# "Making Restitution Matter: Engaged Arts, Public Collaboration and the Matter of Social Relations"

*This series of short essays is the result of a collaborative writing process between symposium presenters Ray Hsu and Brian Ee and UBC students Winnie Chick, Maki Sumitani and Jillian Steger with the involvement of guest editor Carla Benzan. During the 2009 Graduate Student Symposium, postdoctoral fellow Ray Hsu and his collaborator Brian Ee presented on the Reading Week Project: a collaborative project between a local restitution-based elementary school and the University of British Columbia. In their contribution to WRECK, the complications and potentiality of collaboration is explicated. In the first essay, Hsu discusses his past experience of collaboration in a Wisconsin prison, followed by a short description of the principles of restitution-based pedagogy and the Reading Week Project by Brian Ee. These essays are followed by three short pieces by UBC undergraduate students who participated in the Reading Week Project. In the final essay Ray Hsu reflects upon the students' contributions and their implications for collaborative praxis.*

Ray Hsu
### "Prison and the 'Public' University"

Several years ago, I facilitated a creative writing workshop at a Wisconsin prison, where eight to twelve men came to write every Monday. Marianne Erhardt and I started the group at the beginning of the academic year. Marianne was an MFA student in poetry, while I was a doctoral candidate in English literature.[1] That is all our writers really knew about us. Even though we all brought in our own writing to share every week, institutional wisdom has it that we do not share personal details. We knew little about our fellow writers, even though we all wrote together.

Every Monday, we brought in a piece of reading to spur our writing. I once brought in Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," which was provocative because some of our writers were Vietnam War veterans. We then free-wrote from a prompt. We worked with a colleague, Andrew Hirshman, who hosted a literary radio show on WSUM 91.7. He was excited by the idea of featuring our writers reading and performing their work, so we recorded two episodes over two years. But we devoted the bulk of our weekly meetings to sharing and critiquing our work, including the writing of Marianne and I. As our writers pointed out, we were also part of this group.

But I can't forget that even within the prison, I am also an agent of the university. In its manual for community partners, my university defined "service-learning" as "a credit bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility."[2] In a meeting with department instructional coordinators, I learned that service-learning exists within an economy that defines campus students as primary recipients of knowledge and prisoners as secondary, a form produced by funding. By way of explanation, teaching assistants at the UW-Madison typically have nineteen students. The instructional coordinator said that if I planned to have equal numbers of inside and outside students—say, ten campus students and ten prison learners—then I would have to seek other sources of funding in order to make up for the tuition shortfall of nine campus students. An unviable alternative that would have kept equal classroom numbers would have been to teach a thirty-eight student classroom with nineteen campus students (to receive full funding) and nineteen prison learners, violating my teaching assistants' union contract. Although the nineteen-student cap is intended to keep teaching assistants from having excessive workloads, this cap also highlights who gets to count as those nineteen deserving of my paid labor and who qualifies only for my unpaid "volunteer" labor.

The reason why the discourse of service does not quite fit is because it does not offer much room for any critical stances one might have to the system of service itself. As critical anthropologists point out, the critical distance we once thought necessary to write objective accounts may be illusory. So how can we judge systems in which we participate? How can we critique systems in which we are agents?

The problem of who gets to count as a legitimate subject of knowledge in this classroom is a matter of funding and always of equity to teachers and students. The educational coordinator at the correctional institution where I volunteer agrees that an integrated classroom produces more "red tape" than the service-learning model, citing funding problems to explain why incarcerated learners would not be able to enroll in the course. If correctional institutions and college campuses share the common goal of producing citizens, then how does state funding discipline different citizen-subjects? Race and class disparities between incarcerated subjects and university subjects carry over into the job prospects of graduates

from both institutions: state money produces and differentiates the labor force through these institutions. Correctional institutions produce people who have lower value in labor markets than those university campuses produce, although incarcerated people may also be college graduates. State funding produces and limits the forms of civic engagement to which subjects have access.

Humanities graduate students are normally only trained to be engaged with academic communities. The Humanities Exposed (HEX) Program, however, offered me the institutional support I needed to work in a prison. Why are the public spheres in which academics find themselves so separate from those of the (so-called) Community? This is how the Program described itself during one of the years in which I participated: "HEX is based on the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships in which graduate students create projects directly related to their research, and which also provide a tangible benefit to a community partner… HEX projects identify community needs and form sustainable, ongoing relationships to address those needs."[3] What has HEX enabled and disabled? The Program enables a number of points of access to "community" and university stakeholders and also offers the opportunity to ask this question: how can we co-create something within this particular space?

A primary limitation of the HEX model involves funding and conceptions of authorship and ownership: it requires one to make her or his own project rather than contribute to existing ones. In other words, I could not help out with community groups, I had to produce something new that could be called "my own project." This approach has limitations, especially since many community groups have good structures but lack the labor to do it. So, HEX was uncomfortable with my simply "helping out". I felt pressure to develop a "project." One can see why this would be important to HEX at the level of funding: it does not look particularly exciting to potential funders that those one funds simply help out with daily operations rather than produce something "tangible" and "of benefit" as the rhetoric of the HEX definition has it. This requirement also explains why HEX scholars are encouraged to produce concrete products to cap off their projects: these products can be showcased when asking for further funding.

If Humanities work is done within an organization, then it sells its operations based on the commitments and needs of that organization. If that organization is a public university, then the Humanities, like other disciplinary groupings, sells its operations to the state and increasingly to other interests as states cut back on their share.

We do no justice to the concept of "public service" by merely contrasting public universities to private universities, a reductive gesture to which public universities often resort. Public universities and private

universities share overlapping interests even as they differ on others. The ideal of a "free public voice" is contradictory: a voice is structured by its public. This is not to say that a voice is merely a mouthpiece that parrots its public, but that the most radical move a voice can make is to challenge the structure of "the public" itself. This move is a kind of sabotage, since doing so threatens (and produces new conditions for) the very public that offers "the voice" its voice. The public is historical — that is, it has its time and place. The voice takes its time and place and looks forward to a new one, one that it helped create.

## Brian Ee
### "The Reading Week Project"

During the Reading Week Project the present author, eighteen UBC undergraduate students and a postdoctoral fellow and poet, Ray Hsu, spent three days assisting teachers in activities at our local Vancouver elementary school, where we employ the ideology of restitution-based pedagogy in our teaching program. Restitution is a process by which youth learn self-discipline. It is based on the principle that people are internally motivated. We behave to reflect the pictures we have created in our head of how we want to be in the world. We may think we behave to get items we value or even to gain compliance from others. However, these goals are always related to how we see ourselves in relation to these people and things. We as adults are not in the habit of talking to youth about the person they see themselves being, because we have habitually focused on changing their behavior, on making them conform, rather than on their self-evaluation. Restitution focuses first on the person. We then ask the person to self-assess their behavior and how it affects others.

In February of 2009, Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh teachers and students who were taking part in UBC's Reading Week Community Service Projects, led a series of group-based projects. In collaboration with these guests, our elementary school students developed a creative piece to display/present in a variety of writing activities: video, photography, slide shows/power point, drama/theatre, poetry, cartooning, and songs. Linked by the theme of 'survival,' these collaborative projects were then shared with the whole school.

*Presented below are the impressions of select UBC student commentators who describe their experience working with secondary-school students within a restitution-based paradigm. These are followed by Ray Hsu's reflection on their insights in relation to the possibilities of collaboration.*

## Maki Sumitani
*UBC undergraduate student (First year, undeclared major)*

During my first year living in British Columbia, I tended to spend the majority of my time on the campus at the University of British Columbia (UBC). One thing I enjoyed about the Reading Week Project was that it gave me an opportunity to get a glimpse of a different part of life in B.C.

Two memories from the Reading Week Project stand out as different from my previous personal experiences. For the first time, I was introduced to the many issues faced by virtually all inner-city schools. Although problems such as low income and single-parent families are not unfamiliar subjects, it was very unexpected to find these issues as one of the top subjects to discuss in introducing the schools. It was also the first time that I heard someone identify themselves as First Nations. Something that was only an abstract idea suddenly became more concrete, and easy to relate to, when a girl spoke out very directly with a proud smile, "I'm First Nations."

After spending three full days in the school, I soon came to notice more similarities than differences between students I've met in my life, and the students I met during the Reading Week Project: both face the challenges of group work, express differing motivations for working on a project, laugh at lunch time, and run out as soon as recess starts. Surrounded by such children, I almost felt as if I was back in my own elementary school. As the number of familiar faces gradually increased, the larger issues of "students of inner-city schools" or "members of the First Nations community" were not on my mind when working with the students. Instead, it became more important for me to get to know each individual I met over my Reading Break.

## Jillian Steger
*UBC undergraduate student (4th year, Political Science and English)*
### "Social Media as a Site for Togetherness"
When we look around us we see giant billboards plastered with the latest celebrity's face begging us to buy the newest skin cream; later, while watching the evening news, we are bombarded by the destruction and degradation of our society. The question is whether this media can really be a site for positive social change. A new phenomenon is taking the world by storm: groups such as "Journalists for Human Rights" are showing the import of social media – media with the purpose of producing good results and promoting togetherness.

At Grandview we learned that media can be constructive; we used it to promote a social message about caring about one another, rather than just the things we buy. These uses of media impact our construction of our identity, yet offer substantially more hope for togetherness than the

alternative. The difficulty and potential promise of "social media" can be seen in my experience with the Division Two students at Grandview. This experience was anything but easy. The task given to this Division was to create a commercial promoting the message of belonging. Some group members wanted to be in the limelight, while others did not want to participate. By the end of day one, my group had very little done and we were worried that we would not complete the project on time. At this stage, we were not a reflection of our group topic, "belonging," but were instead being our individual selves and could not agree on what we wanted to do for the commercial. However, by the last day at Grandview the mood of the group had shifted. Everyone finally began to take their place in the group dynamic. Some chose to be behind-the-scenes, while others chose to be the main actors. In the end we created a splendid commercial that reflected a new kid in school trying to fit in at her new school.

This idea of belonging was carried on in the rest of my experiences at Grandview. As a group leader, I really felt as if I belonged at Grandview when we, as UBC students, made a video about survival reflecting our experiences at the school. This video, although it was about survival, could also fall into the theme of belonging, as we became a part of the Grandview tapestry by creating a video just like the Division Two students.

The theme of belonging was also reflected in the bright red Grandview gym shirts that we bought on the last day at Grandview. We had everyone sign these shirts, from our fellow group leaders to the students at Grandview. These t-shirts were the final puzzle piece in helping us belong at Grandview, as they were something that we could keep that showed us that our time at Grandview had really mattered. They were a visible representation of what mattered most, the relationships and connections we made with one another.

In addition to belonging, there were many other themes we reflected upon during the week, including "power, fun, freedom and survival." At Grandview, we realized that we could have "fun" releasing our inner poets with the kindergarteners as they put up their signs and did hand signals in front of a large group. We found that we could promote a social message through song to "learn together to get along" as we sang and went crazy with the Division Seven students.[4] We looked at photographs and helped the Division Four students write poems about how they could "survive." We also created a series of photographs with the Division Five students that helped us explain the basic necessities needed to survive.

All in all, my experience of Grandview helped me to make friends with my fellow group leaders, and it helped me to learn that I could truly make a difference and belong again in elementary school, even if it was just for three short days.

Winnie Chick

*UBC undergraduate student (BA Psychology, 2009; entering Faculty of Education, 2009)*

The Red Shirt
By: Winnie Chick

Community learning can be found on a red shirt.

We start with a school:



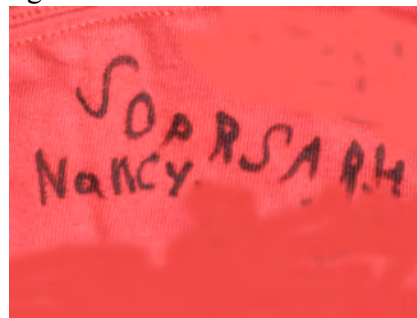…and we fill it with unique individuals, all sharing the same pride and passion.

How do we leave our mark in the community?

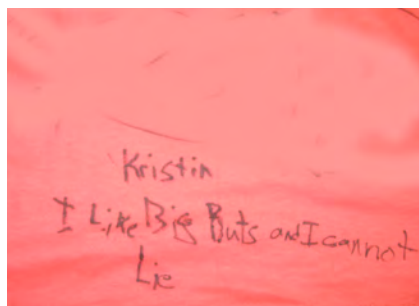By putting a smile on someone's face.



By making an effort.

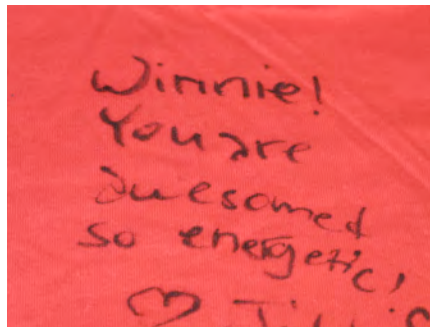(this is Nancy's attempt at writing "Superstar")



By staying true to ourselves.

By demonstrating creativity.

By offering
words of
kindness.

By being
a friend.

Community learning is a collaborative effort - all names in Sharpie stand out equally.  This kind of education goes beyond the margins of an essay, the confines of the classroom, the formalities of academics.  Signatures scrawled on my back and growing from my chest to my ribs, rooted in a living process…we claim ownership to our work, and we bring it to life.  There's no set font, no size limitations – feel free to write or draw on a diagonal.  What university thesis could I wear to show that I was a part of something special?  For Reading Week 2009, I learned about my role in my community, I made a difference, and the red shirt says it all.

Ray Hsu
**"Collaboration and Collective Practice
at Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh"**

Where do I live and where do I write? I write this contribution near Main and 39th in a café built on unceded Coast Salish territory. Like many students and faculty, I spend much of my time on campus. I even live in a residential college that houses many graduate students and faculty. My campus is geographically isolated from much of city life. In fact, such isolation is part of the university's creation myth: in 1922, discontent with inadequate facilities at Vancouver General Hospital, students marched through downtown Vancouver and on to Point Grey campus, where they occupied the unfinished Science building and declared the campus theirs. "The Great Trek," university brochures call it. The Trek is not only mythological; it is also geographic and social. The campus occupies some of the most expensive land in the country, only a few miles from one of Canada's most diverse communities. It's only a few miles, but many at my university consider it a long bus ride and will never witness the vibrance and spirit of its inhabitants.

Over a period of three days, UBC students worked on arts programming with students and teachers at Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh Elementary School. Across different grades (or "Divisions") across different media, including music, poetry, video, visual art. The UBC students made a video around the concept of "Survival" that drew from one of the precepts of restitution-centred pedagogy.

We also worked across different social and political categories. Maki reflects on the question of what it means to meet someone who identified proudly with a social/political/cultural category. I am struck by how she acknowledges the complexity of a human being, a complexity that exceeds categories. Yet these categories allow us to make sense of this complexity by relating us to others.

Such are the difficult questions around identity. Each morning, UBC students reflected on the "challenges of group work," as Jillian aptly puts it, on what it meant to share across "different motivations for working on a project." It was as if, as Maki puts it, "I was back in my own elementary school," as if back at some point prior to post-secondary division of labour. What did it mean to share goals? Ours was an experiment in collectivity, or what Jillian calls "the idea of belonging." She points out that the terms of belonging shifted. Who wanted to participate, who didn't, what constituted "proper" participation: all of these changed over time.

But what did we collaborate over? To what shared texts did we turn in order to make sense of our experiences? Both Winnie and Jillian turn to our red shirts, emblazoned with the Grandview/Uuqinak'uuh Elementary crest. These shirts were perhaps the most revealing documents: they turned us into texts. Or perhaps more accurately, they showed us that we were already texts, rewritten by many hands. While our identities are written across our faces and lips in many ways that were beyond our control, but these shirts testified to many of the ways we could participate in the writing of ourselves. Jillian calls these red shirts "the final puzzle piece." Which invites the questions: What was the puzzle? The shirts revealed an underlying puzzle, a broader pattern of which we found ourselves a part. We handwrote names onto each other, illustrated them, and communicated across our bodies. We spoke to each other across the shirt.

By wearing these texts, we wear the marks of others and embody collective practice: "From my chest to my ribs," Winnie writes, "rooted in a living process." The shirt frees us from the grids of lined paper we find in the classroom. Instead, the shirts remind us of summer camp and other spaces between and beyond spaces of institutionalized knowledge. These shirts remind us of a different kind of reading that attends to the hands of many authors, a reading that looks beyond sole authorship towards a solidarity among many. The shirts remind us that we can embody solidarity: "we bring it to life," as Winnie puts it. By putting solidarity into practice, we animate it. In doing so, as Jillian points out, we also resist for a moment the practices and institutions that idealize the individual.

If the red shirt proposes collaborative writing as one alternative to sole authorship – the primary mode of university writing – then it also poses a challenge to expository academic prose and the single-authored essay as the gold standards of university reward. Let this collaborative essay work in a similar spirit by bringing different voices toward shared goals and by bringing solidarity to life.

**(Endnotes)**

[1] "Special thanks to Le Panoptique for allowing the partial republication of Ray's longer article which can be found at http://www.lepanoptique.com/sections/arts-litterature/who-owns-a-name-funding-publics-in-prison-and-in-the-humanities/.

[2] University of Wisconsin. "Service-Learning and Community-Based Research: Manual for Community Partners." <<http://www.morgridge.wisc.edu/community/documents/Community%20manual.doc.pdf>> Accessed 1 September 2009.

[3] Center for the Humanities. "HEX: The Humanities Exposed Program." <<http://www.humanities.wisc.edu/programs/hex/>> Accessed 5 June 2007.

[4] 'To Learn together to get along' was a line from a version of "Lean on Me" written by a student at Grandview.