common, perhaps, are cash awards that range all the way from \$25 to thousands of dollars. Occasionally small prizes are awarded in the form of gift cards, and large prizes often take the form of educational funds or scholarships. Sometimes, winning essayists are awarded scholarships to attend a particular conference, summer program, or videoconference series. They may be invited to a special dinner and/or an awards ceremony at which they are honored. Sometimes these contests promote the winners' ongoing professional and/or intellectual development by offering them free memberships in a professional organization. One contest forwards a letter to the Law School Dean attesting to the essayists' achievement in the essay contest.⁶⁶ Another contest, which solicits essays in the form of a letter to the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, actually forwards the winning essay on to the Secretary.⁶⁷ Most contests award plaques or certificates of recognition to the winners, and sometimes certificates of participation are awarded to all of the individuals who enter the contest. Other less frequent types of award include laptop computers, Kindlefires, Nooks, tablets, and itunes gift cards. One contest that invites students to write about Arbor Day even awards coupons for a free dessert from McDonalds and a packet of honey locust tree seeds and instructions on how to grow them.⁶⁸ The choice of prize is often a function of the material

⁶⁶ "Howard C. Schwab Memorial Essay Contest." American Bar Association Section of Family Law 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁶⁷ "International Energy Essay Contest 2012." World Energy Forum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁶⁸ "2012 Arbor Day Essay Contest." South Dakota Department of Agriculture 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

resources that are available to contest organizers, their perceptions about what will motivate prospective essayists, and their creativity.

Additionally, it is not at all uncommon for sponsoring organizations to offer winners the opportunity to be published on their website, blog, or another publication issued by the organization. Otherwise, they may have an agreement with a local newspaper or some other periodical that has agreed to publish the winning essays. One contest even offers the opportunity to have the essay published in hardcover form from a self-publishing site.⁶⁹ The regular promise of publication seems a particularly noteworthy class of prize motivating the essayists' participation. And this connection between the promise of publication and the lure of a contest implies close links between the notion of authorship and governmentality because of the ways in which publishing shapes the direction of knowledge and ideas of the writer.

Additionally, because of the central role that teachers often play, awards are often directly made to schools and teachers. Sometimes these awards are in the form of curricular materials or funds to be used in the classroom. For instance, as we have seen, one contest offers teachers whose students' essays are selected as winners a "Badges of Character" poster to hang in their classroom. Teachers may also be invited to attend awards ceremonies with their students. This may involve travel to Washington D. C. or some other location relevant to the contest theme. Sometimes winning writers and/or teachers are permitted to bring guests with them, for example, to visit a history museum in the company of a Holocaust survivor⁷⁰ or

⁶⁹ "My Favorite Teacher Essay/ Poem Contest." Barnes and Noble 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁷⁰ "2011-2012 Holocaust Remembrance Project Essay Contest." Holland & Knight Charitable Foundation, Inc. 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

attend the annual World Energy Forum.⁷¹ Prizes for both contest winners and their teachers help ensure that essay contests capture the attention of teachers and other audiences in school and community contexts.

Judges

Another defining feature of contests is that they appoint arbiters to judge the quality of entries. Although many contests do not provide information about the panel of judges in the announcements on their websites, it is nonetheless taken for granted that the sponsoring organization has the authority to appoint judges appropriate to the task. Other contests, in the interest of accountability, make some information about the judges or the process of judging available to the public. Typically, the description of this process is brief; for instance, the New Jersey Hall of Fame Annual Contest explains that a “panel of teachers reads the essays, and the New Jersey Educational Association and the Hall of Fame Organization chooses the winners.”⁷² Usually, when this type of information is provided, it gives some indication of the pool of candidates from which the judges will be drawn, for instance ‘psychology faculty at the high school and college level’⁷³ for the contest sponsored by the American Psychological Association, or ‘experts from the UN, World Bank, academia, and leading energy companies’⁷⁴ for the World Energy Forum.

⁷¹ "International Energy Essay Contest 2012." World Energy Forum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁷² "N.J. Hall of Fame Annual Essay Contest." New Jersey Hall of Fame 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁷³ "A.P.A. T.O.P.S.S. Scholars Essay Competition." American Psychological Association Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁷⁴ "International Energy Essay Contest 2012." World Energy Forum 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

Typically, the judges are a panel of several individuals, but occasionally, a contest has a sole judge. One of these is the Northwest Perspectives Essay Contest, which recruits a well-known writer such as Barry Lopez to select the winner to be published in the *Oregon Quarterly*.⁷⁵ Very occasionally, contests list the names of individual judges; the Center for International Private Enterprise, for example, lists the names of representatives from the Junior Chamber of Commerce International, the National Endowment for Democracy, CIPE Romania and Asia CIPE, as well as small business owners and entrepreneurs.⁷⁶ And even though the judge(s) would appear to have maximal agency for deciding standards of quality in an essay contest, their evaluative criteria are often provided by the sponsoring organization. Additionally, their appointments are often made based on the perception that this particular judge, or panel of judges, shares the sponsor's definition of good writing, as well as their ideological agenda.

Tools and Technologies

The tools and technologies that are available are also an important feature of contests because they expand or delimit the options of writers and sponsors. Until the last few decades, contests were typically not held online, and many contests still ask writers to mail their submissions, even when the announcement and prompt for the contest have been circulated online. Other contests specify that writers upload their submissions to a website or submit their compositions by email or fax. The composing choices of writers are also delimited by issues of reliable computer access and the genres that are possible using the available

⁷⁵ "2012 Northwest Perspectives Essay Contest." *Oregon Quarterly* 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

⁷⁶ "C.I.P.E. Youth Essay Contest 2011." Center for International Private Enterprise 2012. Web. 16 July 2012.

technology. All of these factors, therefore, represent important variables that influence the rhetorical choices of contest participants.

Audience, or the Public(s)

A final defining feature of essay contests is the relationship that they construct with the “public(s)” they are addressing. Essay contests are public literacy events. They are directed at influencing, persuading, and often organizing a particular constituency, or segment of the public. As public sphere scholars (e.g. Warner 2002) have demonstrated, publics are constituted by discourse, and the circulation of texts -- and their accumulation over time -- significantly impact the ways in which publics develop and exercise agency. With the growth of the Internet, contests can target niche publics as subjects/objects of address with greater ease than in the past. The audience for any essay contest is not solely comprised of its intended participants or prospective essayists, but it is also comprised of the members of sponsoring organizations who take a lead role in designing the contest materials and prompts, the judges they appoint, and other groups and individuals who identify or see themselves as sympathetic to the goals and ideals that such contests represent. Contests therefore have agency and meaning because they forge ties with these public(s) whom they address, represent and/or imagine.

Additionally, it is important to underscore that many online contest announcements circulate on listservs and are re-posted on multiple other websites that alert potentially interested audiences and publics about basic contest information, themes, deadlines, and the like. One single contest may be ‘re-broadcast’ on tens of thousands of organizational websites and, in this way, take on a life of its own. The rhetorical impact of such contests may be

multiplied by the sheer number of sites on which they make their appearance and vie for the attention of readers on the Internet. Even oblique or unorthodox contests may gain a certain validity or legitimacy because they have harnessed the prestige of literacy and are seen as representing the viewpoints of a much wider public. Defining features such these all contribute to the complex rhetorical work that essay contests do.

Other Partners in Invention

One of the groups that remained elusive in this analysis, even though they most assuredly played a part in contests, were the friends, advisors, and editors -- the writing coaches and peer mentors, for example -- who helped read the essayists' drafts and provide input during their writing processes. This is a group that deserves recognition in the model, even though little formal acknowledgement of these individuals' roles in the process of invention could be found in the contest materials. Teachers are frequently mentioned, but they are usually treated as sponsors or judges, rather than partners in invention, even though they realistically participate in writers' invention processes in a variety of ways. And this is a group for whom the business-like descriptor, "sponsor," does not seem altogether adequate -- because it fails to place primary emphasis on the helping role that these groups and individuals played. The category, therefore, "Other Partners in Invention," refers to a variety of groups and individuals whose contributions were difficult to identify specifically or pinpoint in the contest materials but whose contributions were nonetheless likely significant.

Conclusion

All of these elements of essay contests, therefore, represent nodes of agency within this "governmental" literacy practice. Each actor --whether it be the essayists, the sponsoring

organization, its co-sponsors, advertisers and/or endorsers, the digital technology they rely on, the decisions of judges, the lure of the prizes, the prompts, or the public(s) engaged – plays an important role in determining the cultural and rhetorical work of essay contests. The ways in which agency is distributed in particular contests may vary according to the contest, but typically sponsors have greater power in framing the terms of participation than other actors involved. At the same time, these sponsors must rely on the participation of other actors in order to achieve their aims – whether these are of a civic, educational, commercial or partisan nature (or some combination of these). As a result, the efforts of sponsors are necessarily contingent upon the participation of other actors.

One of the implications, then, related to governmentality is that, while contest sponsors play an influential role in determining aspects of contests, so do the targeted essayists and other actors. Thus the “governmental” implications of contests point us toward a more expansive view of rhetorical agency as distributed. But, given the complexity of governing systems like these, essay contest participants need sophisticated strategies for recognizing how they are being addressed by any given contest and for negotiating meaning. I will be therefore offering some ideas about the instructional possibilities that this observation raises in the last chapter.

This chapter has presented a model of the essay contest and provided some rich description of this contemporary system of literacy practices, with the aim of making visible the multiple points at which various participants might exert agency. The chapters that follow will further explore the history of essay contests as a technology of governance, and they will take up the idea of rhetorical agency, especially as it relates to the writers and their purposes. In

chapters Three and Four, I will be drawing on an extended example to show the ways agency is distributed in one essay contest in particular, the World Bank's 2009 Youth Essay Contest on Green Entrepreneurship. This example will allow me to consider some of the implications for writers with regard to the ways in which subjectivities are constituted and knowledge produced at numerous other scenes of writing.

Chapter 2

A Partial History of Essay Contests and the Idea of the Essay as Genre

A Partial History of Essay Contests

We rarely think of essay contests as having a history, as emerging within a particular cultural milieu and historical moment. But today's essay contests represent the intersection of two strands in the history of literacy: one linked to the practice of awarding prizes for writing -- a strand that can be traced to the tradition of naming poet laureates in Europe and the writing prize system in European universities -- and another linked to the emergence of the "author" as a "cultural agent" (Pease 1990), the essay as a culturally specific genre, and "essayist literacy" as a communicative style. Both of these strands come together at a particular juncture in the history of Empire when, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the first essay contests were held. The first (and longest running) of these contests came about in the 1870's with prizes awarded by military institutions in the UK and US, and, in 1883, by the Royal Colonial Institute, which expanded the audience of essay contest participants to schoolchildren --first in the UK, and later, throughout the British empire. These contests harness the power of the genre they highlight -- that of the essay -- to cultivate sympathies and recruit functionaries for the colonial project, and they additionally make clear how powerful "sponsors of literacy" (Brandt) -- in this case, royal, military, and colonial societies -- have played a central role in the

history of essay contests. They also call attention to the governmental functions that such contests play.

Early History of the Essay Contest

Royal Bards and Poet Laureates

Prior to the invention of the essay genre, the early history of essay contests begins with the custom or practice of awarding honors to writers. The roots of such contests can be traced back to the laureation of poets in Europe from the fourteenth century on. According to Flood (2007), this tradition derives from the practice of bestowing a laurel wreath around the heads of athletes, and eventually, around the heads of poets in classical antiquity. In 1341, this practice was revived with the laureation of Petrarch, the first modern European poet to receive the honor. When Count d'Anguillara, on behalf of Robert, King of Naples, bestowed the honor on Petrarch, he proclaimed "...[W]e have placed with our hands on his head a *crown of laurel*, granting to him...by the authority of King Robert, of the Senate and the people of Rome...the free and entire power of reading, disputing, and interpreting all ancient books to make new ones, and compose poems, which, God assisting, shall endure from age to age" (Hamilton 1880, 21). Thus the power to "read," "dispute" and "interpret" the works of the ancients in order to "make new ones...which shall endure" was not merely claimed by the poet, but rather conferred upon him by the King, and supported by representatives of the government, and the people – with God's assistance, of course. Throughout Europe, these early sponsors of writing attached the prestige of literacy to the Crown.

In Britain, there is "an unbroken tradition of Crown appointments since John Dryden in 1670" (Flood, 3). The list of those who have received the honor includes major literary figures

in history, such as (in addition to Dryden), Chaucer, Spenser, Jonson, Wordsworth, and Tennyson (Hamilton, Flood). There, the appointment of poet laureates continues today, and, until recently, those so named held the title for life. In Germany, however, the practice died out in 1802 (Flood) due to the problem of its being bestowed too easily and often in return for payment (Hamilton, Flood). But, regardless of geography, the bestowal of this title often involved a tacit understanding that the poet laureate would, in effect, repay the generosity of the crown or sponsor through service.

When the honor was conferred by the university, king, or the emperor, poets were expected to produce written compositions in praise of their patron, the Crown, and/or, occasionally, to God. Sometimes, poets were also asked to write in praise of their university or to provide verses in service to the Church (Hamilton, 28), or they might be expected to compose a poem for the Sovereign on his birthday and/or New Year's Day. These compositions were regularly set to music and performed before the King and his court. Occasionally, as a condition of the office, limitations were placed upon the poet's teaching practice. For example, one poet laureate was required "to promise not to read Ovid's 'Art of Love' with his pupils" (Hamilton 29).

At first, the material rewards of the office were few. The prestige, however, that came with the award was significant, and it often gave the poet license to travel throughout the countryside and declaim. In the Holy Roman Empire, poets had to pay a fee for the honor (Flood, 12), but according to Hamilton, in England, poets were often rewarded with a robe, sometimes in the King's colors, and/or a gold ring in addition to their laurel. In 1630, in

England, Ben Jonson petitioned for a raise and received an annuity of 100 pounds and a “terse of Canary Spanish wine.” (32)

The office of poet laureate represented something of a public office, not precisely equivalent to a degree or diploma (such as Master of Arts or doctorate, for instance), but it was possible for the same individual to possess both a degree and the title of laureate. Additionally, there was some overlap (and perhaps some potential for conflict) between the power vested in the crown and the authority of the colleges or universities to bestow these titles. In France, there were no poet laureates; however, there were poetry competitions or “tournaments” (25) instead, and, according to legend, around 1500, the early salonniere or fictional personage, Clemence Isaure, reportedly willed a sum of money to be used for such (25). These early traditions represent some of the early ways in which influential sponsors extended recognition to writers, and some of the ways in which writers accepted certain terms in exchange for this recognition.

Aside from the Greek history of laureation and its rehabilitation in 1341 in Italy, Hamilton has traced the practice of employing royal bards or a “King’s Versificator” (29) back to ancient practices in Scandinavia, Ireland, and Wales. In Wales, for instance, bards were required to “sing the song of the British kings” (27) when the army was in their full regalia; they might also be asked to compose a poem, sing a song in the queen’s chamber, or sing their lord to sleep, in exchange for various perks or “gratuities’ (27) from the king and his nobles or vassals. Throughout Europe, then, since the earliest times, writing awards seemed to carry the expectation that the poet would repay the favor, by praising the sponsor of the honor in verse,

and the earliest sponsors included royal and wealthy personages, but eventually sponsorship was extended to the universities, as well.

University Essay Prizes

In France, in the Provincial and Royal Academies

With the rise of the universities in Europe, there was a gradual adaptation of this practice into the Prize System in European universities. The University Prize System arose as a way of awarding special distinctions for the written submission that best responded to the set topic or theme. In 1750, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was awarded a prize by the Academy of Dijon for his “Discourse” in response to the question of whether the arts and sciences had made a positive impact on morality. The prestige of this prize established Rousseau’s importance in the scholarly community and advanced an area of interest at the time. According to Crosland and Galvez (1989), this prize was one of many that were offered during that period by French academies for work that had already been completed, rather than for future research. This was a system in which prize questions were set and influenced inquiry via “the idea of the prize-winner as a model to be emulated” (79).

But, over time, French intellectuals questioned the effectiveness of setting prize questions; many were too difficult or did not represent the interests or diversity of the work of the scholarly community. Indeed, on occasion, no prize could be awarded because there was not work of a sufficiently high quality in response to the obscure questions raised. And so, in 1826, when there was an influx of money into the French academic prize system, “encouragements” were made to scientists for scientific experiments that were increasingly costly. These represented the movement away from prize questions and the beginning of the

awarding of grants for future scientific work. But the system of awarding prestigious prizes for academic work remained in the universities, and money from wealthy donors was often directed towards specific areas of scholarly inquiry.

At Cambridge

The Prize System was also common practice in British universities, which encouraged, for example, writing on classical, colonial, and religious themes. At Cambridge and Oxford, the growing pervasiveness of this practice also coincided with a movement away from oral examinations and towards written exams (Hamps-Lyon). Writing prizes offered a way for recipients to distinguish themselves among their peers, thus serving as “the road to fellowships and then to jobs outside the university” (Lubenow, 2000, 251). And, because they were intended as an elite distinction, they served to channel the efforts of writers in particular directions, as well as to identify work of the highest caliber. Sponsors came forward to sponsor the prizes that spoke to their governing aims. At Cambridge, essay prizes were announced alongside scholarships in the university “calendar” — a publication that served as a student’s guide to the university, with an array of announcements about academic offerings, awards, textbooks, services, and the like. Many of the essay prizes at Cambridge were awarded for the best prose essay on religious topics in a given year. And, by the mid-nineteenth century, some of these religious-themed prizes also addressed colonial and missionary affairs. This movement from the religious to colonial aims of writing prizes spoke to a shift in the governing aims of influential sponsors, and because of the importance of the British colonial project in the history of the modern essay contest, I will focus on several of these early precursors here.

Sir Peregrine Maitland's Prize

In Indian affairs, one of the oldest writing prizes at Cambridge was Sir Peregrine Maitland's Essay Prize, which took these religious themes and applied them to the colonial context. The 1866 Cambridge University Calendar explains how this particular contest originated:

The friends of Lieutenant-General Sir Peregrine Maitland, K.C.B., late Commander in Chief of the forces of South India, being desirous of testifying their respect and esteem for his character and principles, and for his disinterested zeal in the cause of Christian truth in the East; have raised a fund for the institution of a Prize in one of the Universities, and for the establishment of two native Scholarships at Bishop Corrie's Grammar School at Madras....for an English essay or some subject connected with the propagation of the Gospel, through Missionary exertions, India and other parts of the heathen world. (222)

As this description suggests, the prize was developed in order to commemorate Sir Maitland, who had served as a military commander in India. Acknowledging his "disinterested zeal in the Cause of Christian truth", these friends of Sir Maitland established the prize, along with "two native scholarships" in Madras, to stimulate inquiry on topics related to the missionary project in India and elsewhere. This prize, with its emphasis on missionary and colonial themes, represents one of the clearest examples of the "governmental" functions of the writing prizes that preceded the invention of the modern essay contest.

As early as 1845, when the first of these prizes were awarded, the Sir Peregrine Maitland Prize thus reflected the adoption of missionary and colonial projects by the university prize system, encouraging essays that championed the cause of conversion in India and elsewhere in the British Empire. For instance, an essay entitled "The Respective Peculiarities in the Creeds of the Mahometan and the Hindu which stand in the Way of Conversion to the

Christian Faith" (Fiske) won the Maitland Prize in 1848. This award was given every three years by the vice chancellor and two other masters-level members of the University. The award carried greater symbolic importance than it did financial incentive, yet it presumably paved the way to careers in the foreign service. Winners of the prize were awarded £1000 and were expected, at their own expense, to make fifty copies each to be distributed to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the Church Missionary Society, and Bishop Corrie's Grammar School at Madras. Prizes like the Sir Maitland prize, therefore, contributed to the production and circulation of "expertise" regarding colonial affairs both at home and in the colonies because it invited those who would submit their essays to adopt the priorities and viewpoints of the sponsor as their own. In this way, the University Prize System clearly focuses our attention on the role of colonial governing agendas in the history of writing contests.

The Le Bas Prize

Likewise, the Le Bas prize was awarded at Cambridge for essays on the topic of the "Anglo-Indian Empire." The announcement for this prize in the Cambridge Calendar reads as follows:

Members of the Civil Service of India who were students at the East India College at Haileybury at various intervals during the thirty years that the Rev. C. W. Le Bas, M.A., formerly Fellow of Trinity College, was connected with that Institution, desirous of testifying their regard and of perpetuating the memory of his services, raised a Fund amounting to £2000...which they offered to the University of Cambridge for founding an annual Prize...for the best English Essay on a subject of General Literature, such subject to be occasionally chosen with reference to the history, institutions, and probable destinies and prospects of the Anglo-Indian Empire. (224)

As with the Sir Peregrine Maitland Prize, the Le Bas prize commemorated the work of a British missionary, the Reverend C.W. Le Bas, a professor of the East India College and fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge. Students and friends 'desirous of testifying' their "regard," "esteem," or "respect" for him sought to define his legacy through their efforts to elaborate upon "the history, institutions, and probable destinies and prospects of the Anglo-Indian Empire." One of the objects of both of the *Le Bas* and the *Sir Peregrine Maitland* prize was to affirm the Christian missionary effort as an essential aspect of British colonialism, just as it built a body of knowledge and a corps of academic specialists on the future of Empire.

These writing prizes, therefore, reveal some of the important "governmental" partnerships or allegiances between the British Higher Education system, missionary societies, the East India Company, and the Civil Service of India in the mid-nineteenth century. They also show how closely linked were the projects of colonialism and the promotion of certain forms of English literacy, both at home in England and abroad. Both the *Le Bas* and the *Sir Peregrine Maitland Award* accomplished this linkage by forging associations between the colonial project and the prestige of writing prizes among students at Cambridge, at the same time as English Education was being instituted as a cornerstone of colonial policy in India. The English Education Act of 1835, which promoted the study English in India, was, in fact a privilege that, as Viswanathan (1987) points out, was available to few residents of England at the time. Its implementation as colonial policy in India suggests that certain aims of Empire were attached to English literacy as a sign of distinction.

Thus, the institutionalization of the *Le Bas* and *Sir Peregrine Maitland Prizes* represented merely one of the "multiform tactics" (Foucault) by which the larger colonial infrastructure was

supported. This was an infrastructure that rested on multiple tacit associations between literacy and governing colonial and missionary aims. In India, these associations had significant repercussions for the colonized population. And, according to Viswanathan, the British used colonial education to recruit “native” functionaries and English literary study as “a blueprint for social control in the guise of a humanistic programme of enlightenment” (23). Although Viswanathan does not delve into the practice of English writing instruction in colonial India, she does assert that “the English literary text functioned as a surrogate Englishman” (23), who gained a kind of omnipresence through the dissemination of the English book. The association of books with the English allowed the British to be defined by their reason, she says, and the “...production of thought defined the Englishman’s true essence, overriding all other aspects of his identity....” (23) Over time, she says, the English were constructed as writers, while the “natives” were constructed as readers.

However, by 1858, Indian recruits also needed to be able to write in English if they hoped to succeed in the exams required for the Indian Civil Service (Hamps-Lyon 7). This selective dissemination of English literacy served administratively and practically to reinforce British authority in the colonies. There was, of course, a similar dynamic in British-controlled Africa, where writing played a crucial role in the construction of “Englishness” (Gikandi 1996). In this way, in India and elsewhere, “[t]he colonizing effort was... written not as a history of capitalist expansion, but as a massive, entirely laudable, educational enterprise” (Collins and Blot, 2003, 121). And, as a feature of this educational enterprise, elements of the writing prize system in English universities worked to support the colonial and/or missionary project and its governing aims.

Trench Gascoigne Prize (Royal United Services Institute)

Likely coming out of the university prize system and, in particular, awards such as the Le Bas and Sir Peregrine Maitland Prize, one of the first essay contests to be recognized as such was the Trench Gascoigne Prize Essay Competition, which originated in 1874 and was sponsored by the London-based Royal United Services Institute (R.U.S.I.). The “governmental” functions of this early contest can most clearly be seen in relation to the colonial and/or missionary purposes of the earlier prizes to which I have signaled. The difference, however, is that the intended participants for this competition were not university students but rather officers of the Royal army and navy, and the governing goals related more directly to military affairs. The R.U.S.I. prize thus represented a unique development in the history of writing prizes because it expanded the audience of essay writers beyond the universities to the armed services. And, as one of the world’s longest running essay contests, it is a contest that continues to this day.

Early topics sponsored by R.U.S.I. included arguments for universal conscription, the best type of war vessels, naval tactics and the protection of commerce, and, in 1883, Indian affairs: “Should the European Army in India continue as at present constituted, or should it be converted in whole or in part into a local force?” (R.U.S.I.) Topics like these from the early years of the contest suggest a relationship to the university prize system and its colonial awards but evince a more direct interest in questions of military strategy. Today’s topics similarly deal with the role of the military in relation to pressing issues facing British society and the world -- topics such as civil liberties, cyberwarfare, the relationship between civilians and the military,

and the question of nuclear disarmament versus peace. Topics like these suggest both continuities and discontinuities in relation to the governing aims of earlier contests.

According to the organization's website, R.U.S. I. was established in 1831 in response to a "call...for a 'strictly scientific and professional' approach to the study of military affairs" (R.U.S.I.). The history of the organization itself suggests that the institutionalization of an essay contest was part of the organization's efforts towards professionalization, a move that would help the naval administration more effectively carry out its affairs. According to its website, R.U.S.I. served as a "forum – the only forum – where military policy could be discussed and questioned" (R.U.S.I.). The need for such a forum came during the mid- to late- nineteenth century– a period in which the British colonial project was undergoing various challenges, including "wars in Europe, the USA and India; the Russian expansion into Central Asia; and developments in naval technology" (R.U.S.I.). Among the challenges faced by the colonial power was the need for trained leaders and professionalization in the military ranks. This were some of the "governmental" goals that informed the development of the R.U.S.I. prize.

Aside from the growing need for specialized expertise in military affairs, this call for professionalization likely also reflected a colonial strategy, which, in many ways, depended on the credible leadership of the British officials in charge. As Viswanathan explains, the enlightened, "literary" image of the British had been called into question by the actions of the East India Company, whose activities made the English less believable as moral authorities. As Viswanathan puts it, "The extravagant and demoralized life-styles of the East India Company servants, combined with their ruthless exploitation of native material resources, had begun to raise serious and alarming questions in England about the morality of the British presence in

India" (1989: 24). Behaviors such as these did not fit the dominant civilizing/ conversion plot, and so, the establishment of an essay contest, with its emphasis on writing, served the image of the gentleman soldier that the British sought to cultivate in India and elsewhere. The R.U.S.I. contest therefore marked a significant departure from the system of awarding essay prizes in the British universities because it opened up the practice of essay-writing as a mark of distinction to a constituency outside the university system. Additionally, it made the prestige of literacy available to officers during a time in which the need for skilled and credible leadership was growing more prominent.

The U.S. Naval Institute "General Prize"

The R.U.S.I. contest appears to have served as one of the models for what remains perhaps the longest continually running essay contest in the United States. According to the U.S. Naval Institute, this contest was developed in 1878 by the organization in response to, or as an outgrowth of, similar initiatives in the French and British navies, which saw essay-writing as central to the training of officers. As the U.S. Naval Institute website puts it, "These powerful role models for the young American Navy placed great import on writing to the extent that every French Navy officer standing for promotion would have his essays included as part of his evaluation" ("The General Prize"). Thus, the ability to craft an essay became a sign of distinction that separated out those suitable for promotion from those who were not. The gatekeeping function played by the system of essay prizes in the European universities was therefore transferred to an out-of-school setting, that of the military institutes, creating a character and literacy-based distinction between those who were seen as suitable to lead and those who should follow.

Developed under the leadership of General Alfred Thayer Mahan and Lieutenant Commander Allan D. Brown (who first proposed the contest in 1878 at the organization’s annual meeting), the U.S. Naval Institute contest was awarded annually to a member of the organization whose “paper which shall be deemed the best” (“The General Prize”). As an acknowledgement of the quality of the paper, the author received a \$100 cash prize, and the essay appeared in the organization’s publication, *Proceedings*. The essays were to be evaluated by “three gentlemen of distinguished professional attainments, to be selected by the Executive Committee and were to be submitted through a ‘blind’ submission process – with the inclusion merely of a “motto” that would be sent in a separate envelope containing the writer’s name ” (*Proceedings*). The topic of the first contest was given, though not in the form of a question, and it was succinct. According to the U.S. Naval Institute 1878 *Proceedings*, it read:

“The subject of the first Prize Essay is to be

‘NAVAL EDUCATION.

I.Officers. ----- II. Men.”

This essay contest mirrored some of the concerns of the R.U.S.I. contest with the professionalization of officers – in this case, the preparation of two classes of soldier: “officers” and “men.” In particular, it reflected the interest of Mahan, the head of the Naval Institute at the time, and other naval officers in this key question of naval education in relation to the professionalization of officers (“Discussion”). For Mahan, who was a military strategist and an expansionist, sea power was a necessary expenditure, essential for nation building. Mahan,

who had fought for the Union forces in the Civil War, was inspired by the history of Rome and the successes of the British navy in various battles against the French. His *Influence of Sea Power Upon History* galvanized public opinion behind a buildup of the U.S. navy because it advocated for a greater reliance on battleships and expansion of bases overseas in the Phillipines and Hawaii (Columbia University). The early adoption of an essay contest by the Naval Institute suggests Mahan's appreciation for the power of literacy as a defining component of policy. But, additionally, as a prolific writer whose ideas found purchase both in Europe as well as Japan, he was also likely thoroughly convinced of the importance of essay-writing as a mark of character or distinction.

This appreciation for the power of essay-writing may, at least partially, be explained by the fact that prior to joining the Naval War College around 1854, Mahan was a member of the Philolexian Society, one of the nation's oldest college literary societies, established in 1802. "Philolexian" (which means "lover of discourse" in Greek) was a college literary society at Columbia University. Societies like this one predate fraternities and sororities, and they were one of the few forms of entertainment available; additionally, their emphasis was more academic than social (Gere, 1987). Throughout the nineteenth century, students who belonged to the Philolexian Society at Columbia "engaged in a wide range of literary activities, including debates within and without the society, essay writing, correspondence, and hosting speeches by eminent men of the city" (Philolexian Society). In 1852, alumni of the society raised money to endow annual prizes "in three categories: Oratory, Debate, and Essay" (Philolexian Society). Mahan's own experience with essay prizes as a member of the Philolexian Society may have contributed to his acknowledgement of their usefulness both as a tool of persuasion and the

formation of character, and his personal experience with these prizes also likely helps explain the migration of the essay contest to organizations such as the Naval Institute.

The Royal Colonial Institute Essay Contest

The “governmental” (and, specifically, colonial) functions of contests could also be seen in another long-running contest. The first civilian essay contest extended to audiences outside the universities, and also the one claiming to be “the oldest and largest” in the world, was first established in 1883 by the Royal Colonial Institute (now the Royal Commonwealth Society) in England. This contest expanded the target audience for essay contests beyond military and university communities to schools and schoolchildren. This contest, which took the idea of the essay prize to a wider audience, was aimed at developing a public that would support the missionary and/or colonial effort both at home and in all corners of the British Empire. The rationale for the contest was to encourage widespread support for the colonial project and to nurture interest in the social and/or material “circumstances and resources” of the colonies among those who might later serve as administrators, missionaries, or military personnel abroad. As the “Circular to Principals of Colleges and Schools” that was included in the 1882-3 Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute explains, the contest began as a way of “encouraging the rising generation to acquire a better and more extended knowledge of Her Majesty’s great Colonial and Indian Empires” (“Circular,” 388). The stated goal was for “the preparation of papers [to] cause the competitors to become acquainted with the circumstances and resources of the countries in which many of them will have to seek their future homes” (“Circular,” 388).

Included in the announcement were requirements for submission, as well as the various levels of prize awards to be made. This first contest of the Institute planned to award £20, £15,

£10, and £5 for “the four best essays or papers” (“*Circular*,” 389) on the topic of “The Australasian Colonies: their History and Present Position, Geographical, Political and Commercial” (“*Circular*,” 389). Additionally, an emphasis on originality was present from the beginning; the Principal of the school had to attest to the fact that the essay was that student’s original work. At first, the top prize winner needed to be a UK university student, with less than three years of study completed, and the lower prize winner could be “Pupils of any School in the United Kingdom” (“*Circular*,” 389). But later in its history, the contest was expanded to students across the British Empire, a shift that made the contest “international in its reach, while at the same time operating within the confines of a British imperial narrative and ideology” (Gissel, 2007, 37). According to Gissel, the contest ran for two years and then died out due to low participation until 1913, when it resumed once again in earnest. At that time, she notes, the winning essays tended to espouse the ideals of progress and self-determination, along with the idea that the British were uniquely poised to bestow these benefits of civilization upon humankind.

This consensus among the winning essayists is perhaps not surprising, given the elite population from which they were drawn and the “civilizing” mission of the contest’s sponsor. The colonial or civilizing mission was, in fact a central reason for the institution’s founding. According to Gissel, “[t]he establishment of the Institute itself was set against the backdrop of a debate on Empire taking place within Britain. While those influenced by the ‘free traders’ argued that the impetus of Empire had fallen away as it had become too expensive and largely unnecessary, colonial reformers, on the other hand, advocated continued imperial engagement” (38). The founders of the Institute were prominent members of British society

who favored continued imperial action, and who wanted to counter the arguments of those who were calling the project into question. As is well documented in the Institute's *Proceedings*, the organization was founded in 1869 to provide a gathering space for British colonial administrators and volunteers who, upon their arrival home, sought opportunities to receive news and share what they had learned with others. It served as an emerging discourse community that would serve to promote the group's valued knowledge and colonial self-identification.

One of the individuals in attendance at the first meeting of the Royal Colonial Institute explained that “[e]veryone, leaving the colonies and coming to England, finds himself on his arrival at an utter loss, for he has no place to resort to where he can meet those who belong to the same colony, and where he can obtain information of what is going on in the country he has left” (*Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute*, 1869, 4). Another explained that those returning from their colonial duties encountered “great difficulty in procuring reliable information in regard to all matters pertaining to the colonies on the part of those who, for political, scientific, or other practical purposes, seek for such information”(6). Attendees at the preliminary meeting of the Institute pushed for the establishment of a colonial museum and library as well as a lecture-hall, and reading-room in London. Similar to other gentlemen's clubs and literary societies of the time, the Royal Colonial Institute offered a way for its members to socialize and to reinforce their ideological commitments. From its founding, the Institute was designed as a common space where members might have their colonial experiences acknowledged and legitimized.

The Royal Colonial Institute was modeled after several other societies—in particular, the Royal Geographical Society, the Society of Arts, and the Royal Society of London (17). The first of these, the Royal Geographical Society, generated knowledge about various parts of the world, including the colonies, but was seen as not specialized enough to encompass the variety of topics which would be covered by the proposed society. The last of these, the Royal Society of London, one of the oldest scientific societies in Europe, was formed in 1660 to promote an “experimental” approach to mathematical and scientific learning, based on the ideas of Francis Bacon (Atkinson 1999). Its journal, *The Philosophical Transactions*, has been credited (or faulted, as the case may be) with the early development of scientific discourse as we know it (Atkinson). The roots, therefore, of the Royal Colonial Institute, the sponsor of the first “modern” essay contest, were deeply entangled in these former institutions and their cultural assumptions.

The name of the organization was, additionally, chosen to provide the society with “the same *locus standi* and position which the other royal societies enjoy” (*Proceedings* 4). The question of “locus standi” or credibility was an important one because, at the time, those charged with colonial governance were increasingly faced with the task of maintaining the desirability of foreign service during a time when British subjects were hesitant to “emigrate” to the colonies. There seemed a growing impression that life in the colonies was too difficult, the rewards too paltry, and the method of transportation too insecure, to warrant the effort; instead, too many would-be colonial functionaries were opting to relocate to the United States. (71) These perceptions may have additionally been amplified by the fact that well-esteemed writers of the time were questioning the colonial project. Because of this hostile atmosphere,

one of the group's major aims would be to counter those "writers who attack and would dismember our empire" (53) --a goal it would accomplish by extolling the virtues of British colonialism and the benefits it bestowed.

At the inaugural dinner of the society, members of the navy, volunteers, and government ministers were present. The navy had a special role in these gatherings; as one member of the society stated in 1869, "The Navy has always been associated with our colonies. 'Ships, Colonies, and Commerce!' was an old toast often given in this country; and of all the services with which the colonies are connected, and of which they are proud, there is none of which they are more proud than the Navy of England" (24). Gissel has noted that the British had "the most powerful navy at the time and a willingness to post troops in every territory" (41), and, as such, their allegiance was crucial to those who were mounting a defense of empire.

Those who attended the meetings shared a belief in the superiority of British "race" and of Christian civilization; the activities of the British Empire were seen as equivalent to "progress," and British colonists abroad were doing good by "diffusing the blessings of liberty throughout the world" (*Proceedings* 22). In early meetings of the Society, arguments were forwarded to build a library of written materials to support the work of Empire, both to assist imperial functionaries in their day-to-day activities and to solidify the impression of the British as the foremost experts on their colonial territories and dominions. Reading and writing were seen as central to these goals, and the reading of essays and their discussion became the central focus of the meetings of the newly founded Royal Colonial Institute. As the chair of the newly formed organization stated at the group's first meeting:

One of the principal objects of the society when it is established will be, at its usual weekly or periodical meetings, to read papers on subjects of interest to the colonies....engineering, emigration, architecture, the building of bridges, the harvests, trade, mines, finance, missions, the history of the Aborigines, and all that relates to the Aboriginal tribes in our various dependencies; shipping intelligence, the progress of shipbuilding in our several maritime dependences, the advancement of art and science, archaeology, and matters relating to the early history of the colonies, zoology....the introduction of animals from one colony to another...pisciculture...and...inventions....Another subject which might well engage the attention of such a society is new raw material – a new material for paper-making, for instance.

(Proceedings of the Royal Colonial Institute, 1869, 3)

These topics were seen to be of common interest to individuals and groups already engaged in the ideological project of empire abroad, and worthy of further study and promotion at home. Such topics represented the colonial interests of the founders of the world's first modern essay contest – one of the longest running in history and one that continues today.

Today's Royal Commonwealth Society Essay Contest

Since its founding in 1869, the organization has undergone numerous changes over the years, including a change in its name, which changed first to the Royal Empire Society and later to the Royal Commonwealth Society -- the name it goes by today. Women were admitted as Fellows in 1922, and, since the achievement of independence by many of its colonies, the focus of the organization has shifted away from colonial matters to matters of the Commonwealth. As its website states, having undergone major renovations in the last decade, the Society today is an international educational charity located at 25 Northumberland Avenue in London. Today, the Royal Commonwealth Society boasts an award-winning restaurant and wine selection, "a 250-foot auditorium, first-class business facilities, a member's lounge and bar, increased exhibition space, an Internet café, and much more" (R.C.S. "Our History").

The essay contest still remains active. Today, it is open to all 14-18 year-old citizens of the Commonwealth, which is comprised of 54 member countries. Currently, “[f]rom Africa to Asia, from the Pacific to the Caribbean, from Europe and the Mediterranean to North America, the Commonwealth’s membership stretches across all the world’s continents and oceans and includes 1.8 billion people, or 30% of the world’s population. Over half are young people, aged 25 or under” (R.C.S. “A Modern Commonwealth”). Member countries include Canada, Namibia, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Mozambique, and Tanzania, for example, (R.C.S. “A Modern Commonwealth”), and the theme for the contest in 2013 reflects an entrepreneurial impulse: “Opportunity through enterprise” (R.C.S. “Commonwealth Essay Competition”). Since the 1990’s, an annual photo contest is also held – a modification which acknowledges the power of visual persuasion in the Internet age. Changes such as these suggest that the contest’s influence has undergone revisions and has expanded, but the matter of whether its project substantially differs is a matter of debate.

Today, the contest’s online presence, its sponsor’s status as an educational charity, and its appeal to the visual, as well as its enlistment of essayist and other literacies, work to reinforce what might be seen as a neoliberal and/or neocolonial project. These market-based goals can be interpreted as representing a new phase in the history of Empire, and they suggest a relationship between the colonial history of essay contests and current globalizing economic projects. The free-enterprise impulse behind such topics suggests that a new chapter in the history of the contests is currently being written. At the same time, today’s essay contests serve a wide range of interests, and the influence of various social movements can be seen in many contests since the 1960’s. Therefore, despite (or perhaps because of) its legacy, the

contemporary essay contest remains mixed or contradictory in terms of its projects and assumptions -- including, perhaps as a result of its rootedness in humanism, a stubborn insistence upon the writer's and thinker's (albeit deeply contingent) rhetorical agency. This contradictoriness is made especially visible in the next section, which examines the history of contests from the vantage point of the genre that they highlight.

This chapter, so far, has traced one of the two historical strands that come together in the literacy practice that we know of today as the essay contest. To start with, it has shown how the sponsorship of writing prizes goes back to the tradition of naming poet laureates – a tradition that attached the prestige of literacy to the Crown – and then how this tradition of writing awards get picked up in the prize system in European universities – a system that secured a role for the early universities and wealthy donors in shaping the direction of knowledge. Within that prize system, the intellectual projects, attitudes, and affiliations of winners were seen as worthy of the highest emulation. And, then, in the 1870's, a confluence of circumstances called for a distinct type of writing award that could be extended beyond the universities to the armed services, colonial functionaries, and the public at large. Thus, British colonialism and American expansionism are seen as the inaugural moments of the modern essay contest as a distinct literacy practice, the emergence of which represents an expansion in the use of essayist literacy in the construction of subjects and publics –that is, as a tool of governance – or, indeed, of conquest by alternative means.

However, there is also a second historical strand to pursue in tracing the development of essay contests – a strand which follows the emergence of the essay as genre, the “author” as

a historical subject, and “essayist literacy” as a cultural register or communicative style. The remainder of the chapter, therefore, treats Montaigne’s publication of his “Essais” in 1580 as a key moment in the history of authorship, one that is often associated with the historical emergence of the bourgeois, rational, individualist subject. Since there is no history of the essay contest without a history of the essay as genre, the chapter also explores some of the assumptions underlying the use of this genre and the idea of “essayist literacy” so often associated with it. In doing so, it argues that the essay contest, with the forms of literacy it promotes --the essay genre and “essayist literacy” -- remain deeply ambiguous terms.

The Idea of the Essay as Genre

The second strand, therefore, in the history of essay contests concerns the genre of the essay itself, as well as the related idea of “essayist literacy” and the ideological and epistemological “biases” that this term implies. This exploration is necessary because it is impossible to construct a history of the essay contest without some historicization of the genre of the essay itself, a form which emerges just prior to the rise of bourgeois individualism, capitalism, and Cartesian science. An examination of the essay genre in relation to its cultural history can help us to see how it is used for a variety of “governmental” purposes in contemporary contests. Moreover, the emergence of the essay marks a key moment, not only in the history of the essay contest, but also in the history of authorship.

Most histories of the genre begin with the diplomat, Montaigne-- the writer who coined the term, “essai,” which, in French, means a test, an attempt, or a trial. Although definitions of the essay vary widely, all of these terms point towards a genre that is, at least at its inception,

provisional in its quest for knowledge, contingent upon numerous possibilities, and certainly not definitive in terms of what it has to offer. And as various commentators (Good 1998; Adorno 1984) have pointed out, the essayist in the late sixteenth century was, in effect, a critic, an emerging historical subject not satisfied with received knowledge. Despite the fact that Montaigne, like many of his predecessors, found inspiration in the classics, according to Good, “the essay...was not one of those Renaissance genres based on a desire to revive the literary models of antiquity” (1). Instead, the genre derives from the late medieval period and reflects a changing attitude towards knowledge that is embodied in the figure of the essayist. This “figure” represented a cultural character that was, in many ways, similar to the protagonist of the Spanish picaresque novels and to Cervantes’ errant, chivalrous knight. For Good, the “figure of the essayist... is more rooted in society than either, but still has a detached, skeptical view of his environment. His ‘essays’ are equivalent to the ‘episodes’ of knightly adventure or picaresque trickery: none of these forms is tightly integrated into a plot or systematic structure....” (10) Good emphasizes that the Montaignean essayist drew from the late medieval period some of its trickery, chivalry, and skepticism, and that the Montaignean essay was more “episodic” than “systematic.” But additionally, he emphasizes the “disinterested” outlook of the essayist: “[l]ike the honnête homme of French seventeenth century literature, the ideal essayist should be *disinterested*, his outlook uncolored by any particular trade or profession” (11). The Renaissance essayist represented a shift away from scholasticism and towards greater independence of thought.

The essay, therefore, emerges between the old medieval reliance on revered moral authorities and the new faith in science and its “systematic ambitions” (Good 3). First

published in 1580, Montaigne's essays mark these historical changes; the rise of the essayist historically coincides with the shift from a reliance on medieval "auctores" to a reliance on "authors" for knowledge. Pease (1990), for instance, explains how each medieval discipline had been content to look to its revered authorities: "Cicero in rhetoric, Aristotle in dialectic...Ptolemy in astronomy, the Bible in theology...to interpret, explain, and in most cases resolve historical problems by restating these problems in terms sanctioned by auctores" (106). Writing during the medieval period was nearly synonymous with identifying and copying down relevant passages from the holy books.

But, with the so-called discovery of the new world, a new class of "cultural agents" was introduced. This new cast of characters introduced new terms for geography, customs, and flora and fauna that had no precedents in the earlier sources. As a result, Pease suggests, their authority depended not on adherence to custom but upon original thinking and/or "verbal inventiveness" (107). And so the birth of the essay, like the birth of the "author," coincides historically with the rise of capitalism and the age of exploration. As Pease explains, "Authors rose to cultural prominence in alliance with other individuals who exploited this dissociation between worlds: explorers, merchants, colonists, traders, reformers, and adventurers" (107). Seen in this light, the essayist was the quintessential bourgeois, individualist subject, and, the essay, the preferred medium of expression for this verbally inventive, skeptical outlook.

At least one commentator on the essay also notes the genre's humanist origins. Good, for example, attributes the inspiration for the genre to "the compendium of sayings, like Erasmus' *Adagia*" (1) -- a collection of proverbs that also included some preliminary analysis. This precursor genre to the essay, the "compendium of sayings," might also be viewed as a

close relative of the commonplace book, a genre derived from antiquity whereby orators jotted down notes, observations, and favorite quotes from materials they came across, as an aid to memory and “invention,” a term which refers to the ways in which writers come up with, and develop, their arguments. The method of commonplacing was a common pedagogical approach from classical times through at least the eighteenth century. Indeed, we know that Montaigne himself kept a commonplace book (Blair, 1992, 542), as did later essayists, including John Locke, for instance (Dacome 2004).

This comparison is relevant because, as Good observes, “Montaigne’s earliest essays seem designed to establish the truth about a given topic by collecting relevant quotations from classical and later writers. But the handling of these citations gradually changes, until, in the later essays quotation becomes a way of bringing a new voice into a conversation, rather than of providing authoritative support” (1). This idea of “bringing a new voice into a conversation” is one that not only accompanied the author as a new “cultural agent” but also echoes ideas about what constitutes good writing at the present moment. The fact that it can be traced to Montaigne and other writers in the essayist tradition is illustrative because it suggests the close relationship between the genre and our valuation of ‘critical thinking’ and/or ‘originality’ in writing today. Good draws on Foucault in representing this historic shift as one of movement from *commentary* into *criticism*, a shift that implied a radical reconfiguration of authority away from a blind faith in the classical sources. This reconfiguration of authority suggests that humanist concepts of individual rhetorical agency are closely bound up in the history of the essay.

In Praise of the Essay: Adorno

At the same time, the essay is a genre that, in many ways, codifies the contradictions of the emerging bourgeois humanist subject. That is to say, those who see the essay and so-called “essayist literacy” merely as a Western cultural construct, founded in Cartesian science and rationality, overlook some of the deep contradictions that were present at the very founding of the essayist tradition. One of these contradictions relates to the relationship between science and art at the genre’s inception. For example, as various commentators insist, even though his skepticism allied Montaigne with “empirical science, with its stress on observation and proof” (Good 3), the essay was not synonymous with science; instead “[i]t emerges between the old and the new learning, rejecting the old method of uncritically accumulated commentary, but also refusing the systematic ambitions of the new science...” (Good 3). This in-between status of the essay has led several notable Marxist literary critics to sing the praises of the essay as form.

Lukacs, for example, sees the essay as constitutive of a transitional (18) subjectivity that fuses science and art because it contains a longing for the organic wholeness that predates this split historically. And for Adorno, who is responding directly to Lukacs in his “The Essay as Form,” the essay effects a juxtaposition of opposites that can be useful in the present context: “although art and science have separated from each other in history, their opposition is not to be hypostatized” (156), he insists. While both writers see the division between the arts and sciences as a characteristic of capitalist alienation, they see the genre of the essay as intrinsically offering an alternative -- as it adheres neither to the conventions of fiction or literature nor to the conventions of science, while “somewhat complicitous” (154) in the

worldview of both. Rather than as a tool of hegemony or enslavement, it is seen by Adorno as a liberating genre.

As Adorno puts it, “[T]he essay urges the reciprocal interaction of its concepts in the process of intellectual experience. In the essay, concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture” (160). Or, if you prefer, Adorno offers another useful metaphor for the rhetoric of the essay: “Through their own movement the elements crystallize into a configuration. It is a force field...” (161). Whether a woven carpet, a crystallization, or a force field, the essay for Adorno brings together competing impulses and reflects their dialectical interplay.

In the essay, claims Adorno, the ideals of science - including the “exhaustive” (163) treatment of a topic, positivism, objectivism-- are laid bare as a kind of false consciousness; he sees the essay as operating within a different set of assumptions – rather humbler ones. For Adorno, the essay avoids the false consciousness of science but stands in relation to it, admitting of its own lack of certainty and provisionality, while simultaneously staking its own claims to truth. Adorno insists that “the essay refuses to behave as though it had deduced its object and had exhausted the topic” (164). He, like Lukacs, finds something utopian in this refusal and argues that the essay represents a kind of protest against Cartesian dichotomies.

For Adorno, “[t]he essay remains what it always was, the critical form *par excellence*” (166). And, as such, it must mingle with its “polar opposites” and confront the contradictions it contains. The essay is praised for undoing all sorts of binaries: between art and science, dynamic and static, truth and untruth, the primitive and the scientific, nature and culture. In

fact, for Adorno, the “proper theme” of the essay is the “interrelation of nature and culture” (167). For, he asserts, “the more energetically, the essay suspends the concept of some first principle, the more it refuses to spin culture out of nature, the more fundamentally it recognizes the unremittingly natural essence of culture itself” (167). The essay thus revives the rhetoricity of argumentation, as against the scientific claims of a Descartes, a Bacon or a Kant - - by telling the story of scientific progress as loss, insisting that science has betrayed its own ends, and “silently lament[ing] the fact that truth has betrayed happiness and thus itself” (169). For these Marxist thinkers, the key point is to reclaim a utopian function for the essay in a “modern” age in which the scientific and the artistic have become estranged.

The Essay Today as a Pedagogical, ‘Catchall’ and/or ‘Default’ Genre

This description of the essay’s positive attributes differs markedly from the critique of the essay and “essayist literacy” that is now commonplace. Today the essay is understood mainly to be a ‘schooled’ genre, that is, one that is principally found in school settings. Writers like Spellmeyer (1989) embrace the essay for the teaching of composition for many of the reasons offered by Adorno above. But Bloom (reprinted in 2009) sees the essay simply as a “catchall” term because this is the way most teachers and textbooks treat this category of writing, which, as she points out, has come to resemble or incorporate a variety of other forms. In her survey of college textbooks from the past fifty years, Bloom found that “the essay includes a wide variety of non-fiction from articles to memoirs to character sketches to travel narrative, natural history, cultural, social and political analysis, philosophical statements, science writing, literary criticism, editorials, research reports, and satires and speeches” (948).

All of these types of writing, says Bloom, can be found in modern anthologies of the essay and, hence, are seen as varied models of the genre today.

Bloom also points to some of the factors that make a particular essay suitable for anthologization, or membership in what she calls “the essay canon.” Essays become canonical when they are most importantly, teachable; but also suitable for a particular course; short enough to be discussed in one or two class periods; aligned with the goals of the course or the textbook thematically, intellectually, or politically; written by an author of reputation; aesthetically pleasing; a good rhetorical model or model of technique; and affordable. These criteria, according to Bloom, have spawned an entire industry around the essay genre, which she calls “the academy’s lingua franca” (966).

While Bloom’s study emphasizes how the essay has commonly been assigned as reading material in college (particularly composition) classrooms, other composition scholars have pointed to the frequency with which this genre is preferred for writing assignments in classrooms from elementary school on up. Following Womack (1993), Andrews (2003) calls the essay the ‘default genre’ of assessment in schools. In general, he suggests that the essay is preferred over other genres for writing assignments because it valorizes explicitness, lends itself to rational argumentation, and can be relatively easily assessed. At the same time, he explains that part of the reason for the essay’s stability as a pedagogical genre is its “flexibility, its ability to adapt to different functions....Refreshing a genre like this, or indeed challenging more vigorously its dominance as the default genre of the academy, is what keeps the most important qualities alive: clear thinking, exchange of views, reasoned commitment and lively

expression” (126). In short, Andrews highlights the “flexibility” of this genre as part of the reason for its wide use.

Evidence for the pliability of this genre is found in the fact that rubrics for the essay vary widely, and students often find themselves confused by what is meant when an essay is assigned. As Andrews explains, “there is a spectrum ranging from the explicit, abstract and logically structured at one end, to the more personal, idiosyncratic and expressive...at the other. It is this spectrum which makes sets of criteria for the assessment of essays so difficult to compose and apply, and, more importantly, for students to interpret” (115). The essay, therefore, is seen as a rather malleable form – one that can be adapted to multiple ends, making this genre difficult to summarize or explain.

Many presume the essay to be a western cultural form; however Good (1997), Cahill (2003), and Hamps-Lyon observe that essays were written in Asia for centuries predating the practice in Europe. And Cahill suggests that conventional Chinese and Japanese rhetorical strategies do not differ as significantly from “Western” argumentative styles as previously thought. Prescriptions for writers in these traditions similarly emphasize flexibility and the reliance on a range of strategies, rather than the dictates of particular forms. Nor is the essay equivalent to the three-part essay (introduction/body/conclusion), nor to the five paragraph essay, in all “Western” contexts. Rather, as many of these researchers suggest, these represent genre expectations and ideologies regarding literacy that are debated, regularly contested, and undergo change. At the same time, the critique of “essayist literacy” as a hegemonic style of writing closely associated with the essay is one that perseveres.

“Essayist Literacy” and its Critique

In discussions of the essay and essayist literacy, there has been a tendency to associate, and often to elide, these two terms. This elision can be traced to Olson (1997), who first expounds on the ideology of essayist literacy as an ideal in an article entitled “From Utterance to Text: The Bias of Language in Speech and Writing.” In this piece, Olson claims that the essay represents a “civilized” development from oral modes -- from language as utterance, speech, “conversation, storytelling, verse and song” (258) --to the written mode: language as text, alphabetic literacy, “statements, arguments and essays” (262), and “formal, written, expository prose” (262). He sets up a binary between these two modes, in which oral delivery is seen as relying on contextual cues and written modes of delivery are seen as a-relational or “freed” from context. For Olson, the goal of the written text, as exemplified by the prose essay, is “explicitness.” Rather than relying on the “shared intentions of the speaker and the hearer,” meaning is seen as “autonomous” or residing in the text.

Table 2.1

Olson’s Binary Conceptualization of “Essayist Literacy”

<u>Oral modes</u>	<u>Written modes</u>
Language as “utterance”	Language as “text”
Speech, Conversation	Alphabetic literacy
Storytelling, Proverbs, Adages	Formal, written, explicit
Aphorisms, Riddles, Verse	Expository Prose
Song	Statements, Arguments, Essays
Relies on Contextual Cues	“Freed” from Context
Meaning requires interpretation	Meaning resides in the text

Olson, who calls his own article an “essai” (258), credits the British essayists (e.g. Locke) with the essayistic technique (268) and “the Royal Society of London who picked up this technique as solidifying what he calls “the intellectual bias that originated at that time” (269). Whereas earlier works, such as the Bible and the Odyssey were “biased” towards oral mnemonic devices, “proverbs, adages, aphorisms, riddles and verse” (263) -- and “writing served primarily for the storage and retrieval of information that had already been committed to memory, not for the expression of original ideas” (264) -- Olson argues that the invention of the Greek alphabet, and later, the invention of printing, changed everything. With these innovations, writing was extended to a larger and more widely dispersed audience, who could no longer rely on “prior knowledge”(266) nor on the “quizzical looks”(272) that clarify meanings in face-to-face conversation. According to Olson, prose developed because a sentence had to carry “unambiguous” meanings, for which there was no need for an “intermediary sage” (270).

Olson’s binary schema, of course, exaggerates these differences and radically overlooks the rhetoricity and rhythmic quality of written texts, as well as the audience’s need for contextual information and the vital role of interpretation. Nonetheless, this schema was tremendously influential and laid the groundwork for later critiques. Scollon and Scollon (1981), for example, suggest that the decontextualized ideal of essayist literacy, of the ‘fictionalization of both the author and the audience’ (52) and the text as “a bounded, isolable entity” (49) bears striking similarities to “modern consciousness” (49). As these authors suggest, this valuing of essayist literacy dates back at least to the Enlightenment, at which time texts were treated as vehicles of truth and granted special authority. As the authors point out, this dominant worldview has discriminated against groups that have been marginalized by that

system. Rather than celebrate non-indexicality, explicitness, and clarity, Scollon and Scollon's study focuses on the ways in which essayist literacy as a communicative style put the Athabascans with whom they worked at a disadvantage. They explain how this group found it difficult, if not impossible, to communicate in a culturally congruent way with non-Athabascans.

Other critics of essayist literacy, like Trimbur (1990), point to the ways in which this overvaluation of essayist literacy poses pedagogical problems. Of course, it is important to note that, as Trimbur points out, this understanding of essayist literacy represents a radically different understanding of the essay than the style made popular by Montaigne (and whose praises are subsequently sung by Adorno). For Trimbur, essayist literacy is associated with what he calls a "rhetoric of deproduction," which involves the privileging and naturalization of straight-to-the point, matter-of-fact, decontextualized prose as the norm. Trimbur defines "essayist literacy" as the kind of prose we find in textbooks, the kind of prose that positions schoolchildren to read for the answers instead of for pleasure. As he puts it, it is "the sort of expository writing we read almost without being aware that we are reading it – in news reporting, government documents, reference books, school textbooks, and so on" (73). According to Trimbur, one of the main problems with essayist literacy is that it is "non-literary"; that is, it "seeks to automatize reading. Its frictionless prose neither calls attention to itself nor appears to require interpretation. Instead, we experience such prose as immediately readable, without the density, allusion, and ambiguity we associate with literary texts" (73). Critics like Trimbur emphasize the ways in which essayist literacy automatizes the reading experience for students by equating it with decoding or "processing information" rather than any other more actively pleasurable, critical or complex aims. As such, it "regulate[s] the way students read by

demanding that students separate work from play, fact from opinion, and learning from judgment” (74).

Critics of essayist literacy also point to its tendency to replace – in effect, to colonize or incorporate, other more varied forms of discourse. In composition, for instance, by the late 1800’s, a written composition had replaced oral exams for entrance to Harvard (Hamps-Lyon 2002; Brereton 1995). During that time, the emphasis in instruction underwent a similar shift from oral “declamations, disputations, and debates” (Brereton 4) towards written composition. Before 1860, few colleges taught English composition or English literature, but by 1900, all colleges in the U.S. had courses like these. As Brereton explains, writing, which had earlier been taught during all four years of the college curriculum, became segregated into a first year course. By the turn of the century, composition instructors had developed the practice of assigning short essays, or daily “themes.”

This critique of essayist literacy rightly acknowledges its potentially colonizing aims, but contemporary educational researchers also point to ambiguities that surround “essayist literacy” and the critique of the essay as a genre. Farr (1993), for example, suggests that “essayist literacy” is more accurately viewed as a register that characterizes multiple academic environments and writing situations than a particular genre. She suggests that “[a] number of genres, both oral and written, exist within this register, for example, school essays, instructional lectures, oral reports, research papers, and textbooks” (8). Nonetheless, she observes that the essay, in particular, stands out among these other genres in terms of how frequently it is used for the purposes of institutional gatekeeping. And, as she points out, college entrance exams, various placement exams, and high school equivalency tests frequently call for the composition

of a persuasive essay: “Not performing well in this genre can cost people time, money (for remedial courses), and probably self-esteem,” she explains. At the same time, she adds that “using a written essay allows for more equity than would using other criteria for selection” (13). Ultimately, she concludes that instructors must teach hegemonic essayist literacy while simultaneously appreciating and learning from other registers and styles.

Likewise, Hamps-Lyons underscores the gatekeeping role of the essay but suggests that this function is nothing new. She argues that “essay testing has been around for thousands of years, although it should be better labeled assessment through writing than assessment of writing” (5). Seen in this way, the history of essay contests overlaps with the history of writing assessment more generally. And this is hardly the sole purview of the “Western;” as Hamps-Lyons points out, writing was used in China as early as 1000 B.C. as one of the measures against which nobles were assessed for their readiness to participate in the activities of the Imperial Court. But she also notes that, according to Dubois (1970), the Jesuits “pioneered the use of written tests in the West, publishing a statement of writing test procedures in 1599” (7). These observations recall the special kinds of “distinction” made possible by the European writing prize system, as well as the gatekeeping function of the first essay contests in the promotion of royal UK and U.S. naval officers. Such practices reveal the long history of essay writing as a tool of assessment, evaluation, or examination in various parts of the world.

But despite this gatekeeping role of the essay and the “rhetoric of deproduction” (Trimbur) commonly associated with it, empirical classroom studies suggest that, in fact, “essayist literacy” does not adequately describe all of classroom discourse. In contemporary educational studies, researchers like Poole (2008) have found that essayist literacy may indeed

characterize the kind of “impersonal, ‘de-contextualized’ presentation of factual information” that emerges in grade school children’s discussions of written texts, but that it does not adequately describe the ways children talk about illustrations -- conversations which include more context-dependent linguistic forms, full clauses, interactions outside of the common pattern of instructor-response, and more affective engagement. As she points out, “decontextualization” should be seen as a stance or “ideology of academic literacy rather than an inevitable characteristic of written language or its surrounding talk” (382). Hence essayist literacy, in its hegemonic manifestations, may not be as all-encompassing a classroom discourse as it is often portrayed to be.

These multiple perspectives on the essay and on essayist literacy suggest that the essay itself is the site of contradictory motives, impulses, and social action. For theorists like Adorno and Lukacs, the essay is a genre that permits dialectical movement among science and art, a key contradiction that they see as undergirding capitalist thought. For writers like Olson, however, the essay gives rise to a rational or detached kind of consciousness that he calls “essayist literacy” – an ideology of literacy or “register” that, as Farr and Trimbur suggest, often dominate academic settings. But, according to Poole, the limitations of essayist literacy as a dominant paradigm can be seen in empirical studies of classroom discourse, where other discourses are present. Thus, various breaches or crevices in this dominant approach to literacy can be seen in the multiple discourses and ideologies of writing that permeate the classroom and beyond. Today, both hegemonic and non-hegemonic definitions of the essay and of literacy vie for ascendance in classroom and community settings.

Contemporary Essay Contests

Similarly, the multiple governing aims of literacy sponsors vie for ascendance in contemporary essay contests. Unlike the narrow field of sponsors for the first essay contests in the 1870's, contemporary essay contests have been initiated by diverse sponsors or patrons and serve an array of agendas and interests. Just as there are contests sponsored by transnational corporations, international governmental bodies, and past colonial powers, there are also contests run by non-profits, smaller foundations, university programs, professional associations, and creative partnerships among these. Agendas serve a wide array of interests, ranging from patriotism to corporate promotion to the commemoration of historical figures to literary appreciation. And the influence of the feminist, civil rights, and environmental movements can be seen in many contests since the 1960's. Today, essay contests serve not only publics but "counterpublics," a category which Warner (2002) understands to include groups who are conscious of their marginalized status. And the fact that the kinds of intellectual projects supported by the essay and the essay contest are potentially much more varied than in the past, is a shift that, in part, owes itself to the digital era.

This shift in technology from print to digital has had a major influence on the "governmental" history of essay contests -- leading to a wider proliferation in the types of contests offered, sponsors and agendas represented, and writing subjects enabled. While, for example, patriotic contests, which recall the early emphasis on nation-building, still abound, various new categories of contest have sprung up. "Green" essay contests, for example, are a relatively new phenomenon and are aimed at producing environmental subjectivities and fostering "sustainable" ways of interacting with "the environment." Hence, the increasing

diversity in the field of essay contests suggests that, while the colonial legacy of the essay contest remains relevant, that legacy is simultaneously challenged by the efforts of other writers and sponsors who take up different aims. At the same time, many contests, designed to promote the “free enterprise” system, such as the 2013 R.U.S.I. contest on “Opportunity through enterprise”— seem to reflect neoliberal, commercially-oriented goals couched in the language of civic engagement. As a result, the cultural and ideological implications of the essay contest as a literacy practice remain a radically ambiguous work in progress, and rhetorical critics and variously situated writers need proper tools so as to contribute to the shaping of their ends.

Conclusion

The essay contest, then, is a deeply mixed literacy practice that is closely linked with the trends of European intellectual history, as well as the material and social conditions that influenced that trajectory. Early prestigious prizes not only lauded the writer’s skill or ingenuity but also reflected the writer’s relationship of service to the crown, patron, or sponsor and also paved the way for the various “gatekeeping” functions of the essay today. And, as I have argued, this tradition expanded to other writing communities -- including naval officers and schoolchildren --during the 1870’s, with the first “modern” essay contests, which aimed to build forms of character and knowledge sympathetic to the goals of colonial administration, territorial expansion, and commerce. But even though essay writers are immersed in this legacy, that doesn’t mean they are without power or agency –especially if they are clued into its history. As we have seen, traditions of essay writing point us towards multiple ways of defining the essay and “essayist literacy” – as not somehow intrinsically or entirely corrupted by

its historical legacy nor the uses to which it is put by those in power, but, rather, as informed by that legacy and open to other more critical possibilities.

While most commentators have focused on some of the perceived characteristics of the essay genre that Andrews identifies -- explicitness, rational argumentation, and assessability -- at the same time, it is important to keep in mind Andrews' observation that the key defining feature of the genre is, perhaps, what Good calls its "formlessness" and Andrews, its "malleability." This flexibility can allow for the essay to be adapted to multiple forms of argumentation (comparison/contrast, rhetorical analysis, problem-solution, and the like). Moreover, this malleability may allow for ambiguities and alternative interpretations that are not fully subsumed within critiques of essayist literacy as a "rhetoric of deproduction." Adorno, for example, emphasizes the varied, contradictory, and provisional quality of the essayistic genre and register, thus challenging the self-congratulatory rhetoric of essayist literacy as all-encompassing. And, as he maintains, the idea of essayist literacy can be read as a stereotype, suggesting that the shift from pre-scientific thought to scientific has been merely asserted yet never actually achieved.

Essay contests, then, in their contemporary manifestation, may be constrained by their history but not determined by it. The participants in contests and other writing situations can gain awareness of the agendas that govern their participation, and, in so doing, develop strategies for responding to their discursive positioning. They can learn strategies for inquiring into the "motives" of genres, ascertaining the expectations of sponsors, and envisioning their own purposes for writing. The next two chapters will offer an investigation into one contest in particular that shows some of these strategies in action. They will additionally explore some of

the concepts related to governmentality, rhetorical work, and the distribution of agency to which I have been alluding.

Chapter 3

The Rhetorical Work of Essay Contests: the World Bank's 2009 Youth Essay Competition

Essay contests conduct rhetorical work. The sponsors of such contests, with their goals and guidelines, their prompts and announcements, participate in shaping and constraining the way writers think, write, and act -- just as writers and audiences contribute to the production of knowledge in these civic literacy events. Because essay contests rely on the participation of multiple actors, rather than merely the overtly coercive actions of powerful sponsors, they comprise "governmental" (Foucault) literacy interventions. For instance, as we have seen, the earliest contests encouraged writing about military subjects among members of the UK and US militaries, as well as interest among schoolchildren in the colonial enterprise. These early functions of the essay contest reflected an approach towards governance on the part of state actors who sought to shape the attitudes and behaviors of their constituencies by relying upon the input of those whom they governed. Through the technology of competitive essay-writing, the earliest contest participants were incentivized to adopt the viewpoints of the royal, colonial, and military societies who sponsored these contests. But since then, many types of organization, including corporations, foundations, literary societies, and universities have come to sponsor such contests, and to direct their constitutive or 'shaping' function. Organizations of these varied types comprise an expanding array of "literacy sponsors" (Brandt), and, among these, transnational actors have come to play an increasingly influential role in designing

“governmental” literacy interventions in the digital age. In this chapter, I consider how the constitutive, “governmental” or ‘shaping’ functions of essay contests manifest themselves in a contemporary contest of the Internet era: the World Bank’s 2009 Youth Essay Competition.

This contest was sponsored by the World Bank, a transnational, quasi-governmental, financial institution – and also one of the most influential and complex literacy sponsors of our time. Using methods of discourse and rhetorical analysis, I consider how the contest announcement “hailed” or positioned prospective essayists as “young, green entrepreneurs” -- and how the winning essayists used creative strategies such as the *rhetorical maneuver* (Phillips) and *recontextualization* (Fairclough) to position themselves discursively in relation to the contest announcement. I show how such strategies assisted the essayists, most of whom hailed from the Global South, to assume social identities that were consistent with this positioning, while simultaneously (1) expanding the subject positions available to them and (2) making connections between seemingly unrelated discourses. In so doing, I describe how such strategies allowed the essayists to exert rhetorical agency in conjunction with their audiences, by negotiating the discourses available to them. Finally, I suggest how this dialog between the “governmental” actions of the sponsors and the creativity of the writers constitute the public, rhetorical work that essay contests perform.

Identification, Constitutive Rhetoric, and Governmentality

As we have seen, essay contests have a civic orientation. They work to promote forms of character and inquiry that are sanctioned by particular communities. The sponsors of contests include multiple types of organization that rely on the essay contest as a mechanism for engaging participants’ subjectivities as writers and readers. As such, these contests, with

their constitutive or ‘shaping’ influence on subjectivity, can best be theorized from the perspective of *governmentality* – a Foucauldian approach that considers how “human beings are individuated and addressed within the various practices that would govern them....” (Rose, 1999, 43), but this is a framework that can fruitfully be combined with other approaches that emphasize the ways in which identities are discursively and rhetorically constructed. In discourse studies, scholars like Gee and Fairclough call our attention to the politics of identification, and, in rhetorical studies, scholars like Althusser, Burke, and Charland point out how subjectivities are rhetorically constituted. That is, they focus on questions of *constitutive rhetoric* (Charland), a theoretical framework that, along with *governmentality*, can enhance our understanding of essay contests as a literacy practice.

To illustrate, Charland (1987) first employed the term “constitutive rhetoric” in his examination of the ways in which documents advocating Quebecois sovereignty came to constitute a collectivity: the Quebecois people. As Charland explains, by constructing certain truths that were taken to be fundamental, a Quebec government White Paper supplied this group with a narrative about its distinct history and attributes. The term “constitutive rhetoric” thus refers to the rhetorical strategies that facilitate the emergence of a particular subject position or identity in discourse. According to Charland, “[c]onstitutive rhetoric simultaneously presumes and asserts a fundamental collective identity for its audience. It offers a narrative that demonstrates that identity, and issues a call to act to affirm that identity” (2001, 125). Constitutive appeals often work at a tacit level whereby they direct or guide social identity construction and govern the identifications that people may assume. Attending to the ways in which discourse constitutes subjectivities involves highlighting how particular subjects are

interpellated by and through social practices (Althusser 1971) and how the politics of identification are operating in any rhetorical performance (Burke 1969).

Similarly, “governmental” interventions act upon subjectivity by guiding the participation of individuals and groups in their performance of identity. That is, governing powers rely on the participation of individuals and groups in their own identity construction. As Foucault explains, “With government it is a question not of imposing law on men, but of disposing things: that is to say, of employing tactics...to arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such and such ends may be achieved” (95). To view essay contests from the framework of constitutive rhetoric and “governmentality,” then, is to consider the ways in which this literacy practice “governs” the ways in which populations identify as rhetorical subjects. It is also to consider how these constitutive practices depend upon the powers and capacities of the governed, rather than on coercive strategies or direct legislative action.

“Governmental” actions typically make claims about improving the general welfare, and they influence multiple domains of social life. Such interventions include literacy promotions, but also initiatives in “public health, welfare, agricultural extension, conservation, good governance, and, increasingly, conflict management, elements of the hydra-headed endeavor we have come to know as development” (Li, 2007, 276). Given the broad array of domains that are governed by such measures, it is important to highlight that the sponsors of “governmental” interventions need not be representatives of the state. That is to say, “governmental” actors in the modern era can include a diverse array of organizations and individuals, whether or not they are aligned in any formal way with state agencies. Today, as Li

explains, governmental actors “include not only diverse state agencies with competing visions, mandates and techniques, but missionaries, scientists, activists and the so-called NGOs, both national and transnational” (276). Recognizing this variety, she suggests, “helps to break down the image of government as the preserve of a monolithic state operating as a singular source of power” (276). This awareness “enables us to recognize the range of parties involved in attempts to regulate the conditions under which lives are lived” (276), and it enables us to see the wide variation in governing agendas that exist.

Scholars of governmentality (Li 2007; Rose 1999), then, insist that “governmental” interventions are not limited to any particular political or ideological perspective; one may speak of “neoliberal” governmental schemes on the right of the political spectrum, just as one may find examples on the left. And, as such scholars as Li and Rose underscore, the point of this scholarship is not to proclaim such schemes universally “good” or “bad.” Nor is the aim of such an approach to suggest that “governmental” interventions are totalizing and leave no room for individual creativity. Governmental operations take as their starting point the understanding that the groups and individuals whom they target retain some degree of agency. Voluntary participants exercise the capacity to act in ways that make sense to them, and, in such programs, there must be some ‘room to maneuver’ within the defined program space. Therefore, the aim of “governmental” scholarship is to explore the rationales behind particular improvement schemes, as well as the various constitutive mechanisms by which such participation is achieved.

Essay contests constitute a particular type of “governmental” intervention, focused on the literate development of subjects, but also their formation as actors with particular

attitudes, values and characteristic patterns of thinking and acting. Such contests have the goal of fostering particular kinds of problem-solving, attitudes, and behaviors seen as benefitting society as a whole. They rely on mechanisms, such as the contest announcement, essay prompt, and various prizes and incentives, to encourage or promote specific kinds of literacy (economic, environmental, etc.) in a particular sub-group of the population, and they provide a measure or standard for evaluating participants' success. Often, they have a civic orientation and treat themes such as patriotism and character, along with their emphasis on essay-writing as a desirable skill. Additionally, they hail the writers as individual personalities and construct social identifications for participants and their audiences. As we have seen, multiple types of community organization sponsor such contests, and, typically, the annual theme, values, and goals of contests align with the mission and other practices of the organizational sponsor. These goals and values are realized linguistically and rhetorically through various textual artifacts, such as the contest announcement.

Rose (1999) has suggested that the study of governmentality begins with the question of "what authorities of various sorts wanted to happen, in relation to problems defined how, in pursuit of what objectives, through what strategies and techniques" (20). To examine the objectives of the sponsor, it is necessary to analyze written documents or textual "artifacts," such as the contest announcement and supplemental materials; the mission statement of the sponsoring organization; the topics of past contests; the goals of the contest; other publications of the sponsoring organization, and the winning essays themselves. These are some of the documents that offer textual evidence of the "rhetorical work" that contests carry out. However, by "rhetorical work," I refer not only to the constitutive ways in which contest

sponsors seek to direct the attention of writers, or to the ways in which they seek to position them as writing subjects, but also to the ways in which writers respond to this direction and positioning through rhetorical strategies of their own. Understanding the “push and pull” of these elements helps us to conceptualize rhetorical agency not merely as a function of the inventiveness of the individual rhetor—but rather as the “kinetic energy” (Miller) that exists between rhetors and their audience(s) -- a relationship that exists in vital connection to the texts and technologies, material circumstances, the rhetorical situation, and the cultural, historical, and political discourses which constrain and enable them as speaking subjects.

The World Bank’s 2009 Youth Essay Competition

An example will make the constitutive and/or “governmental” functions of an essay contest clear. All essay contests have certain key elements: a topic, theme, and/or prompt; a targeted group of prospective essayists; an identified sponsor (and occasionally, other participating organizations); a goal for the contest that is endorsed by the sponsor (usually in keeping with the mission statement of that organization); incentives and/or prize(s); a judge or panel of evaluators; and an audience or public that is addressed. An additional feature of all essay contests is that they are situated within specific historical, political, and rhetorical contexts. In the section that follows, I lay the groundwork for describing the relationship between the “governmental” functions of an essay contest and the politics of identification in one contemporary essay contest: the 2009 World Bank Youth Essay Competition on Green Entrepreneurship. I offer a snapshot of this contest in order to illustrate how the “governmental” functions of an essay contest present both constraints and opportunities for

writers, their sponsors, and audiences, as they construct rhetorical identifications in the digital age.

Topic/Theme/Prompt

In 2009, the World Bank held a Youth Essay Contest, inviting submissions on the topic of “The Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs.” This topic reflected the emphasis that the Bank was placing in 2009 on environmental issues, following the publication of the Stern Report that emphasized the economic impacts of climate change. Young people from all over the world—ages 18-25—were invited to submit essays over the web in English, French, or Spanish in response to the following questions: “How does climate change affect you?” and “How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?” These two questions invited essayists to document the impacts of climate change in their communities and to offer a proposal for addressing the problem. Nearly 2500 young people from over 150 countries participated in the contest-- 95% of them hailing from “developing countries” (Kuznicka), with the top eight essayists hailing from Australia, Mexico, Ghana, Cameroon, the Phillipines, India, and Indonesia. The topic and prompt, which appealed to college-age youth around the world, addressed the global problem of climate change from an “entrepreneurial” perspective and actively shaped the ways in which writers might respond.

Prospective Essayists

The contest had a particular audience for participants in mind. As we will see, various cues in the contest materials alert us to the fact that the intended audience of prospective essayists consisted primarily of 18-25 year olds from the Global South. Those targeted, specifically, were college-age youth, with some formal schooling and experience in research-

based essay-writing; they were fluent in one of the world languages --- English, Spanish, or French (the main languages in which the Bank's day-to-day business is conducted) -- and, since the contest took place via the World Wide Web, they were also necessarily individuals with access to computers. The materials, furthermore, targeted essayists interested in topics related to business and environmental issues. Overall, the contest seemed designed to influence the attitudes and identifications of other young writers by offering a standard or ideal for them to emulate.

Prizes

The prizes for the 2009 contest included a \$3000 award for the first place essay, \$2000 for second place, and \$1000 for third. And, along with these significant financial incentives came social status, valuable networking, potential career opportunities, and the hope of publication. The incentives related to networking and social status could be seen, for example, in the fact that, two months after the winners were announced, essayists were flown out to an Award Ceremony that was held during the Annual Bank Conference on Development Economics in Seoul, South Korea. There, the winning writers had an opportunity to present their papers to an audience comprised of some of the judges and co-sponsors of the contest and chaired by a representative of the World Bank. Additionally, for about a year after the contest, the photos of the top eight essayists and their essays were available online. The promise of networking, social prestige, and online publication all likely constituted powerful lures for the essayists' participation. But, too, the direct financial rewards may have been especially persuasive in incentivizing the participation of writers from the Global South.

Evidence for this claim can be found in the essay by the finalist from Cameroon, who, for example, writes movingly about his financial struggles: “It costs a lot to obtain a college education in my country. I have had to struggle with this reality since I obtained my Baccalaureat.” This writer explains that, due to his financial situation, he had to take “odd jobs during my free hours to help my family cover a number of expenses.” This essayist speaks to some of the lived realities that may have influenced some of this writer’s motivation to compete. And, as Brandt suggests, in the context of a literacy event, such incentives may play a role in compelling writers and readers to identify with the goals and social projects of the literacy sponsor. As she observes, “[a]lthough the interests of the sponsor and the sponsored do not have to converge (and in fact, may conflict), sponsors nevertheless set the terms for access to literacy and wield powerful incentives for compliance and loyalty (19). The essayists may therefore have been predisposed to identify with the outlook and attitude of the literacy sponsor because they found so compelling both the tangible (financial) and intangible (social status) rewards associated with this particular contest.

Judges

The panel of experts who judged the essays included one representative from the National Autonomous University in Mexico (UNAM), one from the World Bank, and six representatives of international NGO’s focused on youth leadership and development issues: Africa Leadership Forum, AIESEC Student Forum, The Glocal Forum, Junior Achievement Worldwide, AIESEC International, and Conciencia Association (from Argentina). Each of these experts represented partnering organizations that additionally agreed to co-sponsor the contest, along with the World Bank.

Sponsor

The World Bank was the principal sponsor of the contest, even though, in many ways, it may seem at first an unlikely literacy sponsor. The Bank is a large, multilateral development organization which was created after WWII to fund post-war reconstruction efforts and today considered one of the most important lenders to governments in the Global South. This organization currently goes by the name of “The World Bank Group” because it is comprised of five agencies: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), and the International Center for Investment Disputes (ICSID). Each of these agencies has a distinct area of specialization; one, for instance, focuses on interest-free loans and grants to the poorest countries, while another focuses on stimulating development in middle income countries.

The Group as a whole is comprised of governmental representatives from about 170 member nations and employs more than 9000 individuals from 168 countries. The Bank, however, cannot be understood as “a bank in the ordinary sense” (“The World Bank”), even though its activities are principally dedicated to the provision of financing. Instead, it is a quasi-governmental organization that promotes research in line with its lending principles and priorities. Two-thirds of its staff is based outside of its Washington, D.C. office, and the others are based in 124 country offices worldwide (“The World Bank”). As a literacy sponsor, the vast size and complexity of this organization make it exceedingly difficult to sum up with typical institutional descriptors.

One manifestation of this complexity, as Goldman (2005) points out, is that much of the Bank's effectiveness as an institution derives not from its autonomous activities, but rather from its work in partnership with national governments, NGO's, technical experts, and scientists. The influence of the Bank is rarely straightforward or one-dimensional; rather, it circulates among multiple "particular sites where these ideas, concepts, policies, and loans get debated, crafted, and challenged" (Goldman 33). As Goldman suggests, the Bank is not merely an institution with four walls around it, headquartered in Washington D.C., but is more aptly described as an elaborate, protean creature that depends on an array of actors to enact and reproduce its designs. The complexity of this institution makes it especially interesting as a "governmental" organization and as a sponsor of an online essay contest. Furthermore, its mutability and fragmented character are often masked by those who represent it as a coherent totality.

As Benjamin (2007) observes, there is a need "at times to treat the Bank with historical specificity as an institutional actor (a subject), and at times to read or interpret the Bank as a social text, authored variously by its own agents (e.g., Bank presidents, employees, and affiliated agencies) and by those forces organized in opposition to [it]" (xiv). " Benjamin, like Goldman, sees the World Bank not as a totalizing institution, but rather as "a powerful but mutable agent, perpetually transforming itself in reaction to critique and crisis" (xxvi). As Benjamin puts it, "[s]tatements by major figures connected with the World Bank often "function[] to construct an imagined, coherent, authorial World Bank speaker, rather than a portrait of a necessarily schizophrenic organization" (151). As a result, "...the World Bank

comes to be understood as a reified abstraction of global capitalism rather than as a powerful political actor engaged in struggle” (xxii).

Commentators like Goldman and Benjamin see the World Bank as a large, postmodern, malleable, and fallible institution, whose efforts to govern in the arena of global “development” rely on multiple groups and individuals who are often not directly affiliated with the Bank. As Benjamin observes, these interventions also take place in the cultural arena, where the Bank frequently “engages in rhetorical acts of public persuasion that rely on cultural formations and that appeal to cultural values” (xiii). These “rhetorical acts” comprise the Bank’s “governmental” involvement in cultural activities like essay contests, along with many of its other activities focused on knowledge production, including the massive research apparatus that the Bank has developed. This apparatus results in hundreds of publications per year, many of which “are cited considerably more often than the average economics or business journal article in the Social Science Citation Index” (Goldman 102), even though they are not peer-reviewed. These publications currently reach colleges and universities throughout the world via its newly developed library e-portal. And, in recent years, the Bank has expanded its powerful digital presence, with its blogs and e-institute, which the website describes as “designed to support self-motivated learners who want to get up to speed on the latest development trends, enhance their skills, and share knowledge through on-line learning communities....” (“The World Bank”) The Bank’s online contest, which ran between 2004-2011, was an early technology for achieving some of these same ends.

Additionally, the Bank has in recent years dramatically expanded its outreach in the areas of literacy and education. And it is within this context of increased involvement in

educational matters that its sponsorship of the 2009 contest took place. Currently, according to its website, “The World Bank is one of the largest external education financiers for developing countries, managing a portfolio of \$9 billion, with operations in 71 countries,” and its “new” support for education has risen to at least “\$3 billion, up sharply from \$1.8 billion last year and boosted by increased support for primary and lower secondary education” (“The World Bank”). Indeed, according to Jones (2005), the Bank has become the “[s]trongest player in the world of multilateral education” (2), surpassing other international agencies that specialize in matters of education and human development.

In terms of its educational agenda, then, it is worth noting that the Bank has tended to endorse initiatives in line with neoliberal ideology (Jones; Klees), an agenda that has been defined as promoting market-based solutions, growth, privatization, and deregulation in policy-making –but, additionally, “a frame of mind, a cultural dynamic, an entrepreneurial personality type, and a rule of law that penetrates the most intimate relations people have with each other, state apparatuses, and their natural environments” (Goldman 8). This support for neoliberal policy-making is additionally taking place within a larger context in which the incursion of neoliberal initiatives into educational settings (Apple 2204; Giroux 2002) is increasingly common, and, according to Jones, since the late 1990’s, the Bank has “steadily increased its use of education reform program loans to drive neoliberal policies around the world” (xviii). The figure of the “entrepreneur,” in particular, has come to stand for the ideal subject of neoliberal governance (Goldman 2005; Peterson & O’Flynn 2007), and this “entrepreneurial” emphasis could be seen in the choice of topic for the 2009 contest. In the contest, which called for the “Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs,” the Bank as a

powerful, yet fragmented, literacy sponsor encouraged a “governing” neoliberal subjectivity for the global age.

Participating Organizations

In the 2009 essay contest, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Korean Ministry of Strategy and Finance, and the World Bank provided funding for the various awards. And, in addition to these organizations, eight other entities also partnered with the Bank to organize the contest. These included universities --Cairo University (Egypt), Jadavpur University (India), and the National Autonomous University of Mexico – as well as a range of youth leadership and civil society organizations. And, although some of these organizations may have played a more active role than others, all had a hand in “authoring” the contest, along with the Bank. Some of these organizations shared the goal of promoting entrepreneurship, but others wished to promote youth leadership, civic engagement, and financial literacy.

These varying emphases could be seen in these organizations’ mission statements. According to their websites, for instance, Conciencia Argentina⁷⁷ works to promote civic engagement and social inclusion, the Glocal Forum⁷⁸ promotes city to city cooperation, and AEGEE Europe⁷⁹ encourages European students to work towards tolerance. AISEC International (Asociacion Internationale des Etudiantes en Sciences Economiques et Comerciales)⁸⁰ is the world’s largest student-run organization of higher education graduates, and its organizational mission is to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and leadership in this population of young

⁷⁷ ""Quienes Somos"." Conciencia. Web. 3 March 2014.

⁷⁸ "About Us." The Glocal Forum. Web. 2 March 2014.

⁷⁹ "What Is Aegee." AEGEE Europe: European Students' Forum. Web. 3 March 2014.

⁸⁰ "Who We Are." A.I.S.E.C. International. Web. 2 March 2014.

people. Junior Achievement Worldwide⁸¹ promotes work readiness, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy. The varying emphases of these organizations could also be seen in the topic for the 2009 contest, which reinforced not only green entrepreneurship but also youth leadership and civic engagement, as well. All of these co-sponsors thus played a role in composing the governing aims of the contest.

Goals of the Contest/ Missions of the Sponsor(s)

Civic Engagement

The stated goal of the contest was to engage young people in problem-solving on large scale issues related to poverty reduction. Historically, the topics from past years had similarly dealt with an array of development-related themes. In 2004, the first year of the contest, coordinators sought submissions describing the Role of Europeans in “Radically Reducing World Poverty.” The following year, they sought “Practical Solutions” related to “Building a Secure Future.” In 2006, they solicited “Practical Ideas” for influencing community decision-making, and, the next year, they asked essayists to explain what they could do to fight corruption. In 2008, essayists were asked to “shape the city of [their] dreams.” In 2011, the last year in which the contest was held, the theme of the contest was Youth Migration. All of these were issues that the World Bank and its co-sponsoring organizations decided to prioritize at the time. According to the website, the goal of the annual contest is “to provide an opportunity for youth around the world to share their ideas on critical development issues” (“The World Bank”). The contest then, was a forum for the Bank to engage youth in the questions that the organization wanted to highlight as priority issues of the day.

⁸¹ "The Power of Partnership." JA Worldwide 2014. Web. 2 March 2014.

This marshaling of public interest could be accomplished under the banner of youth civic responsibility or engagement. Indeed, such language permeates materials related to the contest. A report on the 2009 contest, prepared by one of the consultants for External Affairs in the World Bank's London office, explains that the youth perspective is crucial, given the fact that "the majority of the developing world's poor are children and youth....Youths are key agents of change, but too often the nature and impact of their projects are not recognized or documented sufficiently...." (Kuznicka) The emphasis on youth as 'key agents of change' suggests an interest in fostering youth participation. The report employs the rhetoric of civic participation to suggest that the World Bank, as the primary organizational sponsor of the contest, recognizes that "youth face difficulties being heard and engaging more directly in civic life" (Kuznicka). The contest thus portrays its aims as civically-oriented – that is, as primarily interested in increasing the involvement of young people in democratic governance. But, at the same time, other agendas of a commercial or public relations nature were simultaneously present or implied by the Bank's ongoing need to generate a consumer base for its financial services and products, for example, as well as the entrepreneurial emphasis of the prompt.

"Responsibilization"

In addition, the emphasis on engaging young people in solving the key issues of the day could be seen in the context of *responsibilization*, which Rose (199) suggests, refers to calls by agencies of government to redirect responsibility for solving problems away from the state (174). In many ways, such *responsibilization* constitutes a disavowal of responsibility by various state (and transnational) actors, whose moves to diminish the social safety net characterize political systems that Rose has termed "advanced liberal" (137) and others would call

“neoliberal” or “new capitalist” (Fairclough 2003, 174). To provide context for the definition he is offering, Rose cites the words of former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who in 1979 proclaimed that “the first principle of this government...is to revive a sense of individual responsibility” (cited in Rose, 139). The Bank’s discourse of civic participation, then, can also be seen from this neoliberal “governmental” perspective. Chapter headings in the *2010 World Bank Development Report on Development and Climate Change*, for instance, reflect just such an attitude. Consider, for example, the heading for Chapter Two, “Reducing Human Vulnerability: Helping People Help Themselves” (87), or the heading for Chapter Eight, “Overcoming Behavioral and Institutional Inertia” --the first section of which is titled “Harnessing individuals’ behavioral change” (322). These themes and topics reflect a value placed on responsabilization — that is, the idea that people should be made responsible (responsibilized) for their own self-improvement -- rather than a primary value on civic engagement or youth leadership aims.

This value placed on *responsibilization* is consistent with the World Bank’s 2009 mission statement, which explains: “The World Bank Group aims to fight poverty with passion and professionalism for lasting results - to **help people help themselves** and their environments by producing resources, sharing knowledge, building capacity, and forging partnerships in the public and private sector” (“Vision,” emphasis mine). This emphasis on responsabilization couched in the language of youth engagement is also visible in the materials for the 2009 contest, including the paragraph leading into the essay prompt, which ends with the question, “*How can youth contribute?*” Like any good essay question, it might be argued, this paragraph ends in a way that makes the question relevant for 18-25 year-olds, and engages their

motivation to write. At the same time, it may have the unintended effect of blaming of the victim: young people (in poor countries) are charged with accepting responsibility for the complex problems that earlier generations (in rich countries) have created and been unable or unwilling to solve. The difficulty of this positioning is apparent in the essay by the finalist from Cameroon. This writer begins with chilling testimony about the unprecedented flooding that is affecting his community, recounting how “[f]looding has become the daily plight of my family and the residents of my neighborhood” (55). “People have stopped keeping track of cases” (55), he says, recounting the loss of life and increase in water-borne disease resulting from torrential rains and landslides.

But the essayist adopts a confessional tone in blaming himself alone for his contribution to climate change. He explains the harmful health and the environmental effects of “zoa-zoa fuel, a mixture of gas and oil” (57) purchased inexpensively on the black market and used by taxi drivers in his city of Yaoundé. This writer describes the strong sense of guilt that he carries about having engaged in this practice. As a taxi driver who has resorted to the use of zoa-zoa, he tells of how he first “came upon the map of global warming on the Internet....The accompanying testimony sent shivers up my spine. I realized the extent to which I am utterly vulnerable to climate change and the extent to which I bear responsibility for it....Since that time, I promised myself that if I could acknowledge my culpability, then I could also reverse the trend” (58).

The bind in which this essayist finds himself is exacerbated by the use of the second person address in question number two of the essay prompt: *“How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?”* This essayist seemed to perceive the prompt’s direct

address as singling him out and assigning blame. The potential for essayists from the poorest countries in the world to accept this attribution of blame is especially troubling from the perspective of the climate justice movement, which calls attention to the fact that the countries that have contributed least to the problem of climate change tend to be those most affected by it, and that the rich countries are the ones who should bear greater responsibility for climate solutions. Seen from the perspective of responsabilization, then, the discourse of “youth participation” in the 2009 contest was problematic because it seemed to mask some of the organization’s responsabilizing aims. Seen from the perspective of civic engagement, however, climate change testimony from the Global South was sorely needed, and the essayists’ willingness to share their ideas and stories signaled their interest and willingness to take leadership in solving one of the key civic issues of the day.

Audience or Public(s) “Addressed” and “Invoked”

The audience for the contest, or the public that was simultaneously “addressed” and “invoked” (Ede and Lunsford 1984), was a global audience, as evidenced not only by the range of countries represented by the essayists, but also by the vast digital circulation of the contest announcement via sites via the Internet. The announcement was circulated on formal websites sponsored by numerous civic, educational and governmental organizations, as well as on blogs with names like *YoungGlobalPinoy*s and the *Delhi Greens*. And once the winning essays were announced, they were made available on the World Bank website for approximately two years. Hence the contest was aimed at a transnational public -- one that could identify with the entrepreneurial aims of the sponsor and/or the civic and environmentalist concerns referenced by the climate change theme. There were likely multiple reasons why the sympathies of this

transnational public were important to ongoing activities of the Bank. Among these was the need “to drum up continuous business... [and] to generate... new mechanisms for intervention as well as new reasons for countries to borrow” (Goldman 34). But, additionally, there was the growing sense that the climate crisis was an issue that governing bodies like the World Bank and its partner nations could no longer afford to ignore because the primary audience for their services was experiencing its effects, and these powerful entities had no choice but to accept this reality.

Political and Historical Context for the 2009 Contest

As a global, civic literacy event, then, the contest was situated within a number of specific political and historical contexts. Most crucially -- by 2009 the problem of climate change had captured the attention of policymakers all over the world. Concern had been mounting internationally for several decades, based both on scientific studies and the experience of extreme weather events in poor and island nations, in particular. This growing awareness of the problem led up to the largely symbolic 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an international agreement which required industrialized nations to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions beginning in 2005 --but which had limited impact due to the withdrawal of major signatories, including the U.S. According to a timeline published by *Frontline*, May, 2006 marks a key moment because it was in that month that Al Gore’s film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, was released. This film was significant because it made the case to the American public that global warming was occurring, that it was caused by human activities, and was scientifically documented. Additionally, in the following year --as the *Timeline* indicates -- two events occurred: the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released an authoritative statement based

on overwhelming scientific evidence that the climate system was warming, and Al Gore and the IPCC jointly accepted the Nobel Peace Prize one month before. These events influenced international public sentiment in support of policymaking that would address the climate issue.

In the U.S., some measure of public support did, in fact, seem to be building towards climate change action. In 2008, former House speaker Newt Gingrich appeared together with Nancy Pelosi to express their shared belief that climate change was an issue that called for bipartisan solutions, and, in his State of the Union Address in 2009, Obama was even emboldened to call for a 'market-based cap' on carbon emissions – a proposal that would require companies whose emissions exceeded that cap to lease credits from companies who stayed within the specified limits. All of this suggests that the 2009 contest took place not only within the context of heated political debate in the U.S. Congress but also within a comparatively hopeful moment in global climate change history. There was, indeed, the sense that, if climate action passed the U.S. congress, renewed support for the Kyoto Protocol and other policies might be enlisted all over the world.

Additionally, in 2006, the renowned economist, Lord Nicholas Stern, who from 2000-2003 had been Chief Economist for the World Bank, published his *Stern Review* on the Economics of Climate Change – in which he argued that human-caused climate change presented serious economic impacts and that “ignoring climate change will eventually damage economic growth” (“What is the Stern Review?”). The release of this report, which was commissioned by the UK government, necessarily had a profound ripple effect on the attitudes of development economists at the World Bank and elsewhere. Because Stern was respected in these circles, and because he could make the case for climate change action in terms that

economists could understand, policymakers found themselves more open to taking climate action than ever before. The Stern report demonstrated that poor countries would be affected earliest by climate change and would be hit the hardest. It also showed the climate crisis would result in the displacement of peoples as a result of rising sea levels, flooding, and drought; that global food production would be affected; and that carbon trading, along with research into new agricultural and energy technologies, offered some potential ways of addressing the problem (Osborne). Evidence for the influence of this document on the historical and political context for the 2009 contest could be found on the “Resources” page of the contest website, which referenced the work of Nicholas Stern, Al Gore, and others. All of these elements, together, comprised the political and historical backdrop for the 2009 contest.

Of course, as we now know, climate change skeptics were simultaneously fashioning a strategy that would eventually make climate action improbable – and in July, 2009, the American Clean Energy and Security Act failed to pass the Senate after having passed the House. And in the ensuing years, climate denial grew in the U.S., even as climate change impacts were increasingly felt. But, in 2009, there seemed to be an opening for political action, and the 2009 World Bank essay competition provided a platform for some of the global voices in that debate to be heard. At the same time, the various apparatus of the contest, including the announcement and essay prompt, delimited or constrained the ways in which that debate might be framed. In the next section, I discuss how the contest announcement shaped the ways in which prospective essayists might identify as environmentally aware, young, entrepreneurial, ‘citizens of the world.’ (And, in Chapter 4, I will further describe the ways in

which the contest prompt forged entrepreneurial conclusions via the two-part problem-solution prompt.)

Methods and Analysis

To analyze how the announcement constructed desired identifications for prospective essayists, and how the winning writers responded to this positioning, I draw on several key concepts from constitutive rhetorical studies (Burke; Phillips 2001) and discourse analysis (Gee 1999; Fairclough) related to the politics of identification. As I have suggested, in constitutive rhetorical theory, questions of identification are central. For Kenneth Burke, for example, acts of persuasion hinge on the audience's identification with the rhetor or speaker. As Burke writes in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B. Or he may *identify himself* with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so" (20). Burke explains that writers must persuade their readers that they are like them, if not identical to them -- and that their interests are compatible, or -- as Burke would have it -- "consubstantial" (21) with their own. In this way, identification functions rhetorically to establish a credible position from which to speak. And, as we will see, in the 2009 contest, identifications were central to the positioning implied by the contest announcement, which hailed the writers as specific kinds of people, with particular attributes, interests, and concerns.

In order to respond to this positioning, the essayists used several rhetorical strategies; these included what Phillips (2006) has called "rhetorical maneuvers." Phillips offers the concept of *rhetorical maneuver* to describe one common way in which rhetors negotiate the subject positioning that is available to them. For Phillips, *rhetorical maneuver* "refers to the

movement of subjectivity as a rhetorical resource through which the agency provided by a subject position is turned against that position” (318). Phillips offers the example of a student, who, in a conversation with his professor about an extension on a paper, reveals that he has just learned he will be a father. In this example, the student shifts from a subject position appropriate to the communicative situation – that of a student – to a less appropriate position – that of becoming a father. With this shift in positioning, the student takes the risk that his professor may not take him seriously as a student. At the same time, the rhetor’s alternative performance has the potential to alter the terms of the enabling discourse. This shift, says Phillips, provides “a crucial space in which an element of creativity can be introduced” (314). In brief, this exercise of rhetorical agency constitutes a way for rhetors to conduct what Gee (1999) calls “recognition work” (20) --whereby, as Gee claims, “they try to make visible to others (and to themselves, as well) who they are and what they are doing” (20).

Moreover, for Gee (1999), individuals’ “social identities” (12) are closely bound up with the “social languages” (12) that they employ and the “Discourses” that they engage day-to-day. For Gee, “Big D Discourses” (17) involve “socially accepted associations among ways of using language, of thinking, valuing, acting, and interacting” (17) and are always embedded in a medley of social institutions” (18). For Fairclough (2003), too, discourses represent “different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends [sic] on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people” (124). Discourses, additionally, are “tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions” (Fairclough 124). The ways in which rhetors engage specific discourses and identifications are tied into a

politics of recognition, or the quest to be seen and to act in a way that is congruent with their own self-understanding.

When individuals and/or organizations engage specific discourses in writing, they are, in effect, engaging various facets of their identities. When they draw links between discourses that are rarely brought together, this, too, suggests an act of identification –as does the practice of appropriating elements from one dimension of discourse into another. Fairclough calls the latter textual practice, *recontextualization*, by which he means the construction of “a relationship between different (networks of) social practices – a matter of how elements of one social practice are appropriated by, relocated in the context of, another (222). Textual practices like the *rhetorical maneuver* and *recontextualization* comprise strategies by which writers seek to have their own purposes and identifications recognized in the texts they construct. In this study, by using methods of discourse analysis (Gee; Fairclough) and rhetorical analysis (Selzer; Althusser; Phillips), it was possible to examine the ways in which the contest shaped the essayists’ subjective identifications, and to consider the rhetorical choices made by the essayists in their social performance of identity or “recognition work.”

For this analysis, I proceeded in two phases. In the first phase, I considered how the contest announcement “hailed” its prospective essayists by examining how the language of the announcement created a “young, green, entrepreneurial” subject position with which writers were asked to identify. I also examined aspects of the contest that were suggestive of the intended audience for the announcement, such as the invitation to submit essays in English, Spanish or French. I also consulted a World Bank summary report, which offered demographic information about the actual contest participants, and I was able to access online other needed

information about the contest itself. My intent was to ascertain the key identifications that were called for by the contest announcement, and to probe some of the rhetorical strategies that were at work in this written “artifact.” In doing so, I hoped to gain insight into the mechanisms by which the announcement shaped the essayists’ responses.

Part One: Initial Rhetorical Analysis of the Contest Announcement

In 2008 and 2009, the announcement below appeared on blogs and informal websites, as well as more formal websites sponsored by civic, educational and governmental organizations as diverse as Junior Achievement,⁸² Civitas International,⁸³ the Barbados Government,⁸⁴ and the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University.⁸⁵ The heading for the announcement, which takes up the top fourth of the page, begins with the following: “The World Bank and its partners invite you to participate in an INTERNATIONAL ESSAY COMPETITION 2009. WANTED: NEXT GENERATION OF ‘GREEN’ ENTREPRENEURS.” The questions appear against a green backdrop with outlines of a world map and a large white question mark. In the lower right corner of the announcement page, essayists are urged to “Submit!”

⁸² "About J.A.: What's New? ." Junior Achievement 2009. Web. 7 Jan 2013.

⁸³ "Civnet.Org a Worldwide Online Civic Education Community " Civitas International 2009. Web. 7 Jan. 2013.

⁸⁴ "Unesco Sponsors International Essay Competition." BGIS Media A Website of the Barbados Government Information Service. 2009. Web. 7 Jan. 2013.

⁸⁵ "News and Events at Sipa: Columbia University." Columbia University 2009. Web. 7 Jan. 2013.



Figure 3.1 World Bank Contest Announcement, Source: *YoungGlobalPinoy*s

As evidenced by the number of contestants (1500 from 250 countries), the heading for this announcement must have captured the attention and imagination of many of those within the targeted age range (18-25 year olds). Some number of these may have immediately identified as members of the “next generation,” and/or with the ascriptions of ‘green’ and/or entrepreneurial. The capitalized letters in “WANTED” might have called to mind a job ad or, perhaps, a poster from the American West in a Clint Eastwood movie. This set of associations might have suggested that the intended audience was comprised of jobseekers, ‘maverick’ personalities, or some of both. Responding to this call, presumably, represented an affirmation of this “hailed” identity and-- to some degree-- as acceptance of the terms within which that identity might be expressed.

Following the tabs below the upper heading, essayists could access additional information about the topic, guidelines, prizes, and questions for the 2009 contest. One of these tabs explains that the contest invited online submissions in English, Spanish, or French.

The call for submissions in “English, Spanish, or French” suggests that the contest appealed to youth who were able to write in one of the world languages, and the call for “online submissions” suggests that young people with access to computers were the targeted audience for the announcement. Presumably not “hailed” by the call for submissions were those without access to the cultural capital of schooling, not literate in a world language, or on the other side of the digital divide. Also not “hailed” -- or hailed with less frequency—seemed to be writers from the ‘overdeveloped’ or industrialized countries, representing only 5% of the submissions and one of the winners. (In 2009, an essayist from Australia won first place.)

Additionally, aspects of the event itself suggest a preferred set of identity attributes and values for respondents. In conducting this event as a “competition,” the Bank implicitly reinforced the value of competitiveness (in contrast to collaboration or cooperation). This value, believed to underlie philosophies of the “free market,” is consistent with the Bank’s neoliberal agenda, and with the language of the announcement, which called on youth to identify as “entrepreneurs.” This competitive social orientation demands that individuals monitor and assess themselves based on values of productivity and self-discipline (Petersen and O’Flynn 2007). In inviting submissions on the theme of “green entrepreneurship,” the Bank was also issuing a call to young people with leadership potential who might identify both with the sense of themselves as environmentalists *and* as entrepreneurs. By collapsing distinctions among these terms, the sponsors encouraged these youths towards a particular articulation of the issue -- one that saw entrepreneurship as not only compatible with environmentalism, but as *the* preferred stance or subject position from which to envision or approach climate solutions. That is, they sponsored an entrepreneurial “environmentality” – a term, which, for

Agrawal (2005) involves the ways in which “socially situated actors come to care about, act in relation to, and think about their actions in terms of something they identify as ‘the environment’” (162).

In terms of identification, three specific identifications were explicitly encouraged by the heading for this announcement:

- “next generation”
- ‘green’ or environmentalist, and
- entrepreneur

The descriptor, “next generation,” presumably suggested not only youthfulness, but also “up-and-coming,” in the sense of being the next generation to lead and/or make a difference. The descriptor “green,” also presumably, referred to individuals with environmentalist predilections and/or commitments. And the ascription “entrepreneur” likely referred to those who might be interested in starting up their own company and finding innovative business solutions to real-world problems. These three subject positions seem to be working together in the text to forge a desired identity: the young green entrepreneur.

This entrepreneurial emphasis may have been particularly well-suited to the targeted age group. According to cultural commentators (Williams; Deresiewicz), entrepreneurship was a popular theme among members of this generation -- the generation comprised of individuals between the ages of 18-29 (Pew Research). As a writer for the New York Times asserts, “Our cultural hero is not the artist or reformer, not the saint or scientist, but the entrepreneur” (Deresiewicz 7). Within the context of neoliberal governmentality, then, the “green entrepreneur” can be understood as representing a new “take” on this cultural ideal, an updated version of one of the principal “characters of new capitalism” (Fairclough, 2003, 213).

As distinct from a mere “environmentalist,” this cultural character, representing the vision of “green neoliberalism” (Goldman), sees primarily business-oriented solutions to the climate crisis. S/he understands the goals of growth and profit as fully compatible with environmental protection and sustainability.

“Green Neoliberalism”

This meshing of the discourses of “environmentalism” and “entrepreneurship” in the World Bank 2009 contest reflects a “green neoliberal” perspective, which Goldman claims to have dominated environmental initiatives at the Bank during the period in which the contest took place. For Goldman (2005), “green neoliberalism” refers to the strategic pairing of the discourses of neoliberal globalization and environmentalism that characterized the organization’s policy agenda and public relations during that time. Within this framework, notions like “privatization” and “deregulation” were seen as fully compatible with “sustainability” and “conservation”; this unlikely pairing necessarily downplayed any possible conflicts or tensions between the two terms. According to Goldman, the Bank’s “green neoliberalism” allowed the Bank to allay many earlier concerns that had been voiced by its critics. Specifically, by greening its development ethos, the Bank was able to woo some of its most powerful detractors, including environmentalists and NGO’s who were, initially, “up in arms about the Bank’s large-scale dams, rain forest colonization schemes and logging projects, and ‘greenhouse-gas-producing power plants. Today, by contrast, the world’s largest environmental organizations are now the chief cosponsors of World Bank energy, land, colonization, and forestry projects” (xv), argues Goldman. Within the space of two decades, the

Bank managed to transform the public perception of the development project into one that is largely believed to be compatible with the goals and aims of environmentalism.

Goldman suggests that this articulation of “green and “neoliberal” recalls a strategy employed by the Bank during the McNamara period, during which the Bank achieved its greatest expansion by effecting a merging of the discourses of development and poverty alleviation. He sees the Bank’s “green neoliberalism” as a pragmatic response to the criticisms heaped upon the Bank during the 1980’s and 90’s, when protestors were denouncing the punitive impact of the Bank’s structural adjustment policies on the poor. And he suggests that the enlistment of this discourse has largely succeeded in allowing the Bank to repair its troubled ethos in the eyes of disillusioned investors.

It is important, however, to point out that there is a deep irony in the Bank’s promotion of this linkage. Neoliberal policies have posed some of the most serious barriers to environmental standards in recent times. The neoliberal opposition to government regulation has been a major obstacle to legislation backed by environmentalists. But the concept of articulation from cultural studies helps to make the rationale for such a conceptual pairing clear. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) have theorized, hegemonies frequently rely on the construction of key conceptual linkages between two or more elements. By definition, these linkages have nothing natural or inevitable about them, but their discursive suturing makes it possible temporarily to ignore or deny the lack of identity between them. According to Laclau, hegemony is effective “to the extent that it can articulate different visions of the world in such a way that their potential antagonism is neutralized” (Cited in Slack, 119). And, according to

Stuart Hall, such articulations exert a powerful force that organizes consciousness of the world. (Cited in Slack,124).

“Green neoliberal” discourse therefore enacts precisely this kind of denial of the conflict between two antagonistic terms. By encouraging prospective essayists to identify as the next generation of green entrepreneurs, the sponsors of the contest were, in fact, promoting a particular subject position that would minimize or downplay any possible tensions between these terms. “A subject position,” according to Brummet and Bowers (1998), is a stance, role, or perspective one takes in relationship to a text so as to read it or engage it” (118). In the contest announcement, the only subjects “wanted” were those who could identify with the ‘green neoliberal’ articulation of identity on offer. Only those who could see themselves through this particular lens or perspective would likely be motivated to invest their time and attention in the contest.

Once the announcement had captured the attention of prospective essayists, they could visit the World Bank homepage to learn about the contest requirements: additional resources and details regarding awards, partners, previous contests, and FAQ’s. Their participation in the reading and writing tasks that were required by the contest would further mold or shape this “green entrepreneurial” subjectivity. The research, writing and revising required for successful completion of the essay task would, over time, develop their familiarity with the contours and possibilities of this positionality, induct them into an emerging discourse community, and *constitute* the very subjectivity it seemed to hail. As Burke observes, constitutive appeals operate, not at the level of logic, but rather via a feeling of “elation wherein the audience feels as though it were not merely receiving, but were itself creatively

participating in the poet's or speaker's assertion" (58). From this perspective, the essayists in this contest were asked to fashion arguments by which they would persuade themselves of the contest's ideological objectives. They were influenced not only by this literacy event, but by this event in relation to other multiple acts of writing, as well.

Of course, this rhetorical analysis, so far, reveals only how the writers were positioned by the announcement – not how they responded. In the next stage of my analysis, I was interested in looking at how the winning writers took up the identifications they were offered, and how they participated in the constitutive rhetorical work of the contest. This rhetorical work involved not only the “governmental” or shaping functions of the contest, but also the ways the successful essayists negotiated the constraints of the contest in order to construct meaningful identifications for themselves. The following analysis used methods of discourse analysis to examine the specific subject positions with which the winning writers identified in their essays.

Part Two: Discourse Analysis of the Winning Essays

For the second phase of this study, the data set consisted of the top eight essays, all of which were reprinted in their entirety (and at least one –Guillermo's in English translation) in a report prepared by the World Bank. For this phase of the analysis, I approached these essays from a discourse analytic perspective to identify the ways in which writers used personal pronouns (“I,” “we,” “me,” “us,” “my,” “our,” “myself,” and “ourselves”) to identify themselves linguistically with a particular subject position or social identity. In particular, I examined instances in which these pronouns appeared in conjunction with a phrase signaling self-identification. In doing so, I sought to understand how the winning essayists positioned

themselves discursively in relation to the announcement, and I drew on Phillip's notion of the *rhetorical maneuver* and Fairclough's *recontextualization* to describe two strategies by which the writers expanded the discourses available to them.

My decision to code the essays for instances of personal pronoun use resembles a discourse analytic strategy used in a study by Gee, Allen, and Clinton (2001). In that study, Gee et al. focused on "I-statements" in order to more closely examine moments when their interviewees referred to themselves in the first person singular, directly as "I." Their interest, like mine, was to determine the ways in which the subjects of their research used personal pronouns to construct social identities for themselves, in collaboration with their interviewers. However, Gee et al. focused on the rhetorical use of only one type of personal pronoun – that of "I." My approach more closely resembles that of Vergaro (2010), who examined the ways in which Italian students of EFL use "the first person subject pronouns *I* and *we*, the object pronouns *me* and *us*, and the possessive adjectives *my* and *our*" (12) because these varied uses of the personal pronoun provide valuable "information about authorial choices" (12). Like Vergaro, I began by examining the many brief sections of text where the first person personal pronouns (*I*, *we*, *me*, and *us*) appeared, as well as instances where the possessive adjectives (*my* and *our*) or personal reflexive pronouns (*myself*, *ourselves*) were used, in order to understand the various ways in which the essayists were identifying as rhetorical subjects. For this same reason, I additionally, paid special attention to constructions like "As a [blank] social identity...."

In my coding, I was interested in the ways in which such uses of the personal pronoun occurred in conjunction with the writers' reference to specific social identities (such as young person, student, or worker). I was interested in understanding how they, both as individuals,

and as a group, signaled an array of subject positions or social identities in the essays. My decision to locate all uses of the personal pronouns was also motivated by a concern for comprehensiveness. Because I was looking for instances in which the writers sought to expand the subject positions available to them, I did not want to leave out any instances in which students made references to themselves. But unlike other researchers (Atkinson 1996; Vergaro) whose primary concern was to determine the degree of “authorial presence” in texts, I approached the range of first person pronouns available to the writers as a vital linguistic resource for conducting “recognition work.”

In particular, I zeroed in on constructions where personal pronouns were used in conjunction with a named social identity, subject position, or activity specifically associated with belonging to a particular identity group. For example, with regards to this last category, I considered an activity such as “organizing clean-up campaigns” to suggest a “green” identity, especially if it occurred within the context of membership in an environmental organization. I also highlighted roles or ascriptions located in the same clause or nearby stretch of text. I sought to understand how and when the writers were using these pronouns to construct subject positions for themselves in the essays. After this initial coding, I developed categories for the subject positions or social identities to which the writers made reference, sometimes using the essayists’ actual language, but at other times drawing minor inferences, as well. Through this process, I identified the following: Youth; Member of Environmental-Civic Organization; Entrepreneur; University Student, Worker, Volunteer, Teacher/ Mentor, Researcher, Writer, Citizen of the Nation (Province/ Region, State/ Municipality, Rural Community, City, Neighborhood), 21st Century, Eco-, or Planetary Citizen, Family Member,

Human Being, Religious Believer, Member of an Ethnic Minority, and Eyewitness. I then grouped each instance of “identification” under the category to which it referred, alongside the name of the essayist. For each category, I shaded specific language that was instrumental to my coding for that particular identity or subject position. These identifications took a number of forms. Below, I describe my coding and interpretation process for the three expected identifications (“next generation,” “green,” “entrepreneurial”) in the contest announcement.

I. “NEXT GENERATION”--“YOUNG PEOPLE”/ YOUTH”

In coding for identifications related to the category of “young/youth,” I shaded phrases like “We young people” to highlight the stretches of text in which the essayists were speaking about their identification with the category of “young people” or “youth.” (See below.)

Table 3.2

As a Youth

Guillermo	<p>p.41 “Young people are constantly being denied the opportunity to participate in the building of a more just and equitable society, perhaps because we are still too young to provide ideas that are worthy of discussion. Nevertheless, many of the best ideas come from young minds. The global youth is, and must be, the builder of a new society.”</p> <p>p.41 “Mexican youth must also be the protagonists of essential changes.... [P]art of the blame rests with us, the young people, who do not demand a greater focus on environmental matters....”</p> <p>p. 41 “As young people, we”</p> <p>p.42 “We young people should be among the primary promoters of national ethnic wealth....”</p>
Kwasi	<p>p. 47 “Most young Ghanaians including myself”</p> <p>p.51 “as the youth, we”</p>

Juan-Paul	p.58 "...taxi drivers, the majority of whom are young people like me..."
Sonali	p.86 "we, the youth of the country"
Sunviana	p. 92 "my life as a youth"
Israel	p. 103 "we as young people..." p.110 "As rural young people, we..."

Six of the writers seemed explicitly to refer to themselves as a young person, or as belonging to a larger category of young people or "Mexican youth" and "global youth" (Guillermo); "rural young people" (Israel); or "young Ghanaians" (Kwasi). Some of the variations on this articulation of identity suggest that the writers were meshing their identities as citizens of a particular nation or their identities as "rural" or "global" with their identities as young people. In doing so, they managed to adopt the hailing in the contest announcement as the "next generation" of young people, while simultaneously emphasizing other intersecting identities. These more complex identifications seemed to serve the purpose of expanding the subject positions available to them and to assert the need for their readers to recognize multiple facets of their identities simultaneously.

Likewise, the writers make a point of asserting their environmentalist or "green" identities; at least two (Sunviana and Israel) explicitly use personal pronouns in relation to their belonging to organizations that conducted environmental campaigns. Sunviana, for instance, writes about of her involvement in Greenpeace and groups called "Youth Does Green" and "Youth Camps of Rio Hondo," and Israel speaks of his involvement in "youth, cultural, sports,

and ecology projects” with the Rural Youth Civic Association of Quintana Roo. These identifications as members of environmental associations can be seen in the chart below.

II. “GREEN”

Table 3.3

As Member of Environmental Organizations

Sunviana	<p>p.97 “I and some good friends of mine belong to the Greenpeace international organization....Our membership for almost 7 months...drives us to attempt actions which are more than just donating funds through Greenpeace.”</p> <p>p.96 “I have been a member of Youth Does Green (YDG) since October 2008....YDG believes that youth can drive people to care more about the Earth....”</p> <p>p.109 “we recently began developing a program known as Youth Camps of Rio Hondo....This group will organize clean-up campaigns....”</p>
Israel	<p>p.109 “we have established a rural civic organization geared toward the development of youth, cultural, sports, and ecology projects... [and] a rural management cooperative....”</p>

Moreover, five of the essayists used personal pronouns to describe their activities in entrepreneurial activities. They described experiences in project management, an economics society and business development, as well as entrepreneurial aspirations, such as starting a private school or “tuition center” and investment fund. The essayists also sought ways explicitly to bolster their claims to the “green entrepreneurial” subjectivity that was solicited by the prompt. Sophie, for instance, writes on p. 27 that “One of the main aspects of my project is the development of advantageous cooperation and sustainable partnerships with industries and local businesses.” These examples suggest that the winning writers, for the most part, embraced the entrepreneurial subject position in their essays.

III. "ENTREPRENEUR"

Table 3.4

As an Entrepreneur – Participant in Business/ Entrepreneurial Activities

Sophie	<p>p.26 “The methodology of my...initiative has been informed by my most recent experience in project management...with the German human rights organization TERRE DES FEMMES”</p> <p>p.27 “One of the main aspects of my project is the development of advantageous cooperation and sustainable partnerships with industries and local businesses.”</p>
Kwasi	<p>p. 47 “Indeed the generation of the green entrepreneur is already here with us at least in the advanced countries. In our part of the world, companies which go green either collapse through lack of solid financial base or are NGO funded. The idea of green industry doesn’t exist yet in Ghana....For this reason, I believe myself and a couple of friends can start an open-ended (the number of shares will not be fixed) sector growth fund. The targeted portfolio would be energy companies i.e bio-diesel companies, clean and renewable energy technology firms, for example firms that deal in energy saver light bulbs, and renewable energy consultants. We would also invest in companies which sell agro-based forestry products (seeds).”</p>
Miguel Antonio	<p>p. 71 “A CAYA partner, the Carolinian Economics Society initiated its own programs in line with environmental conservation and sustainable development. Last 20 September 2008, the organization hosted the Young Economists Visayas Regional Convention....The theme touched on Business in Partnership towards environmental Conservation and Sustainability in the Visayas. We invited representatives....”</p>
Sunviana	<p>p. 99 “I am planning to open my dream tuition center in the next July 2009.”</p>
Israel	<p>p.103 “since we... are starting to build small companies”</p> <p>p.107 “we, as green entrepreneurs...I include myself, because I am currently developing an agroindustry in the food production line.”</p>

Besides direct identification, a value placed on “green entrepreneurial” subjectivity could be found occasionally, too, in the essayists’ proposals for action. Kwasi, for instance,

proposes a “Green scout movement fashioned after the Boy Scout movement, only this time the focus will be on the environment, climate change and how to slow down the process. The movement will have three divisions. The first division will be the Green Prince, the second will be the Green Scout and the final division will be the Green Entrepreneur” (48). Green entrepreneurial subjectivity is something the author not only wants to champion for himself (related to funding renewable energy start-ups through his proposed ‘sector growth fund,’) but also for generations to follow. Kwasi adopts and transforms the language of the prompt, when he says that “the generation of the green entrepreneur is already here with us” (see Table 3.4).

At the same time, Kwasi’s identification as a green entrepreneur turns on his equally crucial identification as Ghanaian (see Table 3.4). While he recognizes that “the generation of the green entrepreneur is already here with us,” he also acknowledges that green companies in Ghana are sorely underfunded. In the “advanced countries,” there is more investment in green industry, whereas in Ghana, “the idea of green industry doesn’t exist yet” (47), he says. This statement suggests that Kwasi experiences some struggle or friction between these two social identities or subject positions. As such, adopting an entrepreneurial subject position becomes an opportunity to talk about other social identities, as well --such as one’s nationality, and the extent to which that other social identity is compatible with an entrepreneurial one. In such moments when the essayists amend or negotiate the subject positions made available by the announcement, the essayists are performing the rhetorical work of recognition.

There are multiple examples of such moments in which the essayists call upon social identities other than the ones elicited by the announcement. For example, seven of the eight winning essayists make explicit reference to their status as university students, even though

this subject position was not explicitly mentioned in the “hail.” However, it is likely that the writing task, with its emphasis on a schooled genre -- the essay—implied a preferred subject position of “student” because it required advanced academic literacy in order for the writers to succeed. Other winning essayists also talked about their roles as workers, teachers, researchers, and writers. And some of the essayists talked about their roles as family members, as described in the chart below:

IV. As a Family Member

Table 3.5

As a Family Member

Jean-Paul	<p>p. 55 “My family house was flooded four times during the last rainy season!”</p> <p>p.56 “Flooding has become the daily plight of my family and the residents of my neighborhood.”</p> <p>p.57 “I have taken odd jobs during my free hours to help my family”</p>
Sunviana	<p>p. 94 “Approximately 60% of Indonesian lives in coastal areas and low-lying coastal cities like my city, Jakarta.... My father and mother were born in Kalimantan. When I was a kid, together with my parents, I visited Kalimantan.”</p> <p>p. 95 “My father, who owns a small aquaculture industry, has felt the impacts of climate change on his business since few years ago....The decreasing number of fish caught has automatically made my family’s income decline.”</p> <p>p.99 “My mother has supported me by buying me a house which can be developed into a tuition center.”</p>

Such identifications seemed to lend nuance and texture to the essayists’ descriptions, and they suggest that the writers’ positioning as “young, green, entrepreneurs” was incomplete. These writers seemed to want to talk about other aspects of their intersecting identities to highlight

additional social commitments, such as concerns with their family’s financial situation, the flooding in their neighborhood, or the declining fish population, for example. This could be seen most clearly when the essayists combined distinct subject positions or social identities in their essays. Doing so seemed to permit the writers to offer specific kinds of climate change testimony from the resulting position, as in the following example:

V. As a Volunteer and a Student

Table 3.6

As a Volunteer and a Student

Guillermo	p.41 “As a volunteer and a student, it pains me to know that indigenous populations are always the main victims of environmental changes. It is precisely this lack of care for the indigenous communities that makes them vulnerable to surrendering their land to a system of overexploitation.”
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This writer’s introduction of his identification both with the subject position of “volunteer” and of “student” make it possible for him to talk about his experience doing ethnographic work among the Tarahumara and to describe the devastating effects of climate change on this community. His dual identification works to illuminate or to authorize another subject position found in at least two of the essays – that of eyewitness. Multiple other identifications were evident in the essays, as well -- including national or regional identifications, as well as “planetary citizens.”

“Rhetorical Maneuvers”

Through this coding process, I established that there were at least twenty identifications or subject positions claimed by the essay writers. As I have mentioned, some of these were woven together to create additional combinations. These ascriptions included the expected

identifications as “Next Generation” (Young People/ Youth); “Green” (Member of Environmental Organizations) and “Entrepreneur” (Participant in Entrepreneurial Activities) -- but they also included a range of other social identities or subject positions:

- University Student,
- Worker,
- Volunteer,
- Teacher/ Mentor,
- Researcher,
- Writer,
- Citizen of the Nation (Province/ Region, State/ Municipality, Rural Community, City, Neighborhood),
- 21st Century, Eco-, or Planetary Citizen,
- Family Member,
- Human Being.
- Religious Believer,
- Member of an Ethnic Minority, and
- Eyewitness

This range of subject positions far exceeded the narrow range initially suggested by the contest announcement. The fact that the winning essayists engaged these social identities in addition to (rather than in lieu of) the ones invited by the announcement suggests that they were attempting to engage in “recognition work” by negotiating the scope of subjectivity available to them. In so doing, the essayists performed “rhetorical maneuvers” that, as Phillips suggests, permitted them to elaborate upon the positioning that was implied by the contest announcement.

Many of these more inclusive social categories (such as community or family member) also suggest alternatives to the more individualist ethos of the person as entrepreneur. And subject positions like “volunteer” or “worker” may suggest a more agentive or active capacity

to contribute than do “young people” or “students.” When the winning essayists wrote as family members and not merely entrepreneurs -- or as volunteers and workers (e.g. taxi drivers), and not only as young people or students -- they were able to push the boundaries of the discourse available to them. This, says Phillips, is “what happens when one speaks the discourse appropriate to a *different* subject position” (315). Such maneuvers made it possible for the writers to expand the discursive possibilities available to them, and to offer distinct kinds of climate change testimony, for example, from these various positions. At the same time, we know that, despite the risks that these writers took, they were effective in maintaining their credibility or *ethos* in relation to their audience because their essays won.

“Recontextualization”

Additionally, by using a rhetorical strategy that Fairclough calls “recontextualization,” the writers managed effectively to integrate concerns not explicitly solicited by the contest into their discussions of “green entrepreneurship.” According to Fairclough (2003), recontextualization is a relationship between different (networks of) social practices – a matter of how elements of one social practice are appropriated by, relocated in the context of, another (222). For Fairclough, this concept is closely related to the concept of “interdiscursivity,” or the meshing that occurs among social discourses over time. This relocation, or mixing, of elements from one discursive dimension into another occurs several times throughout the essays. Here, I will signal to just two examples that stand out as particularly illustrative of the concept.

‘Stepping Up’

One of the writers who successfully uses recontextualization is Miguel Antonio, from the Phillipines, who entitled his essay “Stepping Up to the Challenge: The Cebuano Youth in the

Climate Change Crisis.” Just as the World Bank brought together the discourses of “green” and “entrepreneur,” his essay brings together the discourses of entrepreneurship and protest in unexpected ways. He begins his essay by explaining how three youth-led organizations affiliated with his university have developed solutions to environmental problems. Two of these groups are environmental organizations, but the third is a group of young economists. This group, called the “Carolinian Economics Society” is involved, he suggests, in organizing regional conferences on topics such as “Business in Partnership towards Environmental Conservation and Sustainability in the Visayas”(71). He introduces this economics society to the reader in a matter-of-fact way after the environmental groups, as though they logically belonged in the same category. This can be seen in the listing of groups that is provided in the following excerpt:

Cebu is never sparse of youth advocates for the environment. With problems in wasteful energy consumption and pollution hounding the province, a myriad of youth-led environmental initiatives has mushroomed in schools and communities. In my university, groups like the Clean Air Youth Alliance, Save the Tañon Strait Citizens Movement, and the Carolinian Economics Society have been active youth groups promoting environmental reform and sustainability. These groups have already organized large-scale civic actions which have caught the attention of governments and agencies in local, national and international levels. (69)

Here, he suggests that the economics society, like the environmentally-focused groups to which he calls attention, were engaged in “large-scale civic actions.” And he goes on to explain that these groups were “united in calling the youth to become active participants in pressuring businesses and governments to realize environment reforms” (71). Following this discussion, he introduces original research that he has conducted. This research, he says, explores ways to persuade firms to introduce environmental reforms through “citizen’s protests.” As he argues:

Today, my team is currently finishing our thesis on the impact of environmental news to Philippine companies' stock prices. Our research is an extension to the landmark work of Dasgupta, Laplante, and Mamingi (2001). It has been empirically tested that market forces actually induce firms to comply with environmental standards. Results show that positive news on better EMS and investments improving environmental performance increase the firm's stock price. On the other hand, stock prices go down with negative environmental reports like oil spills, citizens' protests, and hazardous plant emissions. (72)

In this paragraph, Miguel Antonio marshals the subject position that he has crafted for himself as a student researcher in the field of economics to wield both the discourses of business ("market forces," "stock prices") and environmentalism ("oil spills," "hazardous plant emissions") to argue for the effectiveness of citizen's protests. This is a strategy that the essayist attributes to a group called "Save the Tañon Strait Citizens Movement," which he says is a "collection of environment advocates opposing oil drilling plans in the strait" (70). As he explains:

STSCM has encouraged students in colleges and universities to appeal before higher authorities to stop oil drilling and focus on finding renewable and cleaner energy. They use active nonviolence and media in amplifying the oil exploration opposition. They also organized creative protests and forums on oil exploration's ill effects. They have helped mobilize coastal communities to defend their fishing rights. (71)

"[C]reative protests" and mobilization are thus touted as important avenues for improving firms "environmental performance." This writer draws on the history of the Tañon Strait movement to suggest that such tactics involving nonviolence and the media are effective tools for addressing environmental problems. In describing the pressure such protests placed on the Japan Petroleum Exploration Corp (JAPEX) in 2004, he writes that "[C]ivil society was adamant in taking the fight to the courts and in the streets. Protest rallies, lawsuits, and consultations with local government heads pressured JAPEX to stop its drilling operations in May 2008. Environmentalists rejoice this as victory but the battle is far from over" (68).

In his essay, Miguel Antonio is thus able effectively to marshal the discourse of “green entrepreneurship” in such a way that he makes an argument for environmental mobilization and protest against entrenched corporate interests—precisely those neoliberal or business interests with whom the Bank might otherwise be presumed to be affiliated. These kinds of unexpected moments seem vital in signaling rhetorical agency in his essay because they work to invoke this essayist’s desired audience and to articulate an atypical subject position for readers who may be aligned with the business and banking communities. Speaking, for instance, as a member of environmentalist organizations, as well as a society for economists, opens a space for introducing the discourse of activism into a contest more focused on entrepreneurial solutions. This kind of *recontextualization* requires adroitness at introducing novelty while staying within the bounds of the acceptable, and it requires that writers tap the rhetorical affordances of the contest and their own creative purposes.

‘My longing for the eternal soul’

At least one other instance of *recontextualization*, or the inclusion of unexpected discourses, appears in the winning essays. Consider, for example, the way in which Sonali weaves the discourse of spirituality in the opening paragraphs of her essay, entitled ‘Go Green’-

The New Mantra:

On 25th June 2006, I boarded the Jammu Express for my first visit to the Heaven on Earth – Kashmir. My destination was the Holy Cave Shrine of Amarnath in the up hills of Jammu and Kashmir to pay my offerings to the ice Shiva Lingam. The Shivling is a natural ice stalagmite that...is one of the most sacred pilgrimages of the Hindus....My longing for cleansing and purifying the eternal soul was shattered when I reached the base camp in Pahalgam enroute Amarnath. There I was informed that the Shivling has melted completely due to unusual hot climatic conditions.

The language of ‘sacred pilgrimages’ and ‘cleansing and purifying the eternal soul’ brings welcome reprieve from the business-like tone of the essays, with their focus on climate crisis and enterprising solutions. From the opening sentence of Sonali’s essay, it is clear that the reader has entered another discursive realm. Local place names (Amarnath, Phalgam) are sprinkled throughout, and the reader is invited to accompany the narrator in “board[ing] the Jammu Express for [her] first visit to the Heaven on Earth...” This essayist’s account of climate change begins not with its effects on a nation, a region, or city, but rather with its effects upon a sacred Hindu site: the ice Shiva Lingam. As she explains, this ice formation, which is revered by Hindus, has “melted completely due to unusual hot climatical conditions” (82). As a result, she argues, “climate change is “adversely impacting us in all ways – environmentally, economically, socially, and now even religiously” (82). The writer constructs for herself a subject position of religious believer to explain how environmentalism is a religious responsibility. And unlike the other essayists, this writer references Gandhi and other Hindu teachings in her “Works Cited” page. This *recontextualization* thus broadens the climate change conversation, so that it goes beyond consideration of the material and economic implications to include the spiritual.

Conclusion

All of these instances of *recontextualization* and *rhetorical maneuver* in the essay, therefore, constitute rhetorical work, in that they signal efforts on behalf of the essayists to expand their discursive positioning, within the constraints and opportunities afforded by this particular essay contest. These constraints included, for example, the ways in which the announcement positioned the writers to identify as young, green entrepreneurs. These

rhetorical strategies allowed the winning essayists to conform to contest expectations while simultaneously (1) expanding the subject positions available to them and (2) making connections between the seemingly unrelated discourses of “green entrepreneurship” and protest or spirituality. These strategies demonstrate some of the ways in which writers can successfully negotiate the constitutive, “governmental” or ‘shaping’ functions of contests in the digital age.

Additionally they demonstrate how rhetorical agency is jointly enacted in the interplay among the various rhetorical actors in essay contests. Among these actors, the sponsors and winning essayists are key rhetorical actors. But, as I will explain in the next chapter, the role of genre, the essayists’ assertion of their own purposes in conjunction with those of the sponsor, and intertextual influences all underscore the social nature of composing in the contest, too. And the fact that the contest took place online, and that the winning essays were available on the Bank’s website where they could be accessed by multiple audiences, suggests the need for even more supple ways of conceptualizing rhetorical agency to include the role of audience as well: What is the role of educators and the “public” in constructing the meanings of an essay contest, for example? And how might the rhetorical strategies that I have discussed in this chapter be useful to writers who find themselves similarly positioned by writing tasks in other contexts? It is to questions like these that I turn in the concluding chapter.

As we have seen, a “governmental” scheme like an essay contest necessarily positions the subject in particular ways, towards particular ends. It is a literacy event that necessarily carves out subject positions for the “governed” so as to promote particular forms of participation. But, because governmental schemes necessarily rely on the cooperation of the

“governed,” as Li suggests, such efforts always reveal “gaps” and “fractures” between expressed goals and their realization (279). Ultimately, our understanding of the constraints and opportunities in a contemporary essay contest can help us conceptualize the rhetorical work that it conducts -- as a complex, participatory event that relies on the negotiation of agency among the various actors who participate in contests.

Chapter 4

Distributed Agency: The Rhetorical Composition of Genre, Purpose, and Intertextuality in an Essay Contest

In the last chapter, I discussed how the announcement for the World Bank's 2009 essay contest hailed The Next Generation of Green Entrepreneurs, as well as how writers responded to their positioning by the contest announcement. I looked at ways in which winning writers used strategies such as the rhetorical maneuver and recontextualization to expand the subject positions available to them, and to incorporate unlikely discourses -- such as the discourse of protest and spirituality-- into their essays. I described how such strategies assisted the writers in asserting *rhetorical agency*, or the "competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others" (Campbell 2005, 3). In this chapter I further take up questions of rhetorical agency in relation to the shaping force of the contest prompt, guidelines and essays. I make the argument that rhetorical agency in the contest was distributed, involved various actors, and was not a zero-sum game. I show how the constructs of genre, purpose, and intertextuality all demonstrate this, by illustrating, one by one, how each functioned as the site of distributed agency in the 2009 contest. Beginning with questions of genre, I show how contest materials forged expectations about genre and purpose that delimited the writer's choices as agents. I then offer evidence from the essays for the writers' creativity in working

within these expectations or constraints. I also describe how the essayists' self-conscious statements of purpose and intertextual references emphasized certain purposes and voices over others, and I show how these practices made visible the agency of various actors in this contest. This analysis involving genre, purpose and intertextuality serves to underscore ways in which agency is negotiated or distributed in a contemporary literacy practice.

Rhetorical Agency

Rhetorical agency is a key concept in rhetoric and composition studies. Since the 1970's, when Barthes proclaimed that the individual author was merely an illusion created through discourse, scholars have been working to make sense of various questions related to agency and authorship. Questions have surfaced, such as: Who or what is the "author" of a text? How do we understand agency when the very idea of the author has been shown to be discursively constituted? And how do we analyze the dynamic interplay between language, ideology, and the creativity of writers? Questions such as these seem to call into question the very potency or intentionality of the writer, whose power to make rhetorical choices and to effect change appears to be compromised. The concept of rhetorical agency can be useful for addressing such questions because its emphasis on the *rhetoricity* of agency suggests potential roles for multiple actors, including writers and readers.

Barthes famously proclaims at the end of his essay that "the death of the author must be at the cost of the birth of the reader" (148), but contemporary theory suggests that rhetorical power cannot be viewed as a zero-sum game. Carolyn Miller (in "What can we learn from automation?"), for instance, suggests that we view rhetorical agency as the "kinetic energy" that binds together the writers and readers of a text. I would like to take this kinetic

metaphor further to suggest that writing implies agentive work across an entire dynamically connected “assemblage” (Bennett). This assemblage can be understood to include not only human actors like writers, readers, sponsors, collaborators, and sources, but, for Bennett, it can also be understood to include non-human actors like texts and genres, digital networks, platforms, search engines and electrical grids. Agentive action is therefore understood to be distributed or negotiated across a range of actors – traces of whose presence can be identified in the discursive operations of texts. And in this chapter I argue that discourse analysis can aid such a reconceptualization by pointing to specific textual instances of distributed agency.

Methods of rhetorical discourse analysis can be useful in pointing to a text’s social and material underpinnings. They can offer strategies to highlight moments in a text where manifestations of a specific “agentic assemblage” (Bennett, 51) are made visible. Analytic constructs like genre, purpose, and intertextuality can be useful for describing the intersection of agentive action in a particular text, group of texts, or literacy practice. At the same time, a theory of agency based in the tradition of composition studies should account for the writer’s unique role in “making do” (de Certeau, 1984, 27) with the materials and conditions s/he is afforded, even as it emphasizes the complexity of the rhetorical assemblage. This line of inquiry is important because, as Geisler (2004) suggests, the presumption of agency is central to the work of composition instruction. And so, as Geisler, Bawarshi (2003), and others suggest, a theory of agency that can usefully inform the work of composition instruction should make sense of the writer’s creative process within the context of a multiplicity of conditions needed for a work of writing to be “recognized or heeded” (Campbell).

In this chapter, I focus on three productive constructs for the study of rhetorical agency -- genre, purpose, and intertextuality -- because all three of these constructs allow us to expand upon our thinking about agency in relation to writing and the 2009 contest. Genres, for example, show the influence of sponsors because they suggest characteristic “moves” and motives that writers must abide by, even as writers’ “uptake” of various genres demonstrates their capacity for creativity. Statements of self-conscious purpose, similarly, suggest that writers actively participate in the construction of purpose and meaning when writing. And the intertextual practices of writers further show how the text is constructed in collaboration with sources. Using examples from the World Bank’s 2009 essay competition, I analyze how each of these constructs serves to demonstrate that the contest was the site of distributed or negotiated agency. I employ various methods of rhetorical discourse analysis in each section to illustrate these claims. Each section begins with some framing of the construct and provides an explication of the specific methods I employed. I then move on to the findings from each section and relate these to the argument as a whole. This makes it possible to show how the constructs of genre, purpose and intertextuality reveal the distribution of agency in an essay contest.

Genre

In recent years, genre has surfaced as an important locus of inquiry for reconceptualizing the interplay between structure and agency in writing (Miller 1994). Genre is a particularly useful concept for understanding how social and discursive structures interact with writers’ possibilities for invention. The work of Bawarshi (2003), for instance, underscores the constraining force of genre as well as its potential for enabling creativity. As he insists,

genres are historical creations that both delimit and enable possibilities for writing. Despite their relative stability, genres change over time with the introduction of new circumstances for their use and the new meanings that writers bestow upon them. This tension between structure and agency, between convention and creativity, is at the root of current rhetorical conceptualizations of genre.

Because genres are dynamic and evolving, theorists of rhetorical genre have argued that definitions of genre that limit themselves to 'text type' overlook the ways in which genre is a form of social action (Miller 1984). According to Miller, genres "represent typified rhetorical action" (151), or recognizable responses to repeated situations that call for them. They develop as functional responses to "exigences" or needs that are collectively perceived. They also organize perception and influence the ways in which people conceptualize social problems, approach decision-making, and choose particular actions and behaviors over others. In this way, genres contribute to the development of rhetorical or discourse communities. Genres also represent ideological frameworks; they are crafted in rhetorical communities whose epistemological assumptions are embedded in genres. Because they are at once historical artifacts and actual templates that must be re-shaped by the writers who use them, they are a good site for understanding how agency is distributed among an assemblage of actors in a writing contest.

Genre Motive

The study of agency in relation to genre necessarily entails the question of motive. Do genres have motives? Do they exist for certain purposes, to the exclusion of others? And to what extent are they capable of encompassing multiple purposes at once? Inquiry into motive

hearkens back to the work of rhetorical theorist, Kenneth Burke, whose *Rhetoric of Motives* remains a classic in the field. Researchers in this tradition have suggested that genres have motives that are more or less built-in to the rhetorical situation they address. Genres both imply intentionality on the part of those who use genres but also on the part of the genres, themselves, because they materially codify specific intentions. As Bawarshi (2001) points out, “Intention must have some socially defined motive in order to be recognized as a meaningful social action” (77). Because genres imply intentionality and specific kinds of exigence, a genre appropriate to one rhetorical situation may not be appropriate to another. When multiple or competing purposes exist, it may be necessary to invent a new or hybrid form. Genres themselves, then, are social actors; they have a certain materiality, as do the exigencies they address. At the same time, this materiality is fleshed out or fashioned by the users of genre, who, along with those genres, conduct social action. Even as genres give shape to ideology, their ideological potential must be unlocked by the users of genres, including their writers and readers. This conceptualization of agency thus complicates notions of genre as purely formal, and of *genre motive*, as possible in some definitive way to classify or contain.

Genre Inquiry

The shifting and dynamic nature of genre poses particular challenges for researchers. There can be the tendency to attempt, through description of formal attributes, to fully capture the meaning of a particular genre. To an extent, such containment is possible; the relative stability of genres seems to invite classification. At the same time, the fact that genres are always being used for new purposes makes such efforts necessarily imperfect. One way that researchers have responded to this challenge is to approach genre analysis as “inquiry” and to

emphasize both text and context in their work. Today, genre inquiry approaches typically include some of the following methodological components:

- assembling samples of the genre;
- identifying the discourse communities who use the genre;
- examining the kinds of topics, language, and rhetorical patterns or structures that are typical of the genre;
- analyzing the purposes for which the genre is used and under what circumstances;
- reflecting on the genre's epistemological assumptions; and
- considering the genre's place in a genre system or chain.

Compiled with reference to Paltridge (2006), Hyland (2004), and Devitt, Reiff, and Bawarshi (2004)

As this list suggests, a genre inquiry approach involves comparison, as well as acknowledgement of the dynamic interplay among genres, discourse communities (the users of genres), the purposes and assumptions of genre users, textual features, and other related genres in a genre system or genre chain. Because the approach urges researchers simultaneously to attend to the textual and contextual aspects of genres, it encourages dialectical thinking when analyzing the complexity of genres. From the perspective of rhetorical genre theory, the investigation of purposes is especially important because it deals with how genres persuade. Such an approach can be useful for highlighting how multiple actors exert rhetorical agency in an essay contest.

Genre Analysis of the Prompt

For my analysis of genre in the World Bank contest, I began by reviewing the contest announcement, prompt, and guidelines for cues related to the format and purpose of the essays. Then I proceeded to examine the top eight essays to determine common patterns among them. Because the rhetorical investigation of genres requires contextual analysis, I also considered relationships between the specific formats invited by the competition and relevant

academic, public and institutional genres. I also considered some of the ideological assumptions informing these genres in relation to the 2009 contest. In my investigation, I hoped to understand how the genre implied by the prompt was taken up by writers, and what this relationship might reveal about ways in which rhetorical agency was distributed in the contest.

In the last chapter, I showed how the interpellating language of the caption for the contest announcement (WANTED: NEXT GENERATION OF ‘GREEN’ ENTREPRENEURS”) positioned the writers as rhetorical subjects. Here I consider how the two questions that follow shaped expectations about argument and genre:

(1) “HOW DOES CLIMATE CHANGE AFFECT YOU?” and

(2) “HOW CAN YOU TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH YOUTH-LED SOLUTIONS?”

These two questions also appear in the writing prompt (below), which contest participants could access on the World Bank competition homepage under “Topic”:

The Essay Competition 2009 invites youth to share ideas on:

How does climate change affect you?
How can you tackle climate change through youth-led solutions?

Please answer both questions:

1. How does climate change affect you, your country, town or local community? How do you think it will affect you in the future? Think about the consequences for employment, health, security and other areas of your life.
2. What can you do, working together with your peers, to address the problem of climate change in your country, town or local community? Think specifically about the role of youth-led initiatives in the ‘green economy’.

Figure 4.1 “Topic.” Source: *The World Bank, 2009*

The prompt above elaborates on the two questions that appeared in the announcement by offering several follow-up suggestions to the writers. The first asks them to think about how climate change is currently affecting them and their communities and how it will affect them in the future. It also asks them to ‘think about the consequences’ of climate change in various areas of their lives. The second asks writers to think about how they might engage their peers at a local or national level and to ‘think specifically’ about initiatives that are led by youth in the ‘green economy’. These two questions suggest a two-part structure that contains important information regarding both the content and format of responses. An additional cue is provided in the instruction above to ‘please answer both questions.’

This polite cue is important because it implies that, in answering both questions, the sequential ordering of the questions corresponds to the pattern of argument their essay should follow. The first question, which asks the writers to consider the impacts of climate change, implies that some initial formulation of the “problem” is expected. The second question, which asks writers for specific climate change initiatives, then places the emphasis on climate change “solutions.” The questions are ordered, moreover, in a way that is suggestive of a problem-solution pattern. This problem-solution format, according to Hoey (1983), is one of the most common patterns in discourse and is one that many writers and readers have been socialized to recognize. But instead of leaving the solution entirely up to the writers, the prompt specifically invited proposals of a particular kind: ‘youth-led,’ ‘green economy’ proposals.

While such a narrowing of these solution-focused sections is not intrinsically a matter for concern, it is worth noting that Li (2009) has pointed to several problems with this format in

the practice of writing Environmental Impact Statements (or Environmental Social Impact Statements) -- which, since 1989, have become “a requirement for all World Bank-financed projects” (222). This is a form of proposal writing that is commonly used in the social sciences, as well as business and government settings, for the purpose of explaining how environmental (and social) risks will be mitigated. The primary goal of this format is to document solutions to those risks, so that projects can move forward. And, as Li points out, one of the consequences of documenting environmental impact has been to keep environmental risk assessment ‘manageable.’ “[A]s long as they are ‘manageable’ risks,” says Li, “they are not an impediment to...development” (228). The prompt, then, suggests a particular ordering that encouraged the respondents to organize their thoughts within the given framework. Writers who took up the goals that were suggested by the first question might be more likely to take up the purposes that were implied by the second.

When the panel of experts met to select the winners of the contest, they awarded the first prize of \$3000 to a young essayist from Australia who wrote a “Blueprint for Green Schools.” The second place essayist, who won \$2000, was from Mexico, and wrote on “The Repercussions of Climate Change on the Rarámuri People.” Third place, with a prize of \$1000, went to an essayist from Ghana, who offered green solutions at the Community, National and International Levels. Presumably, each of the essays that won demonstrated successful adherence to the “Selection Criteria” announced by the judges, who evaluated the essays based on “their structure and coherence, originality and creativity and the use of thoughtful and concrete proposals/ examples.” But, additionally, as is suggested by the analysis that follows, the logic of the essays was in keeping with the problem-solution pattern of the prompt.

Genre Analysis of the Essays

Because my analysis of the prompt suggested that the two-part structure may have played an important role in framing essay responses, my analysis of the essays looked at the sequential arrangement of ideas, as well as argument type. I recorded the page numbers devoted to each section of text and sought to determine whether establishing climate change as the problem was the focus of the first part of each essay. Additionally, I sought to determine whether “youth-led,” ‘green economy’ proposals were the focus at the end.

This content analysis revealed that all of the essays, to a greater or lesser degree, conformed to the above expectations. All of the essays identified climate change as the key problem (along with a number of related environmental issues such as extreme weather, soil erosion, deforestation, flooding, carbon emissions, and pollution). These problem sections, in every case, appeared at or near the beginning of each essay. Additionally, all of the essayists offered proposals for action in lengthier solution sections that came at or near the end. They all, to varying degrees, also offered future-oriented, specific goals and objectives involving youth and ‘green economy’ solutions. These formal and thematic similarities suggest that the influence of the prompt was strong in guiding a problem-solution pattern in the essays. In the following table, I have documented key phrases and page numbers that demonstrate how each problem section appeared prior to the solution section.

Table 4.1

Problem/ Solution Pattern of the Essays

Title	Problem	Solution
“Blueprint for Green Schools”	“Climate Change in Australia and its Impacts in the Future” pp. 3-5	"Green Schools" Solution pp. 5-10

“The Repercussions of Climate Change on the Indigenous Raramuri People: Local Actions, Global Benefits”	On Impact of Development on the Raramuri and “Effects of Climate Change” pp.2-3	“How Can We Address Climate Change...?” (e.g Biointensive Orchards) pp. 6-9
“Greening the Ghanaian Youth”	On Climate Change & “Recent Weather Extremes” pp. 1-3	“The Practical[] Green Solutions” pp. 3-8
“Climate Change is the Defining Issue of Our Time”	Climate Change Impacts to “my city and life” pp. 1-4	"Green Taxi Campaign" pp. 5-9
“Youth Participation in Green Endeavors” and green initiatives pp. 4-7	“Cebu’s Climate Change Crisis” pp. 3-5	“Solutions Offered by Cebuano Youth” and other initiatives pp. 5-9 “STEP UP” initiative pp. 9-12
“Go Green’ -- The New Mantra”	The impact of “global warming” on Hindu spirituality p. 1; “The Global Crisis” p. 2; and “The Indian Scenario” p. 3	“Youth Participation in Green Endeavors” and green initiatives pp. 4-7
“Climate Change--An Explosive Long Bill the Earth’s Generations Must Pay”	“Deforestation in Indonesia” p. 2 and “Climate Change Does Affect My Country” pp. 3-6	“Youth-the Now Green Generation” –Public Awareness pp. 6-10
“Climate Change: A Challenge for Humanity”	“Overview—the current situation with climate change” pp. 4-8	“The Current Economic Model and the Challenge for the Generation of Green Entrepreneurs” including “University for Humanity” pp. 8-15

As this analysis suggests, all of the essays organized their discussion of climate change impacts and solutions into two sections focused on problems and solutions. For example, in the first half of her essay, the first place winner writes of “ferocious bushfires,” “flash flooding and king tides”(23) that have destroyed entire townships and made “the northern State of Queensland into an officially declared disaster zone”(23). This section focuses on the problem,

explaining that her country, Australia, is “the driest inhabited continent on earth and is therefore particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change” (23). The second place essayist, too, begins by describing how families he visited in the Sierra Tarahumara were affected by temperature increases, deforestation, drought, and barren farmland. His first section details how climate change impacts have led to major social and environmental problems affecting an indigenous community in Mexico. The third place winner begins by describing his experience as a volunteer in Ghana and the impacts on his region after a period of severe flooding and unusual drought. His initial section describes the impact of climate change on agriculture, communities affected by the poor conditions in hospitals, the lack of electricity, food and water shortages, and diseases like cholera.

Without exception, then, all of the essayists similarly present climate change as the problem in the first part of their essays. All of the problem sections had their own regional or geographical emphases, and some of these descriptions were preceded by a title page, outline, abstract, preface, or summary, but all were located near or at the beginning of each essay. Each of these descriptions, additionally, ranged from 2 to 4 pages in length and appeared sequentially before the author’s proposed solutions. In three cases, these sections were separated by brief transitional sections in which the author described the role of youth in green initiatives, generally, or reflected on fieldwork, for instance. But in each of the eight winning and finalist essays, the detailed description of the problem of climate change appeared prior to sections devoted explicitly to solutions. Having established the urgency of the problem, all of the essayists proceed to offer initiatives to move forward in addressing it. These proposals range from “green schools” to bio-intensive orchards to public awareness campaigns. In the

solution sections, the degree of elaboration varies, but all of the solutions sections range in length from 3 to 7 pages. In all of the essays, these two sections together made up the bulk of each essay. All of the essays ranged in length from 7 to 16 pages, but in each case, the section on solutions was slightly longer than the section dealing with the problem. Similarities such as these suggest that the influence of the prompt was strong in compelling the shape that the essay arguments took.

However, even though all of the essays did, in fact, conform to a common problem-solution pattern, it would be hasty to conclude that the prompt entirely dictated the essays' ideological content or that they thoroughly diminished the capacity of the writers to define their own purposes. Such a presumption would overlook the key role that readers and writers play as 'points of articulation' (Campbell, 3), and it would deny the role that they play in shaping the motives of genres to their own ends. From a "governmental" perspective, then, it is important to probe the ways in which this agency was expressed. And so, in the next section, I examine these issues in relation to statements of self-conscious purpose.

Purpose

In a chapter dealing with the discursive construction of purpose, discourse analyst Theo van Leeuwen posits that "where new things are to be done, or where old things are to be done in new ways, purpose will be paramount" (125). Van Leeuwen suggests that questions of purpose are always implicit in social practice, and that such purposes must be "discursively constructed, in order to explain why social practices exist and why they take the forms they do" (125). Writers engaged in the social practice of writing often find themselves in situations in which they need to make their purposes clear. When both the audience and the writer take

the purposes for writing equally for granted -- that is, when the purposes for writing are clear or agreed upon in advance -- then there is little need for clarification. But when those purposes may be unclear or contested, the assertion of purpose can become a point of contention. Even as writers assert their own purposes, they must necessarily do so in relation to the imagined purposes of readers, and because purpose statements signal that writers and readers must negotiate goals, they have implications for rhetorical agency.

Statements of self-conscious purpose thus are important sites where agency is asserted and negotiated in an essay. As van Leeuwen suggests, the representation of a speaker's own actions *as purposeful* signals an affirmation of agency. Linguistic constructions formulated along the lines of "I do x in order to do (or be, or have) y" stake a claim to authority because they contain explicit mention of the writer's intentions. As van Leeuwen puts it, "Social actors whose actions are explicitly constructed as purposeful in this way are discursively empowered as intentional agents -- as people who can decide to, and then succeed in, changing the world, whether in minor or major ways, or as people who can set a goal and then determine, autonomously, how to achieve it" (127).

In the World Bank essays, the writers' representation of their own writing *as purposeful* also seemed to require an acknowledgement of agency from the reader. As we will see, most of their essays contained statements that were formulated along the lines of "I write in order to..." In statements of purpose like these, the writers attempted to make their own goals for writing visible. For my analysis of purpose, then, I relied on methods of rhetorical discourse analysis. My analysis focused on one central question: "How did the essayists represent their own writing as goal-oriented or purposeful? "Additionally, I was interested in considering

“What goals, specifically, did they emphasize, and how did these compare to those made explicit in the prompt?” I hoped with these questions to come to a fuller understanding of the variety of ways these writers represented their purpose(s) and the implications of this explicit acknowledgement of goals in relation to agency.

The Assertion of Writing as Purposeful

I began coding with an eye to identifying statements where the writers specifically articulated their purpose for writing the essay. I looked for specific linguistic cues, such as sentences that began with a clause such as “This essay seeks to...” or “I intend....” Sentence openers such as “In this essay, I...” or “The proposal below...” contained clues that the writer’s purposes may be included in the clause to follow. I focused on moments in the texts in which writers self-consciously made statements indicating their own agentic action related to their goals for this specific writing project. These statements often contained the first-person pronoun, “I,” or a noun synonymous with their essay or argument, such as “this essay” or this proposal” as the agent of a sentence in which the action was a verb such as “doing,” “seeking,” “intending,” “prioritizing,” or “aiming.” I also sought to identify statements that specifically referenced the present essay and the writer’s purposes for it. According to van Leeuwen, such sentence-level cues make it clear that the writer intends a relationship between the action and the purpose. As van Leeuwen suggests, when the language of “aims to” or “seeks to” is present in such statements, this seems to signal the assertion of agency.

Five of the writers included in their essays explicitly self-referential statements about their purpose(s) for writing the essay. Discursive moves like these can be useful for the analysis of rhetorical agency because they signal the kinds of actions that the writers want their essays

to do or accomplish. The chart below outlines the statements of purpose I identified in the essays, with the key phrases I used to interpret their signaling of purpose highlighted.

Table 4.2

Self-Conscious Statements of Purpose

Guillermo	p. 36 “This account seeks to illustrate the critical situation faced by the Tarahumaras.”
Kwasi	p.47 “I believe that at least most of the youth in my community like most other young men in the nation believe the government and the youth need to collaborate to help save our nation and hence our lives. Information dissemination would therefore be made a major priority in this essay.”
Jean-Paul	<p>p.54 “Many around me are oblivious to the effects of their daily activities on the environment and human health. I am writing this essay on their behalf, with the aim of lifting the fog of ignorance that surrounds them.”</p> <p>p.55 “These are the messages that this essay seeks to convey. It demonstrates how knowledge...lead[s] not only to awareness in a social group of the threat of climate change, but also to practical contributions to curbing it. Eco-citizenship education...is possible if we wish to achieve these objectives. The young people of Yaoundé can spear head this mobilization effort in order to preserve life on this planet.”</p> <p>p.58 “The proposal below is a practical idea that can contribute to combating climate change. This essay competition gives me an opportunity to submit my proposal for review by experts at the World Bank Group. They will help me determine its viability and capacity to effect positive change in the environment in which I live.”</p>
Miguel Antonio	p. 66 “With this, I propose a Climate Change STEP UP Plan to concretize the different initiatives.”
Sunviana	<p>p.92 “In the writing of this essay, I am trying to see the impacts of climate change as an explosive long bill the Earth’s generation[s] must pay to the Earth for what they have taken from it.”</p> <p>p.92 “[I]n this golden opportunity, I am trying to present and express youth as the NOW green generation who can both start a step to make the Earth a better planet to live and prepare for the NEXT green generation with youth’s own unique way.”</p>
Israel	p.103 “We are aware that Quintana Roo, like most states in Mexico, is already heavily involved in activities that jeopardize and contribute to climate change. Increasingly

	<p>intense hurricanes, longer periods of drought, severe flooding, and the emergence of new plagues make the news on a daily basis. But, what is our view of the problem? What strategies are we proposing? This essay seeks to answer these and other questions.”</p> <p>p.104 “This essay is not the forum for raising technical issues, as there are many papers written about these issues and one only has to surf the Internet to find information. I will instead seek to address the problem from another angle.”</p>
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As suggested by the above chart, strategies for signaling purposes in the essays included the following. Guillermo, for instance, introduces a very matter-of-fact sentence about his sense of purpose with the introductory clause, “This account seeks...” This writer refers to his argument at that point in the text as an *account* or a narrative argument. “This account,” as the agent of the sentence, is followed by the verb “*seeks*,” which describes purposeful action. Beginning the sentence in this way provides a useful template for signaling purpose. This purpose is named as follows: “*to illustrate* the critical situation faced by the Tarahumaras” (italics mine). The use of the infinitive form of the verb “to illustrate” highlights the key kind of action that he wants to foreground: goals related to description. His one-sentence statement seems to articulate very clearly his primary goal: that of advocacy for the Tarahumaras.

By contrast, Jean-Paul’s references to his purpose in writing are lengthier than Guillermo’s and appear more than once, suggesting that his purposes may have been more varied and that they required reinforcement or restatement throughout. One of these statements consists of several sentences which appear at the end of a lengthy introductory paragraph and is signaled by the sentence, “These are the messages that this essay seeks to convey.” He also uses the opening clause “It demonstrates...” to reference the purpose of his essay, which he says is to explain how knowledge about climate change can lead to solutions.

He makes it clear that he is specifically interested in promoting “ecocitizenship education” for the people of Yaoundé, whom he believes play an important role in leading global prevention and adaptation efforts.

Israel, on the other hand, leads with information and then poses several questions, which he takes to characterize or represent the main interests of the audience. “[W]hat is our view of the problem? What strategies are we proposing?” he asks. He then proceeds with a sentence explaining that “This essay seeks to answer these and other questions.” This explanatory statement suggests that his essay promises not only to represent a local perspective (“our view”), along with a proposal, but also that the essay will answer “other questions” besides those explicitly invited by the prompt. Israel’s statement calls attention to the range of other purposes he might want to foreground in the essay. He does not name these purposes but rather alludes to them so as to make them apparent to the reader. The rhetorical effect of his gesturing to these “other purposes” is to suggest that there may be other goals to which the reader should attend.

Negotiated Motives, Distributed Purpose

As I examined these statements of self-conscious purpose made by the writers, and the short stretches of text surrounding them, I found it interesting that they suggested goals not fully captured by the instructions in the prompt. Some aligned with the “genre motive” of an essay focused on solutions, but others seemed to express other related civic, environmental, or educational goals, involving the desire to make the world a better place or to disseminate information, for example. One of the writers even expressed the desire for feedback on his ideas from World Bank experts in his purpose statement. But these self-conscious statements

did not reveal a primary focus on ‘green economy’ solutions, as invited by the prompt. Nor did any of the essayists speak of being motivated by the possible financial reward of the contest prize.

Advocating for youth leadership to combat climate change seemed an important purpose for all five writers, whose statements referred to:

- the need for government and youth collaboration (Kwasi);
- mobilizing youth in Yaoundé (Jean-Paul);
- representing youth as the NOW green generation (Sunviana); and
- the important role of rural youth (Israel) in effecting change.

These writers also named other goals in the identified statements, which included:

- “[disseminating] information” (Kwasi)
- “saving “our nation and our lives” (Kwasi)
- “lifting the fog of ignorance that surrounds my community” through “Eco-citizenship education” (Jean-Paul)
- preserving “life on this planet” (Jean-Paul)
- combatting climate change (Jean-Paul)
- soliciting feedback on his proposal (Jean-Paul)
- “effect[ing] positive change in the environment in which I live” (Jean-Paul)
- understanding the problem in a particular way, as “an explosive long bill” (Sunviana)
- “present[ing] my views on global warming” (Israel)
- approaching solutions from a theoretical, rather than a technical perspective (Israel)
- rais[ing] “other questions” (Israel)

The variety of these “other goals” suggests how many other ends could be inserted into or appended to the defined aims of the contest. Overall, these writers’ self-conscious statements of purpose did not place primary emphasis upon the ‘green economy,’ even as elements of their proposals sometimes embraced market-based solutions. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, these statements did not even include as a primary emphasis publicizing the writers’ own ‘green economy’ endeavors, such as, for instance, setting up a tuition center

(Sunviana) or starting an “environmentally responsible” (108) micro-enterprise (Israel). Instead, they ranged from information dissemination to offering concrete proposals to viewing the problem in a new way. They included mobilizing the youth and advocating for communities, as well as receiving feedback and effecting positive change. The variety that exists among these differing interpretations and emphases also indicate agency.

While, of course, these fragments present a necessarily imperfect picture of the essayists’ goals for writing, they nonetheless provide important information about the kinds of purposes that the writers wanted to emphasize or foreground. At least in the “self-conscious” statements that I zeroed in on, these writers emphasized various kinds of civic goals over ‘green economy’ ones. Certainly, these writers may have had ‘green economy’ purposes in mind, even though they did not choose to highlight them in their statements of self-conscious purpose, but the fact that other purposes were competing for rhetorical ascendancy in the essays suggests that the writers exercised rhetorical agency through their negotiation of goals.

Intertextuality

Intertextual references in the essays also revealed agency to be distributed among various actors. Intertextuality refers to the ways in which an assembly of voices in the text informs the writers’ claims, or, as Bazerman (2004) puts it, the analysis of “how texts rely on other texts” (83). According to Bazerman, a key question for intertextual analysis involves the writer’s rationale for relying upon other voices: Why is the writer offering the reference, and what is the writer’s stance vis a vis the other voices s/he includes? Bazerman also invites us to consider the ways in which writers’ identities are wrapped up in the sources they cite, and he suggests that the process of writing entails a kind of “intertextual self-fashioning” (1994, 20)

that links the construction of authority and the writer's ethos in a particular text. As van Leeuwen suggests, various kinds of authority are available for intertextual referencing. These include personal authority, as well as that of experts, role models, laws and rules, tradition or custom, consensus, moral superiority, healthy practice, and normality. Sometimes, references to authority are easy to spotlight in a text, but, at other times, they are less visibly or consciously presented. In academic texts, one of the ways in which referencing is made visible is through scholarly practices of citation.

Frequently, the writer's rationale for assembling a web of references involves establishing the relevant voices in the conversation or debate. As Bazerman (1994) has shown, in academic writing, writers stake their own authority, to some degree, on that of the experts they cite. In a study of a scientific article, Bazerman found that "each new finding, argument, or claim locate[d] itself upon its own reconstruction of an explicit intertextual field" (194). In such texts, claims Bazerman, the intertextual field represents a "strategic site of contention, for it is the site at which communal memory is sorted out and reproduced, at which current issues and communities are framed and dynamics established pushing the research front toward one future or another" (194). In order to introduce a new argument, authors must dismantle prior assumptions by teasing apart the perceived reliability of the existing "intertext" (21).

When writers cite, they implicitly call upon the reader to authorize their citation by accepting the authority of the reference and the style of citation employed. This authorization requires some provisional agreement between writers and readers related to the construction of authority. But this kind of provisional agreement may be complicated by power differentials between writers and readers. Canagarajah (2002), for example, calls attention to the

“geopolitics” of intertextual referencing, or the relations of power among sources in the intertext. As he points out, scholars from ‘peripheral’ global locations may be compelled to cite authorities from the ‘center’ and/or to omit references to sources from the ‘periphery,’ whose authority may not be recognized by those in the ‘center.’ For Canagarajah, whose use of these terms echoes their use by world systems theorists like Andre Gunder Frank (whom he cites in his bibliography), center refers to “the West” (7), whereas periphery refers “typically [to] communities colonized by European intervention” (7). Canagarajah argues that the conventions of academic writing often mitigate against the inclusion of sources not recognized or valued by centers of academic publishing in the Western metropole. His embrace of these terms suggests his desire to ‘re-claim the margins’ as a space of radical critique (see, for example, hooks 1990, cited in Canagarajah).

Critiques have, of course, been levied against the limitations of the world-systems, binary ‘center-and periphery’ model because it is easy to upset the model by pointing to examples of the ‘center’ in the ‘periphery’ and the ‘periphery’ in the ‘center.’ But, despite these critiques, it is clear that systems of unequal access and privilege remain, and the unequal valuation of knowledge places constraints upon writers from a variety of global locations. The obstacles that Canagarajah describes are relevant to the writers in the World Bank contest because these writers took risks when they decided to draw not only upon sources sanctioned by the academic center but also those they valued from the periphery. Through their intertextual practices, these writers insisted upon the relevance of sources that hailed not only from U.S. and European-dominated information sources, but also from sources they found to be meaningful from their varying perspectives. As we will see, then, these writers’ ‘geopolitical’

positioning intersected with their intertextual practices in ways that revealed the distributed character of agency.

In the 2009 contest, a list of “Useful Resources on Climate Change” that highlighted international agencies, NGO’s, and major figures in climate change politics were made available to the essayists via hyperlinks issuing from the contest homepage. These included:

- The World Bank Climate Change website;
- Youthink! (World Bank website for children and youth);
- United Nations Environment Program (UNEP);
- United Nations Climate Change Conference, December, 2008;
- Stern Review: The Economics of Climate Change;
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)—laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007;
- Al Gore, laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize 2007;
- World Wildlife Fund.

The winning essayists, however, did not limit themselves to these suggested sources; as we will see, instead, they constructed novel “intertexts” in their references and citations. Not only did they develop creative combinations of these sources but, additionally, they sought out other, primarily online, sources to legitimate their purposes and claims.

For my intertextual analysis, I followed the approach described by Bazerman (2004), as simplified here:

- Underline intertextual references
- Create a list of all instances, creating adjacent columns for observations
- Use this list to make further observations/ interpretations
- Look for meaningful patterns

As this list suggests, intertextual analysis involves both documentation and interpretation. The process I followed involved the identification of intertextual references and especially patterns related to the writers’ use of citation in the essays. To begin, I took Bazerman’s advice and

scoured the collection of essays for intertextual references, highlighting each instance I identified and taking notes about the writers' citation practices. After this initial coding, I created a graph with five columns across. These columns allowed me to organize the intertextual references by essayist according to: (1) the group or individual referenced, (2) the source for the reference, (4) the seeming purpose for the reference, and (4) "other observations." Sometimes the sources were unclear or a citation was not provided, so I made note of this in my observations. I also kept track of the type of sources writers consulted and made a separate listing of these. In my notes, I occasionally recorded direct quotes, but at other times I paraphrased this information, when the wording itself was less crucial to the meaning. For some of the sources, I noted dates and place of publication, if these seemed noteworthy. I also paid special attention to the distinctive and, sometimes idiosyncratic, ways in which writers cited their sources.

When I had finished this process, I made a rough listing of the *types* of references included, attempted to categorize each by type, and then counted the frequencies of each. I also reviewed the reasons for which writers seemed to be making the particular reference they did and considered patterns among them. This process resulted in a wealth of material and a lengthy coding document; for the purpose of illustration I have attached a one-page sample in the appendix (See Appendix B, p. 222). Analysis of this material led to some hypotheses, additional exploration, and some tentative conclusions regarding the crafting of intertextual authority in the essays.

I found that the distribution or negotiation of intertextual agency was demonstrated in various ways throughout the essays. First, despite seeming limitations with regards to the

essayists' proficiency with citation, the writers seemed to exercise ingenuity in "making do" (de Certeau) with a variety of sources. As De Certeau suggests, "making do" involves unconventional tactics practiced by the weak in relation to the strong. And even though this binary way of conceiving of power relations may have limited applicability to this contest, the idea that the writers were doing the best that they could with the limited resources at their disposal seems an apt way of describing the agency they exhibited. Second, their essays suggest that they relied primarily on Internet sources, a reliance that indicates that multiple groups and individuals had a "hand" in the intellectual construction of their essay arguments. The contributions of these multiple actors, moreover, required the affordances of electronic circuits, digital search engines, networks, and platforms. This suggests that both human and non-human actors (Bennett, Latour) played important roles in the writer's composing processes. Finally, since seven of the eight winning writers hailed from the Global South, their citation practices had a visible political dimension; this can be seen by their referencing of both 'center' and 'periphery' scholarship (Canagarajah 2002), which engaged intertextuality as a key site of negotiated agency.

"Making Do" with Sources

In all, I identified approximately 80 explicit intertextual references in the essays. Some of these references were cited, and others were not. Seven of the writers included a "References" (or "Bibliography" or "References and Resources" or "Sources Consulted") page, and one (Sonali) included no reference page at all. Several of the Reference pages were incomplete, and several did not adhere to a recognizable citation style. Those that did most closely seemed to adhere to Chicago Style, even though I could not find any instructions

requiring this style in the contest guidelines. Five of the writers (Sophie, Guillermo, Jean-Paul, Sunviana, and Israel) used in-text footnotes, with varying degrees of proficiency, and some of these contained irregularities. Four of these started their footnotes on a number greater than one, suggesting that the writers may have reworked and/or drawn their essays from longer research projects they were working on. Kwasi, Miguel Antonio, and Sonali were the writers who had the most unclear or not credited sources. This may have been due to a lack of proficiency with formal practices of citation or to differing expectations about what citation entailed. At any rate, the writers seemed to be “making do” (de Certeau 1984) with the citation practices they had acquired in their university programs to date.

Most of the sources that appeared in the writers’ essays, and could be easily categorized, are included in the chart below. The chart contains the following, listed in order of frequency: source not credited or unclear (24); online government, agency, advocacy group, or foundation website, report, or other document (16); online news source (at least 11); book (at least 8); a popular saying (5), classic text (such as the Vedas or the Confucian Analects) (3); traditional belief or common knowledge (3); speech (3); survey (3); textbook(3); online encyclopedia(2); open source document (1); company website (1); academic journal article (1).

Table 4.3

Frequency of Sources in the Essays

Source not credited or unclear	24	Speech	3
Online government, agency, organization, or foundation website, report, or document	16	Survey	3
Online news source	At least 11	Textbook	3

Book	At least 8	Online Encyclopedia	2
Popular Saying	5	Open Source Document	1
Classic Text	3	Company Website	1
Traditional Belief or Common Knowledge	3	Academic Journal Article	1

Internet Sources and Agency

The list of intertextual references in the above chart suggests the variety and relative importance of the sources referenced in the essays. It is perhaps surprising that, as university students, few seemed to reference academic journal articles and/or seemingly, to do so via university library servers. There was a preponderance of online sources, suggesting that the web played a crucial role in the essayists' research processes. "Online government, agency, organization, or foundation website report, or document" and "online news outlets" were the most popular sources of information. These sources were referenced most frequently for information related to climate change impacts -- and to support claims that extreme weather events, floods, droughts, deforestation, disease, and coral bleaching could be traced to human activities (like carbon emissions), and linked to climate change. This intertextual bolstering of the causal links between human activity and climate change, as well as climate change and its various consequences, seemed to play an indispensable role in the writers' initial (problem) sections, revealing the ways in which the credibility of these "problem" sections seemed to hinge on external authority.

Various organizations, like the Australian Department of Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Tarahumara Foundation, the Mexican

National and Geography Institute, and the United States Global Change Research Program, were referenced by the writers. These references show the array of institutional contributors to the knowledge that was represented. Additionally, the websites of governmental organizations, advocacy groups, and foundations also point to the important role of the many group-authored sources they cited. One of the writers even referenced Wikipedia, which underscores how authorial agency in the contest was indeed multiple and dispersed.

Popular sayings and traditional beliefs were also referenced in the essays. Guillermo, for instance, quoted the following, which he identified as a popular Raramurí saying: “The Earth is our mother, she feeds us and she will receive us when we die.” His essay opens with this quote and ends with another reference to Raramurí philosophy and its respect for nature, suggesting the desire to frame his essay with reference to indigenous authority. Sonali, likewise, opens with a reference to “Indian tradition” which, she says, holds the earth to be sacred “as the compassionate Mother Goddess.” She references Hindu scripture and the Vedas, in particular, to highlight the relationship between humans and the planet, as shown in “The hymns to the Mother-Earth- Bhumi Sukta.” These kinds of reference to classical texts, traditional wisdom, and popular sayings foreground a source of authority that seems unconventional, perhaps, in an academic essay. Such references seemed to emphasize the agency of marginal actors and the authority of the non-academic sources in the construction of knowledge.

Quotes and ideas from well-known figures also served to highlight climate change as an urgent issue and to inspire and lend moral authority to the idea that action is needed. Quotes from six well-known figures were included in the essays to draw attention to climate change

and inspire action. These figures were: José Martí, Muhammed Yanus; Mahatma Gandhi (referenced by two writers); Al Gore; Ban Ki Moon (then UN Secretary General); and Confucius. The cultural diversity of these figures suggests that the writers conceived of authority in the contest *as international* and that they drew on the voices of writers whose voices would be recognized as authoritative. One of these writers, Jean-Paul, moreover, cites speeches given by three famous figures: Ban Ki Moon, Al Gore, and Mahatma Gandhi. His essay suggests that a patchwork of international voices were influential in his conceptualization of the problem and solution.

The relative importance of the Internet in these writers' intertextual practices points to, additionally, the critical role that online search engines, electronic grids and digital circuits, necessarily played. For Jean-Paul, the importance of the Internet for his scholarship is explicitly referenced in his essay, when he writes about the devastating impacts of flooding on his home and community. One of these impacts, he explains, involved the loss of electricity for extended periods, an event which interfered with his studies. As he writes, "The violent rain and storms in March 2008 caused power outages in Yaoundé, owing to a host of technical problems such as fallen telephone poles and transformer breakdowns. These constant outages have made for dark nights, making it impossible to use the computer for homework" (56). This personal testimony suggests how extreme weather has exacerbated the digital divide and critically impacted this essayist's writing practices.

His experience suggests that -- as Bennett insists -- electrical power grids, among other actors, make the distribution of agency in writing visible; in this context, they are also a

particularly powerful metaphor for describing the ways in which the concept of the “agentic assemblage” (51) applies to our literacy practices. As she explains, the electrical power grid:

“is a material cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remaining in sufficient proximity and coordination to produce distinctive effects. The elements of the assemblage work together, although their coordination does not rise to the level of an organism....And, most important for my purposes, the elements of this assemblage, while they include humans and their (social, legal, linguistic) constructions, also include some very active and powerful nonhumans: electrons, trees, wind, fire, electromagnetic fields.” (24)

The metaphor of the electrical grid thus calls attention to the multiple elements in a rhetorical assemblage; it illustrates how these various forces may all have a role in determining which voices will be ‘recognized or heeded’ in an international forum like an online essay contest.

These various actors could also be seen in the complex activity system that is the essay contest, and in the role of genre, and the construction of authorial purpose in texts. All of these aspects of contests make visible the rhetorical work of contests as assemblage.

‘Center’ and ‘Periphery’ Scholarship

The writers -- who hailed from Australia, Mexico, Africa, the Phillipines, India and Indonesia -- also drew on diverse geographical locations in their citation of sources. Many of these writers referenced sources from the ‘center,’ while others emphasized alternative or “periphery scholarship” (Canagarajah 2002). These intertextual practices suggest that the geographical origin for some kinds of information was important in representing authoritative knowledge. For example, many of the writers referenced nationally-based or governmental sources to document climate change impacts in their countries. Local sources also served as the privileged sources for information about locally relevant solutions, as when Guillermo cites an open source document on the web to show the benefits of biointensive farming. National

and/or local sources are present in all of the essays alongside international ones. Sometimes it appeared that the choice to include sources from the writers' countries may have been a matter of national pride, as demonstrated, for instance, by the fact that both the writers from Mexico emphasized websites authored in Mexico and books published at Mexican universities. References to traditional beliefs (e.g. "Indian philosophy") also seem to index or foreground the importance of national, religious, or otherwise 'peripheral' authorities.

At the same time, at least one of the writers seemed to take joy in referencing and "making do" with sources that came from all over the map. Sunviana relies on an array of online sources, including news outlets, common sayings, and advocacy organizations like Greenpeace, the World Wildlife Federation, and Global Forest Watch. Her sources, all of which were accessed via the Internet, index a surprising array of geopolitical locations: a University of Minnesota website called myminnesotawoods.org; the British Columbian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals; and the Consortium for Atlantic Regional Assessment, which seemed to be based out of Penn State University. Sunviana is also the only essayist to reference a company website: preen.com. This website for a gardening company was referenced to support a claim that the sansiveria plant is useful for cleaning the air. Sunviana's intertextual practices thus suggest ingenuity and even zealousness in her search for authoritative sources; her negotiation of authority thus seemed to have few geopolitical boundaries or disciplinary constraints. Agency in her essay is rhetorically multiple, international and mediated, as well as a function of 'making do.'

These writers' intertextual practices, therefore, suggest the centrality of the Internet for their research. The range of sources upon which they drew, and the range of citation practices

represented, suggest they were “making do” with the materials and skills they had available. The role of the Internet as an actor is also made visible through the writers’ intertextual practices, along with the agency of the electrical power grid and the writers’ lived conditions (including climate change). Additionally, the various sources they consulted demonstrated the importance of the work of groups and individuals from both the ‘center’ and ‘periphery.’ In these various ways, the practice of intertextuality, along with genre and purpose, made visible the distribution of rhetorical agency in the contest.

Conclusion

These three constructs, therefore – genre, purpose, and intertextuality—all reveal how agency is distributed in an essay contest. Genre, for example, is a crucial site for the negotiation of genre motive. As we have seen, prompts provide important genre cues, as do the contest rules and accompanying materials, all of which play an influential role in framing the writing task. But writers also play an important role in interpreting those cues, and in asserting their own purposes, which they must negotiate with their readers. Some of these readers include institutional sponsors and judges, who bring their own motives and agendas to bear. Self-conscious statements of purpose in an essay are also an important site where the negotiation of agency can be seen. And finally, intertextuality illustrates the multiple voices contributing to an argument. Writers exercise agency by ‘making do’ with the sources they put together and by making intertextual choices, including decisions related to their engagement with ‘center’ and ‘periphery’ scholarship. These choices, however, may be limited by material conditions, including the unpredictability of Internet access. As Jean-Paul’s story so vividly suggests, environmental actors such as climate change also have an impact on writers’ ability to

contribute. In these ways, genre, purpose, and intertextuality are three constructs that make visible how agency is distributed (if not equally) among various actors in an essay contest. The rhetorical character of this assemblage suggests the ways in which the power of writing is contested, negotiated, and conveyed.

Chapter 5

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

In this dissertation, I have focused the spotlight on a common, yet unexplored literacy practice -- or rather, system of practices -- the contemporary essay contest. I have paid special attention to the politics of such contests, that is, the ways in which they influence or “govern” (Foucault) the civically-oriented writing and thinking of contest participants. I have also attempted to identify some of the key aspects or participants of contests and to suggest some of the ways in which these represent key nodes of agency. I have also looked, in particular, at the rhetorical strategies adopted by the organizational sponsors of contests and contest participants. In doing so, I have examined closely the World Bank’s 2009 Youth Essay Contest on “Green Entrepreneurship,” a contest in which writers were invited to assume a “green entrepreneurial” subject position or stance – and I have showed how the winning essayists negotiated this positioning via specific discourse strategies. But what, in this analysis, remains still underdeveloped are some of the key theoretical and pedagogical implications of this investigation. How, for example, do essay contests illuminate the dynamics of sponsorship, in relation to governmentality, distributed agency, and the constitution of publics? What does the legacy of contests make visible in terms of our understanding of rhetorical democracy in a

globalized world? And, finally, how can these theoretical insights inform existing pedagogical approaches to the teaching of writing?

The Dynamics of Sponsorship in Essay Contests

To answer these questions, it is useful to return to the endlessly vexing definition, offered by Deborah Brandt, for the term, “sponsors of literacy” because it is her definition that invites us to attend more closely to the agendas of sponsors. Brandt says that sponsors “proved an appealing term in [her] analysis because of all the commercial references that appeared in these 20th-century accounts – the magazines, peddled encyclopedias, essay contests, radio and television programs, toys, fan clubs, writing tools, and so on” (168). (Note the appearance of “essay contests” in this list.) And all of these individuals and institutions are summed up by the term “sponsors,” which she defines as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (166).

But one of the limitations of such a broad definition is that it leaves unanswered questions about the meaning of “sponsor” as a category of analysis. With the term, “sponsor,” Brandt wants to draw attention to the “range of human relationships and ideological pressures that turn up at the scenes of literacy learning” (168), and as she puts it, literacy sponsors “can be benefactors but also extortionists—and sometimes both in the same form” (193). And, as I have suggested, the problem with this umbrella term is that the relationships and ideologies subsumed by it range from those that are characterized as beneficent to those that extort or exploit. Even though the concept of “literacy sponsor” has led to productive thinking in the field of rhetoric, composition, and literacy -- and has encouraged, for example, teachers to reflect

self-consciously about their own goals for teaching and learning – the concept of sponsorship is nonetheless a highly abstract notion that, unfortunately, glosses over a number of crucial distinctions. In this dissertation, I have argued that, in making visible the various actors who participate in the various literacy tasks involved in these events, essay contests help us begin to identify and draw distinctions among the various sponsors relevant to specific writing situations. Additionally, they help us to recognize some of types of (civic, educational, commercial or partisan) agendas that may be present in contests, as well as ways in which some of these agendas are often intentionally blurred.

In my first chapter, I explained that different kinds of organizations typically sponsor writing contests and that the major types of sponsor included: non-profits; foundations; professional associations; university-affiliated centers; agencies of local, state or federal government; businesses; partnerships, teachers and schools; and individuals. Additionally, I suggested that close links exist between the missions of the sponsors and the goals of the contests that they supported, but that prospective essayists would need to read critically to make sense of contest information to determine these connections. In my analysis of the World Bank essay contest, for example, I showed how the mission of the World Bank was related to the language of youth civic engagement and responsabilization in the goals of the contest, as well as to the genre of writing that it promoted (problem/solution), and to the green entrepreneurial identifications that the contest encouraged. In doing so, I suggested that the ideological agenda of the World Bank placed constraints on the kinds of conclusions that contest participants could draw. Even though the contestants used creativity in responding to

the cues of the prompt, the two-part task sought responses that, as Klees suggests, reinforced the Bank's neoliberal "premises and...conclusions" (49).

An implied conclusion was also present in the contest sponsored by the Royal Commonwealth Institute, titled "Opportunity through Enterprise." Other prompts and contests, similarly, impose limitations on the kinds of conclusions that essayists may draw in their writing. For example, as I mentioned in Chapter One, the Elks Society sponsors a contest for middle school students which encourages them to write about why they are proud to pledge allegiance to the flag. This contest, of course, makes certain unfounded presumptions about the subjective experiences of students. It does not ask them whether they are proud to pledge allegiance, nor does it ask them to reflect upon the relative importance of pledging allegiance in comparison to multiple other ways they might express their civic engagement. Nor does it ask them whether "pride" is the only or dominant emotion that such a socially-prescribed activity as pledging allegiance might necessarily elicit. Rather, it makes a presumption about the kinds of feelings that are appropriate to such an activity and positions students who may feel a range of other possible emotions as somehow failing in their civic duties. This equation of a feeling of pride about pledging allegiance with notions of civic virtue, then, contains a number of troubling assumptions about which those who incorporate such contests into the classroom should be aware.

Similarly, the contest sponsored by Intercollegiate Studies Institute, an organization that promotes the free-enterprise system, asks college-age writers to answer a question about whether "we" are "back on the road to serfdom." This contest, as I mentioned in Chapter One contains a "weighting" of the question towards an affirmative answer, such that the question

favors a particular response, while appearing to allow equally for a range of responses. This contest also encourages a particular response through the sources that it requires writers to draw upon. In order to answer the question, writers must become familiar with the ideas of Austrian economist, F.A. Hayek (a key figure in neoliberal economics). Without doing so, they would be unable to engage the specific use of the term “serfdom” that appears in the prompt. Contests like these baldly constrain intellectual freedom to the extent that they place radical limitations on rhetorical agency. Rather than merely name a topic or broad area of inquiry, they blatantly prescribe a process by which the writers find their own arguments to convince themselves of the sponsored conclusions.

From the perspective of governmentality, then, those who participate in essay contests must be sufficiently prepared to recognize the goals or agendas that undergird writing tasks. This kind of awareness is necessary because, presumably, teachers, schools and universities have embraced the value of intellectual freedom and see this value as closely tied to their educational mission. Most colleges and universities have statements, for example, that call attention to this value in their student and faculty handbooks. Other kinds of sponsors (e.g. corporate, foundations, etc.) may not place such a high value (or any value at all) on intellectual freedom. If teachers decide to incorporate, as they frequently do, an essay contest into their courses, they must be alert to the encroachment of other agendas into the classroom. This requires careful reading on the part of the teacher and students because contests may cloak their agendas in the language of civic engagement, for example. These contests, as we have seen, may seem to permit a range of ideological viewpoints, when, on closer examination, it becomes clear that they do not. Teachers and students therefore need appropriate analytical

tools for evaluating the intellectual seriousness of such contests and other similar writing tasks. In this project, I hope I have offered some preliminary tools for this type of critical rhetorical analysis.

Being able to identify and critically analyze the motives of various kinds of writing sponsor is one of the key kinds of rhetorical work that we all must do as readers, both of essay contests, and as participants in other scenes of writing. This kind of rhetorical work implies that those who participate in writing contests, whether as members of the public who “read” about such contests or as contestants who enter them – or as advertisers, teachers, or parents who encourage others to participate – share in the cultural meanings that such contests take on. As communal events, essay contests necessarily involve multiple actors, each of whom contributes to the influence or popularity of a given contest and to the ways we make sense of them. Thus, there is also a role for the public (including teachers and sponsors) and other actors (like the judges) to endorse or refuse to participate in a contest, based on the validity of that specific contest as a civic literacy event. This analysis of the distribution of agency in contests helps us more clearly to envision some of these possibilities.

The Essay Contest as Ecological System

As we have seen, essay contests reveal the multiple actors at the scene of writing. Because multiple individuals and institutions are involved in the “authorship” of meaning in contests, all of these actors potentially weigh in on the ways in which “civic” subjectivities and knowledges are produced. This fact complicates notions of any simple or dual, hierarchical relationship between “sponsor” and “sponsored” and points to the ways in which contests more closely resemble an activity system than a top-down relationship between two unequal

actors. The notion of ecological or “activity systems” (Bazerman 2000; Prior 2009; Bawarshi 2003) can be useful for understanding the social relations of writing in contests. And Syverson (1999) advocates that an awareness of complex systems in relation to writing moves us away from a focus on “individual writers, individual texts, isolated acts, processes, or artifacts” (8) towards an “ecology of composition” – one in which knowledge is understood to be “distributed” and “dependent on social interactions” (8). Drawing on the work of Lave and others, she argues that composition scholars need to reconceptualize the process of composition as a complex system that is “distributed,” “emergent,” “embodied” and “enacted” (7-18). This project makes possible an ecological view of essay contests that helps make visible the distributed rhetorical work that essay contests entail.

Governmentality

At the same time, such a view of agency as distributed may seem to conflict with the emphasis I place on the “governmental” role of sponsors. Since I have been arguing that essay contests can best be understood within Foucault’s framework of governmentality, I think it is necessary to point to a tension that some see in Foucault’s work and to clarify my understanding of Foucault’s framework in relation to agency. This clarification is necessary because Foucault’s “governmental” framework has been interpreted by some to suggest a kind of totalitarian model of power relations – one that implies a denial of non-hegemonic agency altogether. As Ahearn (2001) succinctly puts it, there are two ways of interpreting Foucault’s theory of agency. In brief, some maintain that “Foucault can be read as stating that omnipresent impersonal discourses so thoroughly pervade society that no room is left for anything that might be regarded as agency” (116); others, however, suggest that “Foucault’s

notion of power is not a substance but a relation, a dynamic situation; it produces not only constraints on, but also possibilities for, action” (117). This tension between these two readings of Foucault underscores a key question that animates this dissertation project: if the “governing” influence of sponsors in an essay contest is necessarily totalizing, then to what extent do the writers who participate in such contests exercise agency when they write?

I have suggested that Foucault proposed “governmentality” as a term to describe the art or science of governing. For Foucault, this term describes a historical move away from the blatantly coercive acts of rulers to the directive or disciplinary, yet less blatant or brutal acts of governors in the late sixteenth century. To some degree, the term resembles Althusser’s (1971) concept of “ideological state apparatus” – except that unlike “ideological state apparatus,” its motivating interests are not reducible to class or to state power. Key to the notion of “governmentality” is, as Li (2007) suggests, the idea that “governmental” power “is only power so long as the target of that power retains the capacity to act” (276). “Governmentality,” then, in translation from the original word in French, “gouvernementalité”, is therefore an unfortunate lexical choice because it not only connotes that “government” or state actors initiate highly influential or directive action, but also because “mentality” is often taken, rather simplistically, to suggest a form of mind control. This project counters such all-encompassing or totalizing notions of “governmentality” because it makes visible the dynamic and multiple actors involved in essay contests, and because it points to the ways in which the writers exert rhetorical agency within the constraints of their positioning.

Distributed Rhetorical Agency

Throughout, I have been arguing that the power in essay contests is distributed, contested, and negotiated, and that multiple actors in essay contests “retain the capacity to act” (Li, 2007, 276). Even though contests are from the outset unevenly weighted towards the interests of sponsors -- other actors, such as the writers, judges, and audiences for such contests, participate in ways that together orchestrate the cultural meanings that contests have and the various kinds of outcomes that they produce. Co-partnering organizations and individuals, the multiple participants in digital networks, electronic circuits, and the virtual or material artifacts of announcements and prompts also play a role in determining the range and significance of particular contests – as do the historical, cultural, and linguistic precedents, practices, and resources from which contests draw. As a result, contests are an especially productive site for the analysis of rhetorical agency because they allow us to consider the motives and roles of multiple actors, practices, and genres -- and because they suggest ways in which writing is embedded in complex and shifting relationships of unequal power. They paint a picture of writing as a dynamic constellation of literate activity and highlight the multiple ways in which writing is socially negotiated.

Such a socially distributed view of writing has important implications for rhetorical agency, which has been defined as the “competence to speak or write in a way that will be recognized or heeded by others” (Kohrs Campbell 3). This view sees writing as inherently interactive, collaborative, and/or contested -- as the vital “kinetic energy” (Miller) that exists between rhetors and their multiple audiences and interlocutors (including sponsors, partnering organizations, various publics, judges, and, often, others). Within such a concept of agency,

rhetors or authors are “best described as ‘points of articulation’ rather than originators” (5) because their writing processes and choices are necessarily influenced by the purposes of sponsors, the genres, and the technologies, for example, that shape their work. But, as I have shown in the case of the World Bank youth essay competition, this recognition does not, in and of itself, diminish the rhetor’s ingenuity or inventiveness. Writers in that contest found multiple ways to assert the range of their identities and goals, as well as to fashion intertextual authority in novel and unexpected ways.

As Campbell puts it, “authors/ rhetors are materially limited, linguistically constrained, historically situated subjects; at the same time, they are ‘inventors’ in the rhetorical sense, articulators who link past and present, and find means to express those strata that connect the psyche, society and world.... ” (5) This recognition of the ingenuity of the contest participants – in the face of constraints placed by the task and by sponsors, for example – remains of vital importance to those who aim to educate for rhetorical awareness. My analysis of essay contests can aid us to understand how rhetorical awareness can help prepare writers to recognize their own agency as they approach writing tasks.

Rhetorical Work

Reading a contest like the World Bank’s 2009 Youth Essay Contest on “Green Entrepreneurship” in a rhetorically aware way can help us attend to the strategies that both the sponsors and winning essayists employed. My project illuminates how distributed rhetorical agency operates in contests. As I have shown, in this competition, the World Bank and its partners significantly influenced the terms within which various actors could participate. They set the topic, the genre, and, in many ways the conclusions, of desired responses -- and had the

financial and cultural capital to offer various kinds of incentives , such as: prize money, the potential to forward the careers of winning essayists, and an influential Web platform upon which to disseminate the contest information and the winning writers' essays. As a well-recognized, transnational agency, the World Bank could draw on its significant prestige and its reliable networks of circulation and distribution to get the word out, and the organization's perceived international influence likely enhanced the contest's appeal among the young and Web-savvy, global audience that it was targeting. But the idea that the Bank's neoliberal and hegemonic framework was all-encompassing was contradicted by the rhetorical ingenuity of the winning essayists. Their capacity to assert their own agendas and identifications necessarily complicated the matter, as did the potential disruptive capacity of other relevant actors and networks that comprised the contest.

This, of course, did not mean that the winning essayists were able to overturn altogether the ideological impulses governing the 2009 contest, but rather that they found ways to assert their own rhetorical purposes and devise discourse strategies within the given problematic. In doing so, they performed some of the key rhetorical work that was represented by the contest. As we have seen, they simultaneously conformed to specific expectations related to genre, purpose, and identification – while (1) taking up subject positions beyond those hailed by the contest announcement; (2) engaging in recontextualization of the contest discourse to integrate concerns not explicitly addressed by the prompt; (3) asserting their own rhetorical purposes; and (4) creating novel “intertexts” (Bazerman) using sources from both “center” and “periphery” in their work. By “rhetorical work,” then, I refer to the variety of ways in which these participants' rhetorical practices sought to influence the

construction of knowledge(s) and subjectivities in the contest – that is, the ways in which their writing contributed to the task of persuading diverse members of their audience, which included variously situated evaluators, sponsors, and publics.

To be sure, the essayists were not the only actors to perform key rhetorical work in the contest. On the contrary, the sponsors and organizers who devised various materials, such as the wording of the contest theme, the contest guidelines, announcement, and prompt – as well as the design of the main website on which these materials would appear, and the selection of hyperlinks – also performed rhetorical work via their attempts to guide participants’ research and writing processes. Related rhetorical work was involved in the design of the mission statements that guided institutional sponsors and other allied organizations. Multiple other members of the public, ranging from individual bloggers to institutions also conducted rhetorical work, through their decisions about whether to circulate information about the contest, and the kinds of paratextual information that they offered. Friends, writing coaches, and peer editors also likely offered feedback that shaped the essays, even though evidence of this kind of feedback is not presented by the essayists. The judges also performed rhetorical work via their design and interpretation of rubrics. And finally, rhetorical work was performed by those who read the winning essays and made use of them in various ways.

“Rhetorical work,” then, refers not only to the constitutive ways in which contest sponsors seek to direct the attention of writers, or to the ways in which they seek to position them as writing subjects, but also to the ways in which writers and other actors respond to this direction and positioning through rhetorical strategies of their own. This concept therefore refers to the mutually constitutive ways in which these participants’ rhetorical practices shape

or govern the construction of knowledge(s) and subjectivities in any given contest.

Understanding the “push and pull” of these elements helps us to conceptualize rhetorical agency not merely as a function of the ingenuity of sponsors or of individual writers, but rather as a kind of collective rhetorical agency that is made possible by the multiple actors who take part in any complex communicative ecosystem. And this recognition is part of the contribution that my project makes to our understanding of distributed rhetorical agency and the work it entails.

This emphasis on “work” that I am suggesting, therefore, underscores both the individual and collaborative effort that these dynamic systems imply, even though the forms of communicative labor may vary --depending on the various roles that participants play (whether that of sponsor, judge, contestant, or public audience, for example). This conceptualization, moreover, is consistent with Greene’s (2004) call for a reconceptualization of rhetorical agency that sees it “as a form of living labor” (189) -- one that needs to be understood as “communicative labor, a form of life-affirming constitutive power that embodies creativity and cooperation...in building social networks of all kinds” (201). Above all, rhetorical work is social; it is collaborative; and it is agentive, from this perspective; it presupposes the capacities of variously situated rhetors to make a difference in the world.

Such a conceptualization of rhetorical agency is, of course, central to the work of composition instruction. Without a notion that is based in the reality (and not merely the “illusion,” as Condit,⁸⁶ suggests) of an efficacious writing subject, the discipline of composition has no object, no motive, no *raison d’être*. This is a dilemma for writing scholars that can be

⁸⁶ Cited in Miller (2007)

seen in the debate regarding rhetorical agency that took place a decade ago between Geisler and Gunn and Lundberg in the pages of the *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. This debate makes clear how our pedagogical approaches have been deeply “problematized by the post-modern agent” (Geisler 2005, 109). In it, Gunn and Lundberg go so far as to liken the unwitting rhetorical agent to a player guiding a Ouija board. But, in response, Geisler insists that our theorizing must wrestle with the frequent uncertainty that rhetors experience “about who is moving the planchette” (Geisler 2005, 109). As Geisler suggests, challenges to the humanist subject present an opportunity not merely to reassert that subject but rather to “retheoriz[e] teaching” (110) from the perspective of an amplified view of rhetorical agency. This project offers just such an expanded view in relation to the contemporary essay contest, by accounting for the ways in which rhetors are positioned by discourse but also by acknowledging the possibilities they may have for agentic rhetorical action.

The Agency of the “Assemblage”

As Geisler suggests, one of the implications for teachers is that we need to help students understand that “[a]gency does not lie in the hands of any one persona at the writing table, but rather lies in the interaction among them. It is a complex interplay...” (112) And she suggests, “Balancing concern for educating students in rhetorical agency while at the same time developing a society that grants agency more broadly may be one of the major challenges for the future...” (2004, 15) To conceive of agency in this way, as ‘a complex interplay,’ is to move away from prior notions of the writer as an autonomous agent towards a theory of agency as a “confederation” or “agentic assemblage” (Bennett 2010, 51). It is to recognize the ways in

which rhetorical actors work together -- sometimes in concert, sometimes at odds -- but always in conjunction with others.

This idea of the agency of the assemblage is at the heart of the rhetorical work of contests. As Bennett suggests in the following definition of “assemblage,” building on the work of Deleuze and Guattari and Latour:

“Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements...living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies because some of the points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head; no one materiality...has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather, emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen...distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone” (23-24).

This definition offers a conceptualization of agency in which “ad hoc groupings of diverse elements” generate emergent effects. Bennett gives the example of “a blackout, a hurricane, a war on terror” (24)-- but one might also imagine the way in which the ‘vital energies’ of a school of fish or flock of birds change direction, often in unexpected ways. Because these energies are not distributed equally and certain points of contact “are more heavily trafficked than others” – no one of these actors can consistently “determine” or “govern” the effects of the group. In this way, it is possible to speak of an agency that emerges from the work performed by all actors involved in an activity system or assemblage.

In this project, I have attempted to suggest that such a conceptualization of agency can be useful for describing rhetorical acts. In particular, it can aid our theorizing about the complex communicative interactions that comprise the rhetorical work of essay contests and other

scenes of writing. Such a conceptualization helps us to understand agency as dispersed among multiple actors who conduct rhetorical work. It similarly aids us in theorizing the complexity of organizations (like the World Bank) that serve as institutional sponsors in contests, as well as to understand how essayists and public(s) likewise form collectivities and the constitutive processes that come into play. Additionally, it applies, as we have seen, not only to the multiple aspects or actors who take part in the contest as a cultural practice, but also in the multiplicity that is present in texts -- as reflected by the discursive moves that writers make as they negotiate subjectivity, genre, intertextuality, and purpose.

This reconceptualization can be useful in revitalizing the idea of rhetorical citizenship, a notion which contains an implicit presumption of agency. As Kock and Villadsen (2012) point out, both notions concern themselves with the constraints and possibilities of the rhetorical situation, as well as power, voice, and the “factors that condition a speaker’s access to speaking and being heard” (7). A theory of agency as rhetorical assemblage can assist us in identifying the tactics that are most useful to rhetors as rhetorical citizens variously positioned by discourse. In this way, the study of rhetorical action can be enhanced by the analysis of multiple, dynamic factors at work.

In addition, this theorizing, as Bennett suggests, not only recognizes the work of human collectives, but also takes into account the agency of collectives comprised of both human and non-human actors. This recognition allows the rhetorical critic to take into full account the materiality of various actors, including the digital networks upon which the human rhetorical agents in contemporary contests rely – whether for the distribution of announcements or guidelines that codify standards, goals, genres and prizes in a lasting and/or material way, or for

the global visibility for their work that the winning essayists could enjoy. Recognizing the ways in which computer technology and networks impact human communication is one of the key ways in which a re-theorization of agency (and of materiality) is taking place both within and beyond composition studies, and this recognition of the role of such networks helps us to see how agency is distributed in essay contests.

Rhetorical Democracy in a Digitally Interconnected and Globalized World

This broader view of agency therefore raises questions about the role of the Internet as a rhetorical actor – specifically with regard to the ways in which digital communications may serve to enhance or obstruct the aims of variously positioned rhetors. Today, as we have seen, many contest announcements are circulated, and winning submissions published, online. As a result, the rhetorical work of essay contests contributes to the production of subjectivities, values, ideologies, and knowledges – as could be seen in the World Bank’s appeal to “the next generation of green entrepreneurs.” It is important to recognize that the Internet plays no small part in the ways in which public audiences today are constructed by essay contests and the discourses they invent.

This conceptualization of distributed rhetorical agency also necessarily highlights the key role of circulation as a rhetorical strategy (Trimbur 2000, Eyman (2007). As Trimbur suggests, circulation or “delivery can no longer be thought of simply as a technical aspect of public discourse. It must be seen also as ethical and political – a democratic aspiration to devise delivery systems that circulate ideas, information, opinions, and knowledge and thereby expand the public forums in which people can deliberate on the issues of the day” (190). For Trimbur, the politics of circulation are intimately wrapped up in questions of rhetorical democracy, and

as Eyman additionally clarifies, “[c]irculation constitutes both the movement of a text through a network and its use by other actors once it has been delivered” (8). Both Trimbur’s and Eyman’s emphases on the dynamics of circulation thus raise awareness about this important aspect of persuasion, and Eyman additionally calls attention to the key role of networks and questions of reception by an audience. Attending to perspectives like these regarding the complexity of digital circulation is crucial if we are adequately to conceptualize rhetorical agency in the digital age.

Too, it is important to consider the role of the digital circulation of essay contests in light of their early history. As we have seen, the first essay contests emerged around 1880 as a way of encouraging interest in the colonial and expansionist enterprise -- first via contests sponsored by naval institutes and then by the Royal Colonial Institute in the U.K., a literary society whose principal purposes were to provide support to returned colonial functionaries and to generate interest among a new generation of those who would ‘serve.’ The colonialist impulse underwriting the first contests suggests that a similar, neoliberal and/or neocolonialist impulse may be present in some of today’s contests – perhaps especially those that appear to address and invoke a global entrepreneurial or “transnational capitalist class” (Dirlik 2006). But today’s contests differ 1) in that they no longer merely represent state actors but rather transnational and other types of institution; and 2) in that they have the use of the World Wide Web at their disposal to circulate and reinforce their ideas. Additionally, the range of organizations currently involved in the sponsorship of contests reveals that not all of these are hegemonic actors -- and, in fact, numerous contests might be described as actively working towards the development of “counterpublics” (Warner).

Hence, it is impossible to sum up the influence of the Web as pointing us in any one clear ideological direction. It is, in fact, more accurate to characterize the Web, as do Hawisher and Selfe (2000), “as a complicated and contested site for postmodern literacy practices...” (15), even though these authors admit that the Web is “not a culturally neutral or innocent communication landscape open to the literacy practices and values of all citizens”(15) and that it is “primarily oriented toward the values of the white, western industrialized nations that were responsible for designing and building the network and that continue to exert power within it...”(15) At the same time, they insist that the Web “is also far from totalizing in its effects...” (15) The Web not only reinforces the “governmental” aims of hegemonic actors, but, as they point out, it “also provides a site for transgressive literacy practices...that help groups and individuals constitute their own multiple identities...”(15) As such, it represents an uneven, clamorous, and disputed venue where rhetorical democracy remains a distant aspiration or ideal.

The upshot for composition instruction is this: in order to build the rhetorical awareness and participatory capacity of variously situated rhetors, it is important to develop instructional strategies that help prepare students for this complex, largely digital landscape. Teachers, from a variety of global locations, must assist students to recognize the presence of (local and transnational) sponsors, as well as the specific constructs of writing that are being sponsored (e.g. the essay, the problem-solution argument) on the Web and elsewhere. This type of awareness is necessary because the agendas implicit in these constructs create constraints and opportunities for variously situated rhetors. Such constructs can facilitate or inhibit the rhetorical agency of those who hope to participate as global netizens or “digital

citizens.” And by “participation,” I do not refer merely to the notion of digital citizenship that has been proposed by researchers like Mossberger et al (2007), who define “digital citizenship” simply in terms of their daily use of the Internet. This definition and others like it vastly underestimate the complexity of being able to participate, since meaningful participation not only requires regular Internet access but also opportunities and effective tactics for participating in an increasingly digital, globalized world. All of this is to say that teaching for digital citizenship therefore requires a much wider array of pedagogical tools than we currently have.

This question of rhetorical citizenship is of particular importance to writers from the global “periphery,” who must regularly grapple with ways to engage powerful discourses while still communicating their own purposes and agendas. Caribbean writer, Derek Walcott, for instance, has encouraged writers to challenge simplistic representations that portray writers from locations like the Caribbean as mere ‘mimic men’ (V.S. Naipaul’s term). Says Walcott, “[n]o gesture, according to this philosophy, is authentic, every sentence is a quotation, every movement either ambitious or pathetic, and because it is mimicry, uncreative” (259). Walcott and others find Naipaul’s limited appraisals of the agency of writers from the global periphery highly problematic because of the denial of agency that it reinforces. But Walcott turns the notion of mimicry on its head when he reminds us that “[m]imicry is an act of imagination, and, in some animals and insects, endemic cunning” (262). One of the challenges, then, for the full development of rhetorical citizenship is for rhetorical analysts and teachers to attend to the creativity of writers from peripheral locations, in order to share model rhetorical strategies and theoretical perspectives that can assist writers confronting the challenges of their rhetorical

positioning. Strategies like those employed by the winning essayists in the World Bank contest, for example, may be useful to writers responding to writing prompts in a variety of contexts, and the notion of distributed rhetorical agency calls our attention to the varied ways in which multiple actors “weigh in” on the problematic at hand.

From Theory to the Classroom: Teaching for Rhetorical Awareness

This discussion points to some very preliminary pedagogical reflections regarding the notion of distributed rhetorical agency. Teachers and schools, of course, play a key role in preparing rhetors to participate effectively in a digitally interconnected and globalized world. In a higher education context, the pedagogical implications of distributed agency are compatible with approaches that foster the development of a critical rhetorical awareness among students and others regarding the constraints and opportunities of rhetorical situations. As I have shown in this project, one of the dimensions of such awareness involves recognition of the agendas and influence of various sponsors of literacy. Commercial and partisan aims are particularly important to recognize in the context of higher education because of their tendency to substitute for, and or disrupt, civic and/or educational aims. It is therefore important to acknowledge the growing presence of corporate sponsors on college campuses and in classrooms. Giroux (2002), for example, calls our attention to the rising influence of commercial sponsors on college and university campuses, by explaining how -- at one of the country’s most highly-esteemed public universities, the University of California, Berkeley -- business representatives participate in key decisions about “how research funds are to be spent and allocated. Equally disturbing is the emergence of a number of academics that either hold stocks or other financial incentives in the very companies sponsoring their research” (433).

Giroux suggests that such trends indicate the erosion of the university “as both a public good and autonomous sphere for the development of a critical and democratic citizenry” (433). To educate students for rhetorical agency, then, we must prepare them to be alert to these kinds of behind-the-scenes influence.

At the University of Michigan, too, this corporatization has taken various forms. For example, Dow Chemical recently established Sustainability Fellowships and Distinguished Awards at the University’s Graham Sustainability Institute to fund research on environmental sustainability (“Graham Sustainability Institute”). As Giroux suggests, partnerships like these may seem attractive due to funding cuts to the public sector: “As universities become increasingly strapped for money, corporations are more than willing to provide the needed resources, but the costs are troubling and come with strings attached. Corporations increasingly dictate the very research they sponsor....”(433) This kind of corporate influence can be seen also, on a smaller scale, in the corporate presence in student services on campus, and, related to composition instruction, in the promotional access given to textbook publishers, for example. This corporate presence suggests the need for students, teachers, and administrators to have tools to critically assess the influence of these sponsors.

But the involvement of sponsors in the daily activities of the university is neither limited to highly visible activities nor to the influence of commercial entities. As Freedman and Medway (1994) suggest, “there is no escaping the facts of the power relations of the classroom, the shadowy presence of administrators, parents, and others and the potency of prior discourses that are unavoidably evoked and commented on even in texts which attempt innovation” (18). Although perhaps the word “shadowy” unnecessarily mystifies this influence,

these authors call our attention to the ways in which instructional agendas for writing and learning are always embedded in larger social ecologies. To make sense of this influence, Freedman and Medway call for pedagogies that take into account the tacit presence of other rhetorical actors – in particular, they call for instruction that is grounded in a rhetorical approach to genre inquiry.

Bazerman (1994), likewise, specifies some of the ways in which classroom learning is shaped by the presence of tacit actors, and he suggests that these influences are often manifest in classroom genres:

“The writing classroom is a complex forum. First it is encased in institutional beliefs....These imperatives are realized in requirements that mandate our courses...(and] are realized through genres of testing and standards, curriculum guidelines and goals, policies and record keeping. There are genres that flow from the surrounding institutions into the classroom to regulate it; there are genres within the classroom that carry out the mandate of the regulation; and there are genres that flow out from the classroom that represent the work and competence of teacher and student, thereby holding them accountable to institutional expectations” (26-7)

As Bazerman suggests, a rhetorical approach to genre inquiry is a valuable analytic tool for recognizing the complexity of institutional and social mandates that inform the work of composition instruction. Such an approach can help rhetors pay attention to some of the key distinctions among various kinds of organizational sponsors and their goals, and it can help both students and instructors make informed decisions about the kinds of literacy tasks in which they participate. Additionally, such an approach is implicit in the kind of rhetorical analysis that I have conducted related to contests.

Prompts as Powerful Mechanisms

One of the key ways in which a rhetorical approach to genre inquiry can assist students and teachers to make sense of the discourses present in the classroom is by sensitizing them to the constitutive power of prompts. Such an awareness is necessary because, as we have seen, writing assignments have the power to shape students' views of themselves and the knowledge they produce. This project's emphasis on the ways in which the World Bank prompt positioned essayists calls our attention precisely to the ways in which prompts elicit rhetorical identifications. It also serves as a model for those who would conduct this kind of rhetorical analysis themselves.

Bawarshi, too, provides a model in his book, *Genre and the Invention of the Writer*, in which he conducts a similar analysis of the rhetorical work of prompts. In his chapter entitled, "Sites of Invention," Bawarshi provides a thorough description of the many genres that inhabit first-year writing classrooms and insists that we recognize "the extent to which the prompt situates student writers within a genred site of action in which students acquire and negotiate desires, subjectivities, commitments, and relations...." (127) He says that "[o]ften teachers of writing overlook the socializing function of their writing prompts and consequently locate the beginnings of student writing too simply in the students rather than in the prompts themselves" (Bawarshi 130). As he points out, "every prompt has inscribed within it a subject position for students to assume in order to carry out the assignment" (132). Bawarshi presents several examples of prompts, in which students are encouraged to imagine themselves in particular roles, such as cultural anthropologist (135) or congressional aide (131), and, through

these, he demonstrates how “students read their way into the position of writer via our prompts” (130).

Each time that writers engage with a prompt, they must find ways of “recontextualizing the desires embedded in the writing prompt as their own self-sponsored desires in their essays” (14), says Bawarshi. These acts of recontextualization create opportunities for writers to exert agency in the act of writing. As he puts it, openings for rhetorical agency are therefore invented or enacted “at the nexus where prompt and essay meet” (14). Bawarshi therefore encourages us to reflect on the power of prompts, the genres towards which they guide us, and the subject positions that they invite students to inhabit. Teaching that promotes an awareness of how the language of prompts encodes expectations about the kind of person that the student is imagined to be --and the kinds of thinking and writing that will be valued by the teacher as audience – can help both students and teachers to be more attuned to questions of rhetorical agency.

Calls for a pedagogy of rhetorical awareness --and specifically, in Bawarshi’s case, one of “mak[ing] genres analytically visible” (141) -- therefore involve working closely with students to understand what they are being asked to do and to envision various ways of responding. White (2007), for example, suggests that students be coached to read essay prompts “with pen in hand” (29), so that, with the teacher’s guidance, they can “recognize and circle the key directions and consider what the words mean” (29). He suggests attending especially to the verbs and provides an extensive list of definitions for those that frequently appear in essay prompts. For example, he spells out the meaning of “Describe” as “requir[ing] specific detail” and “Analyze” as “taking something apart to see what it is made of” (29). Such rhetorically-

focused instruction draws on tools of discourse analysis to assist students to understand what they are being asked to do, as they consider their options about how they might respond. This level of attentiveness to the language in prompts can help students gain clarity about the constraints and opportunities of particular writing tasks. This, in concert with other rhetorically-focused activities, can help both the student and teacher to develop awareness of audience, context, and purpose. Various kinds of invention heuristics and “pre-writing” exercises, too, can help students clarify their goals as writers. These invention strategies might include discussions and writing assignments (like a writing history) that get students thinking about their own processes and purposes as writers. Short writing assignments and classroom discussions focused on helping students pay close attention to the rhetorical choices (both at the sentence level and at the level of argument) that experienced essayists make when they write can also contribute to the students’ ongoing development of rhetorical awareness.

Reflection on the Agendas Present in Prompts

To demonstrate how a pedagogy of rhetorical awareness might help students recognize the kinds of agendas present in prompts, I have developed the following set of questions which can be used to guide pedagogical reflection. Figure 5.1 contains a sample list of questions that can be used to spark reflection, whether in writing or in large or small classroom discussion. These questions are intended to help writers analyze writing prompts, whether those attached to essay contests or in school or other settings. They direct the attention of writers specifically to questions of sponsorship in relation to the goals of the task. Additionally, they are intended to help writers consider their rhetorical options by thinking about the audience they envision

for the assignment and how they both might meet the requirements of the assignment and make it serve their goals.

Reflection Questions for Writers of Essays

Read the prompt carefully, and underline specific words or phrases that assist you to answer the following questions:

- *What* is the prompt asking you to *do*?
- *Who* is the prompt asking you to *be*?
- Who has assigned or promoted this writing task?
- What goals have they identified related to your learning process?
- To what extent do the goals of the assignment mesh with your own purposes as a writer? Explain.
- What other groups or organizations (e.g. non-profits, foundations, government agencies, educational groups, or corporations) are sponsoring or co-sponsoring this writing event?
- Find the organizational mission of this sponsor, and paraphrase it here: _____
- In what ways does this organizational mission complement (or contradict) your own purposes as a writer? Write about this in your journal or on a separate sheet.
- What audience(s) do you envision for your essay?
- What would you like to communicate to this/these audiences?
- How might you meet the requirements of the assignment and make it serve your goals?

Figure 5.1 Reflection Questions for Writers of Essays

Teachers may, of course, add, subtract, or adapt questions from this list, based on the relevance of those questions to the particular writing task they are considering. When students are asked to consider the missions of organizational sponsors, teachers may wish to direct them to the “About Us” Tab, if they are dealing with a website, or to other promotional materials that the organization sponsoring the writing task has made available. Teachers might also talk

with students about several of the possible agendas that they might expect to find (civic, educational, commercial, or partisan, for example). And can offer other pedagogically useful examples, as they help students flesh out some of the differences between organizational types of sponsor (including non-profits, professional societies, universities, businesses, and agencies of government, for example).

Not only students but teachers as well need to develop strategies for the rhetorical analysis of their own prompts. This is because, as Gardner (2008) and others (White 2007; Gottschalk and Hjortshoj 2004) suggest, the design of writing assignments is one of the most demanding forms of writing that teachers do. Not only does classroom writing require that instructors understand the needs of their students as the principal audience for their prompts, but it also necessitates that they think through every element of their courses -- the readings that they assign, the discussions etc. -- with a view to the way in which they prepare students to succeed at the assigned writing tasks. Additionally, such an awareness demands that teachers carefully reflect on the kinds of values and communicative purposes that guide their assignments, as well as the needs of communities, disciplinary and otherwise, for whom students write. Teachers and others who design writing tasks might ask themselves, "How clearly have I articulated my goals for this assignment?" "How transparent are my aims for student learning?" for example. This kind self-reflection can lend greater intentionality and meaning to the instructional process.

Teachers (and others who craft writing tasks) may, additionally, find it useful to reflect on questions of sponsorship in relation to the writing tasks that they design or endorse. This kind of reflection may be especially useful for teachers who are considering the adoption of an

assignment that they have not designed themselves (e.g. one linked to an essay contest). If so, they may find it useful to consult self-reflection questions like the ones listed below. (See Figure 5.2.)

Reflection Questions for Writers of Prompts

Read the prompt carefully, and underline specific words or phrases that assist you to answer the following questions:

- What is the prompt asking writers to *do*?
- Who is the prompt asking writers to *be*?
- What are the learning goals that you hope to achieve by asking writers to engage in this writing task?
- What other groups or organizations (e.g. non-profits, foundations, government agencies, educational groups, or corporations) are sponsoring or co-sponsoring this writing event?
- Find the organizational mission of this sponsor, and paraphrase it here: _____
- In what ways does this organizational mission complement (or contradict) your own purposes as an educator? Write about this in your journal or on a separate sheet.

Figure 5.2 Reflection Questions for Writers of Prompts

These kinds of reflection questions can prompt conversations, too, between teachers and students, and they can be used to help not only individuals but also classroom communities gain greater familiarity with their own purposes for writing.

Communicative Ecosystems/ Distributed Agency

Ideally, the kind of rhetorical awareness that I am suggesting also involves making not only the genre of the prompt visible but also the entire activity system within which it

intervenes. McComiskey offers one example of such an approach, which he calls a “social process” (2000) approach to the teaching of composition. This approach makes use of heuristics to guide students through a process of inquiry that assists them to attend to what he calls “the cycle of cultural production, contextual distribution, and critical consumption” (20) in an advertising analysis unit. McComiskey asks students to analyze the ways in which advertising positions audiences to identify as rhetorical subjects, to consider the ways in which ads circulate, and to “write back” to the advertisers, editors, or consumers of the magazines in which they appear. In his course, he asks students to write position statements which offer them the opportunity to begin to “construct their own subject positions rather than passively accommodating or defensively resisting those offered to them (and authored for them) in a variety of media” (80). But future work to extend this “social process” approach into the analysis of digital environments is sorely needed because students remain, in many ways, unprepared to navigate the complicated tactics of persuasion that exist on the Web. Such efforts for pedagogical purposes might, for example, take as their starting point Eyman’s recent work on digital environments and eventually lead to a social process approach to the analysis of digital rhetoric.

Finally, the pedagogical approach that I am advocating suggests the need for students to experience firsthand the idea of distributed agency in the classroom. Such an experience requires fostering “liberatory” learning environments in which “everyone claims knowledge as a field in which we all labor” (hooks 1994 14). Writing classrooms are especially well-suited to such an approach because of the emphasis in many writing classrooms on collaborative learning. As Bruffee (1999) suggests, “Collaborative learning teachers tend to trust college and

university students to *govern themselves* in a context of substantive engagement, conversation, and negotiation” (89, *emphasis mine*). This view of learning insists on an attentiveness to micro-practices that reinforce collaboration, shared interpretive agency, and mutuality (Wallace and Ewald 2000), and it is one that is compatible with critical and feminist pedagogies, or, as hooks puts it, a vision of “education as the practice of freedom” (20). That is to say, this analysis endorses an approach that embraces a pedagogy of invention as social process and rhetorical work.

Implications for Writing Program Administration

Besides these pedagogical applications, the concept of distributed rhetorical agency also has important implications for Writing Program Administrators. Such a view invites the directors of writing programs to re-envision their roles, so that they place greater emphasis on collaboration and shared rhetorical agency. Administrators working in Writing Across the Curriculum Programs may find such an awareness particularly useful, since the effective integration of writing into all areas of the curriculum requires a shared sense of purpose and engagement on the part of all actors. This understanding is compatible with the work of Werder (2000), who suggests that rhetorical agency “resides in the dialectic interplay between actors” (14). Werder advocates an approach to Writing Program Administration that represents “the potential for effecting change based on the extent to which the collective resources, titles, and expertise of a particular situation are made available for the individual and common good” (14). This re-envisioning suggests a style of leadership that recognizes the multiple kinds of expertise and resources that all interested parties bring to the table, and it

implies that the project of writing across the curriculum is a collaborative effort that requires the participation and inventiveness of all those involved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the notion of distributed rhetorical agency that I have developed here has implications that reach far beyond the analysis of essay contests into the realm of writing pedagogy and writing program administration. As we have seen, essay contests offer a useful theoretical lens through which the social nature of composing is newly brought into view. Seeing the ways in which various actors perform the rhetorical work of contests can help us to visualize how systems of rhetorical activity position writers (often unevenly), and how variously positioned rhetors can nonetheless take action in ways that can be ‘recognized or heeded.’ As such, essay contests can be useful for the analysis of other, similarly complex, rhetorical ecosystems, and such an attentiveness to systems must be cultivated if students are to be empowered to participate effectively in an increasingly digital and globalized world. Such contests, because of their capacity to govern and constitute publics and public knowledge(s), call for the development of critical pedagogical and administrative approaches that acknowledge the complexity of contemporary literacy sponsorship. They call our attention to the ways in which meaning is negotiated in an array of environments, including the World Wide Web. Ultimately, because they make visible the ways in which writing is political and has the power to shape publics, these contests suggest the need for an “alert” kind of agency (Wysocki et al. 2004), informed by an awareness of “how our compositions only ever work within and as part of the already existing structures and practices” they engage (6).

Appendix A

Sponsoring Organizations by Type

Non Profit Organizations

ACT NOW! For a Better Papua New Guinea
Cornell Club of Rochester
Lions Club International
Chinese American Citizens Alliance
U.S. Naval Institute
Daughters of the Republic of Texas
Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks
Center for Alcohol Policy
Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc.
Knights of Columbus Council
GCSAA Environmental Institute for Golf
National Society of Sons of American Revolution
New Jersey Educational Association
Rotary International District 5300
The Williams Institute
Institute for Global Environmental Strategies
Compassion and Choices of Northern California
World Energy Forum
Istanbul Center
Ladies International Order of Hibernians, Inc.
School for Ethical Education, supported by Templeton Foundation
Abraham Lincoln Brigade
ACLU
Americanism Educational Leaders
NRA Civil Rights Defense Fund
Oakseed Ministries
National Center for Fathering
Center for International Private Enterprise
Intercollegiate Studies Institute
Charles S. Peirce Society
American Humanist Association
Gulen Institute Youth Platform
Worldwide Waldens
Veterans of Foreign Wars x2
American Association of Law Libraries, Legal History and Rare Books Special Interest Section
Washington Centerville Public Library
Bill of Rights Institute
United States Institute of Peace
Association for Women in Mathematics
Optimist International
Jane Austen Society of North America
Ayn Rand Institute
The National WWII Museum New Orleans
American Society of Human Genetics
The Independent Institute
United States Capitol Historical Society

The Lincoln Forum
The British Council, India
Fleet Reserve National Committee on Americanism-Patriotism
Society for the Development of Austrian Economics

Foundations

John Templeton Foundation
The Morris J. & Betty Kaplun Foundation
Holland & Knight Charitable Foundation (X3)
LIFE Foundation
Arnold P. Gold Foundation
National Park Foundation: The Official Charity of America's National Parks
Gravity Research Foundation
Freedom from Religion Foundation
Jewish Partisan Educational Foundation
Al-Rawiya
Wolf Foundation
Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees
Elie Wiesel Foundation
Kaiser Family Foundation
Costs of Care

Professional Groups

Society for Economic Anthropology
National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development
Virtual Mentor, the American Medical Association Journal of Ethics
American Bar Association Section of Family Law
American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution
American Psychological Association Teachers of Psychology in Secondary Schools (APA TOPSS)
Society of Plastics Engineers
Society of Professional Journalists
Association for Career and Technical Education

University-Affiliated Centers or Departments

Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies (University of Rhode Island)
The Dickens Project (UC Santa Cruz)
America's Freedom Festival at Provo, UT (Brigham Young University)
University of San Diego School of Leadership and Education Sciences
George Bush Presidential Library and Museum
American University Washington College of Law
University of Michigan, Literature, Science and the Arts Theme Semester
University of Texas at Austin

Agencies of Government

City of Arlington, TX Animal Services
New Hampshire Judicial Branch
Indiana Statehouse Tour Office and Indiana Center for the Book, an affiliate of the National Center for the Book in the Library of Congress
Brookhaven National Laboratory Office of Educational Programs
South Dakota Dept. of Agriculture
NASA
Historical Society of the Courts of the State of NY

Businesses

Federal Reserve Bank, Houston Branch
Olive Garden
Barnes and Noble
Ferring Fertility

United States Achievement Academy
Oregon Quarterly, the magazine of the University of Oregon
Ketchum Sun Valley Ski and Heritage Museum
Knoepfler Lab Stem Cell Blog
The Writer magazine
Growmark
Turkey Hill
Thomas Built Buses
Smithsonian Channel

Partnerships

Rachel Carson Center for Environment and Society, In Collaboration with Ludwig-Maximilians-Universitat Munchen, the British Council, International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations and the Consulate General of the U.S., Munich Germany

Bethesda Urban Partnership and *Washington Parent*

Howard County Library, in collaboration with Watson's Tin Box and Howard Co. Public Schools

South Carolina Dialogue Foundation, in partnership with CUICAR, Istanbul Center

Peace Islands Institute and PSEG Star Leger, Ebru TV

Jewish Community Relations Council, Friends of the New England Holocaust Memorial and the American Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors of Greater Boston, and many generous donors

Fairfax County Public Library and the For Love of Country Foundation

AMVETS and AMVETS Ladies Auxiliary

The Florida's Foundation and Florida Black History.com

The Naval Postgraduate School and the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security: Center for Homeland Defense and Security

National Foundation for Women Legislators and the National Rifle Association

Washington Regional Transit Authority, endowed by the Leslie Ebert Memorial Fund

San Diego County Water Authority, also sponsored by Boomers, Atlanta Laser Tag, San Diego Zoo, and Sea World

Krell Institute, NASA, Dept. of Energy Office of Science, Dept. of Energy Computational Science

Education Division of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in collaboration with the Center for SE Asian Studies at the University of Michigan

Foreign Affairs, a journal published by the Council on Foreign Relations in collaboration with the sponsorship of the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (60 member schools around the world)

EngineerGirl, a variety of corporate sponsors including Lockheed Martin, and the website a service of the National Academy of Engineering

Agriculture Council of America, various corporate co-sponsors

DuPont, other co-sponsors, and NAFTA

John H. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "generously supported by John Hancock Financial"

American Foreign Service Association and “two generous sponsorships” by Booz Allen Hamilton Strategy and Technology Consulting Firm, and the Semester at Sea

Foundational Questions Institute, with various corporate sponsors and *Scientific American*

SEVEN Fund, in partnership with the Washington D.C.-based Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (CIFA)

Ayn Rand Institute, supported by Liberty Institute and Mr. Vikram Bajaj

Rand McNally and *USA Today*

School Band and Orchestra Magazine, in conjunction with Alfred Publishing Co., Sabian Ltd, Woodwind & Brasswind and Yamaha Corporation of America

Individuals

Nicholas Kristof, in partnership with the New York Times Learning Network and *Teen Ink* magazine

Appendix B

Coding for Intertextual References: Example

NAME	REFERENCE	SOURCE	REASON	NOTES
Guillermo	"The Earth is our mother, she feeds us and she will receive us when we die."	Raramurí popular saying	To foreground the writer's sympathy with the Raramurí community and its ecological/spiritual beliefs	Opening with this quote (not cited) suggests its importance. Originally in Spanish. Caption is set apart from text; formatting calls special attention to the words that have a literary quality The words convey a worldview Footnotes begin at 17 – suggest that sections taken from larger piece of writing
17	Monarrez, Joel	<i>Public Health in Mexico 42:1</i>	As source of facts re: the Tarahumara	*Published in MX
18,19,20	"in the words of the German geographer, George Mayer" Cited in COSYDDAC(1999)	<i>The Forest Industry and Forest Resources in the Sierra Madres de Chihuahua</i>	A source of facts re: biodiversity in the Sierra Tarahumara and info re: a 1992 law that removed tariffs on forest products in MX	COMISIÓN DE SOLIDARIDAD Y DEFENSA DE LOS DERECHOS HUMANOS, A.C. Chihuahua, Chihuahua, México TEXAS CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES Austin, Texas, U.S.A. *
21	Ricker, Martin	<i>The Role of Mexican Forests in the Storage of Carbon to Mitigate Climate Change(2008)</i>	As source of bleak statistics re deforestation	Improperly cited UNAM publication *
22	Molina, Mario	<i>La calidad del aire en Mexico: Un enfoque integral (2005)</i>	Source of bleak statistics re: emissions in MX	Edited volume, mistakes in title and author, published by a Mexican press and available on Amazon *

<p>25, 26</p>	<p>Drought Research Center</p> <p>State Civil Protection Unit</p>	<p>Planeta Azul</p> <p><i>Climate Alert in Chihuahua</i> (2007 online report)</p>	<p>Source of info: re drought <u>caused by</u> climate change</p>	<p>Govt agencies named in text</p> <p>Article found on journalistic website for the dissemination of environmental info</p> <p>direct quote gives even</p>
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Appendix C

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