

Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



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CBW SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP REORGANIZES AT CCCC

A reorganizational meeting of the Conference on Basic Writing (CBW) is scheduled for Friday, March 18, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in St. Louis. CBW published a newsletter and met annually at CCCC from 1982 to 1986, and we have missed it. We hope to reestablish this special interest group as a forum for discussing issues and organizing activities of special interest to teachers and researchers who work with basic writers.

The session will feature a panel and discussion based on Bartholomae and Petrosky's provocative new book, *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* (review elsewhere on this page). Panelists, all contributors to the book, include Nicholas Coles, Marilyn DeMario, Glynda Hull, Mariolina Salvatori, and Susan Wall. You needn't have read the book to get a lot out of the discussion—but do read it if you can.

All those interested in reviving CBW, whether or not they can be present at CCCC, are urged to return the enclosed membership form with five dollars dues to help cover the costs of future

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CONFERENCE ON BASIC WRITING

A Special Interest Group of CCCC

Meets on Friday,
March 18, 6:30 to 7:45
in the Frontier Room
Clarion Hotel

Wine and cheese will be served.

Review of *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*

David Bartholomae and Anthony R. Petrosky, eds. *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*, 1986. Heineman-Boynton/Cook, 70 Court Street, Portsmouth, NH 03801. (603) 431-7894. \$13.50.

Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts is an account of what one group of talented and creative teachers has done to develop an intellectually challenging course for basic readers and writers. The course, designed by David Bartholomae, Anthony Petrosky, and their colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh, is a major departure from what is offered as basic writing in most programs. And this book, describing the course, is a major contribution to both our theory and our practice.

Basic Reading and Writing is a course designed by visionaries, taught in ideal circumstances, and supported by a committed academic dean. The course, integrating work on reading and writing, meets in two-hour sessions, three times a week. In outward form, and by design, it most resembles a graduate seminar: fifteen students gathered around a conference table with their two teachers focusing for the semester on a single theme, such as "growth and change in adolescence" or for older evening students, "work." The discussion centers on the writings of the students themselves, as they grapple with sub-

stantial readings of complete books. For the "growth and change" version of the course, these have included Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory*, Friendenberg's *The Vanishing Adolescent*, and Mead's *Coming of Age*.
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CBW Reorganization, continued

newsletters and communications.

Is a special interest group for basic writing really necessary? From our perspective, attention to basic writing issues at our national professional gatherings seems to be diminishing. Yet the number of basic writers is not diminishing, and their special needs are not always addressed in the current wisdom about writing instruction—wise though that may be in other respects. We hope that this special interest group can help build a bridge between teachers and researchers in the area of basic literacy and writing skills.

We note that our meeting has been scheduled for the cocktail hour on Friday night, from 6:30 to 7:45 PM, after a long day of meetings that promise to be highly stimulating. (See list of basic writing sessions on page 6.) To make up for this unhappy scheduling, we will serve wine and cheese and have a party of our own. Do join us. Those attending the session may want to go out to dinner as a group afterward, as has been done in the past. Come and meet a group of colleagues who toil in the same vineyard.

Carolyn Kirkpatrick
York College, CUNY

CBW newsletter is published twice a year, in the spring and fall, by the Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of the Conference on College Communication and Composition. We welcome manuscript submissions and direct authors to the Request for Submissions on page 4. Membership in the Conference on Basic Writing is \$5.00 per year and includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore County, Maryland 21237.

Editors: Peter Dow Adams
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

Review of *Facts*, continued

Age in Samoa. The writings consist of 25 assignments, about half of which are revisions of earlier papers. Students also produce reading journals and write responses to the readings.

The danger in organizing this book around the detailed description of such an ideal course is that readers may dismiss it as impractical in their own settings. How many of us have deans willing to fund such a program—or willing to allow the English faculty to teach basic reading, a subject for which they are not “prepared”?

And this book, describing the course, is a major contribution to both our theory and our practice.

However, to let such considerations obscure our appreciation of the valuable particulars in this book would be a mistake. Its two major assertions deserve our attention: first, the proposition that, if we want to transform basic readers and writers into expert readers and writers, we should have them read and write as experts, not as novices; second, the cogent and convincing argument that instruction in reading and writing should be integrated.

Most approaches to teaching novices have the novice work on scaled down versions of the expert task. Piano students learn first to play scales, not symphonies; swimmers learn first the flutter kick, not the butterfly stroke; carpenters make boxes before they make houses. Writing teachers have tended to follow the same strategy: we have students complete drills and exercises, or we have them write paragraphs or simple five-paragraph essays, before we allow them to do real writing.

Bartholomae and Petrosky reject this skills model of literacy education. As they see it, “There was no good reason to prohibit students from doing serious work because they could not do it correctly. . . . There was no good reason to take students who were not fluent readers and writers and consign them to trivial or mechanical work in the belief it would somehow prepare them for a college education. It would make more sense, rather, to enroll these students in an exemplary course—a small seminar where students meet to read, write, and talk about a single problem or

Continued on page 3.

Review of *Facts*, continued.

subject—and to provide the additional time and support they needed to work on reading and writing while they were, in fact, doing the kinds of reading and writing that characterize college study." (ii)

Instead of asking students to perform only very simple versions of writing tasks which doom them to predictably disappointing results, the Pittsburgh program has them attempt to write mature essays on mature themes, after having read extensively in mature texts. The course materials included in *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* demonstrate dramatically how much imaginative and thoughtful teachers can do to devise reading and writing assignments that encourage students to enter the world of academic discourse, to become, as the authors put it, experts in a "freshman version of an academic discipline."

The argument for integrating reading and writing permeates *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*. Informed throughout by reader-response theory, it rejects the idea that reading is an attempt to identify the meaning that resides in the text (and the related pedagogy that focuses on acquiring information and has students practice reading for main ideas, topic sentences, and the like). Rather, the reading of complex texts is presented as a rich intellectual activity. Bartholomae and Petrosky point out that no one remembers an entire text; what we remember is our construction of meaning from a text, and getting students to realize this and to make effective constructions is a major focus of the course. Student readers are encouraged to make their own meaning as they read; this relieves them of their greatest anxiety—that they can't remember what they have read. And again, the sample course materials are a major contribution to the field.

Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts, besides a careful explanation of the theory and design of the course, presents varying perspectives and research reports from five of the people who taught it. Their "reports from the field" help create a clearer understanding of what actually takes place in the classroom day by day. They also raise some questions and problems which suggest that compromises may be necessary with the flat rejection of the "skills" approach.

Marilyn Demario points out that, "near the end of the term . . . we speak more directly about rules and conventions of academic discourse" (97). Glynda Hull, in an excellent essay on error, pro-

poses that our chief task is to "teach a student to edit, that is, how to approximate what it is that we do when we edit. . ." (216). Professor Hull then suggests that "sometimes it is necessary to step aside from a student's paper to discuss verbs in the abstract in order to say why some verbs can end in -ed while others can't" (220). At another point, she reports that "[s]ome instruction can, of course, be provided *en masse*," although she finds herself doing less of this each year (221).

In short, while most of the book argues for im-

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mersing students in real writing, the kind experts do, in the sections dealing with error, there is a recognition that some work with the "novice" topics of grammar and punctuation may also be necessary. And as for reading, what about the student who really does need help with some of the basic "skills" like vocabulary, use of prefixes and suffixes, or even word attack skills? (There is some suggestion in this book that most Pitt students may be beyond this level.)

These are not mere quibbles; I wish that *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* were more balanced in its assertions and advice. In its attempt to encourage more mature tasks for basic writers, it overstates its case and almost implies that no work appropriate for novices should take place in basic writing or reading classrooms. There is a danger of the pendulum swinging too far—from courses that teach basic writers only by having them perform novice activities to one that insists they perform only expert tasks.

But perhaps such excesses should be excused. After all, *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* is a revolutionary book that proposes major breaks with past approaches and deserves to have a significant effect on how all of us teach basic writing in the future. To accomplish this revolution, perhaps some excess is understandable.

Peter Dow Adams
Essex Community College
Baltimore, Maryland

A WORD FROM THE FOUNDERS OF CBW

The Conference on Basic Writing Skills began in 1980, at the CCCC annual convention, when Chuck Guilford posted a sign-up sheet on the message board at the Washington Hilton. Eventually, four sheets filled with names of people interested in starting a professional organization for teachers of basic writing. With Lynn Troyka's advice and support, the organization began to take shape as a special interest group of CCCC. Mailing lists were typed, labels addressed, a session was proposed and accepted for the 1981 conference in Dallas. With the generous cooperation of Sarah D'Eloia Fortune, arrangements were worked out whereby CBWS would help solicit subscriptions for the *Journal of Basic Writing*. In a short time, the group grew to over 175 members from almost every state and Canada.

What we lacked in formal organization and administrative experience, we made up for with an almost feverish belief in the importance of our mission. We were taking up the challenge articulated so eloquently and forcefully by Mina Shaughnessy in "Diving In," her call for basic writing teachers to make a professional commitment to their work, a commitment as firm and serious as the commitments made by colleagues with other academic specialties. With Shaughnessy's example and our own acute awareness of the need for exactly that kind of scholarly work, we began to talk to one another, exploring opportunities for graduate study in basic writing, attempting to chart directions for future research, and offering support and guidance to others who, like us, had been dropped unprepared into basic writing classrooms with little sense of how to negotiate the bewildering maze of problems that we encountered.

In 1982, the organization's home had moved with Chuck Guilford from Kansas State University to Boise State University, and the following year, Karen Thomas (now Uehling) succeeded Chuck as chair. With Rick Leahy, Jay King, and other members of the BSU English Department, we began publishing the *Newsletter*. Eight issues went out from 1982 to 1986. Karen Uehling's interview with Sondra Perl, which appeared in our first two issues, addressed both the theory and practice of an ideal basic writing class. The *Newsletter* also contained surveys, calls for papers, announcements, and information about the meetings at CCCC.

We sponsored six such meetings. Under the able direction of our program chairs—especially Andrew Moss, Mary Kay Harrington, and William A. Stull—meetings took shape on basic writing for the 80's, graduate programs in writing, what a basic writing course should cover (by textbook authors), challenging the basic writer, critical thinking, and new directions in basic writing instruction. Although our time slot competed with the publishers' cocktail parties, it was not uncommon to see 50 or more in attendance. After the CBWS meetings, all interested persons went out together for dinner and conversation. Particularly memorable was our dinner in San Francisco (1982) when about fifteen of us sat on the floor in a Japanese restaurant and discussed basic writing.

In the summer of 1986, Karen Uehling went on leave, and CBWS was in need of a new home. We are pleased that Professors Peter Adams of Essex Community College and Carolyn Kirkpatrick of York College, CUNY, are willing to provide that home. We urge you to support them by submitting material for the *Newsletter*, by participating in sessions at CCCC, and by keeping in touch. Basic writing is too important not to have a thriving professional organization. We extend our gratitude and best wishes to Peter and Carolyn.

Chuck Guilford and Karen Uehling
Boise State University

REQUEST FOR SUBMISSIONS

The *CBW Newsletter* invites submissions on all subjects related to teaching or research with basic writers. Submissions should follow the current MLA style manual and should conform to the NCTE Guidelines for Non-Sexist Language.

Two copies of typed manuscripts should be mailed to either of the following addresses:

Peter Dow Adams	Carolyn Kirkpatrick
English Department	English Department
Essex Community College	York College, CUNY
Baltimore, MD 21237	Jamaica, NY 11451

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND RESEARCHERS OF BASIC WRITING

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

The major journal for those of us teaching basic writers has for years been the *Journal of Basic Writing*. Recent changes have polished the format and widened the readership of this major journal. Truly, no basic writing teacher should be without it. Subscriptions are \$8.00 for one year and \$15.00 for two. A valuable collection of back issues is available at \$4.50 each. Subscribe from *Journal of Basic Writing*, Instructional Resource Center, CUNY, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

A SOURCEBOOK FOR BASIC WRITING TEACHERS

Besides *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue, another recent book deserves attention: Theresa Enos, editor, *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* (Random House, 1987). This rich compendium, nearly 700 pages of articles, some classics and some written for this collection, should be on every basic writing teacher's shelf—right next to *Errors and Expectations*. Contributing editors were Lynn Troyka, David Bartholomae, and Andrea Lunsford; the list of contributors is long, containing old friends and new, and the range of articles is impressive. To cite just a few is certainly to slight others of equal interest and importance, but we provide this partial list to suggest something of the range of this remarkable collection:

David Bartholomae, "Writing on the Margins: The Concept of Literacy in Higher Education."

Robert J. Connors, "Basic Writing Textbooks: History and Current Avatars."

Karen Greenberg, "Research on Basic Writers: Theoretical and Methodological Issues."

Glynda Hull, "Constructing Taxonomies for Error (or Can Stray Dogs Be Mermaids)."

Elaine Lees, "Proofreading as Reading, Errors as Embarrassments."

Andrea Lunsford, "Politics and Practices in Basic Writing."

Sondra Perl, "The Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers."

Sandra Stotsky, "Teaching the Vocabulary of Academic Discourse."

Lynn Quitman Troyka, "Defining Basic Writing in Context."

In addition, Sally Harrold's three detailed bibliographies (a full bibliography of scholarship on basic writing, an annotated bibliography of articles, and a selective bibliography of dissertations) would justify the cost of the book. (The cost is \$26 plus shipping.)

THE CBW NEWSLETTER SEEKS RE- SOURCES EDITOR

CBW Newsletter would like to publish a more extensive list of resources (articles, books, software) for teachers of basic writers. Is there anybody out there who would like to take on this role for future issues? If so, please write to Peter Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore, MD 21237.

A WORD FROM THE EDITORS

We would like to thank a number of people who helped us to get this first issue out: Fred Capshaw, Susanna Craine, Ruth Davis, Gwyn Howard, Jack Meagher, and Lynn Troyka.

Peter Adams
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

CCCC SESSIONS FOR TEACHERS & RESEARCHERS OF BASIC WRITERS

The following sessions scheduled for the CCCC in St. Louis, March 17 to 19, 1988, may be of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers.

Thursday, March 17

- 10:45 AM A15 The ESL Basic Writer and Academic Discourse: Successful Mainstreaming
- 10:45 AM A17 Rating the Writing of College-Bound or College ESL Students
- 12:30 PM B3 The Politics of Literacy: Discourse Communities
- 12:30 PM B4 Literacy and Language: The Potential for Empowerment
- 12:30 PM B15 Literacies of Power
- 12:30 PM B17 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Integrating Reading, Writing, and Learning Theory
- 12:30 PM B18 The Unessential Self: Connections Between Definitions of Literacy and Conceptions of Self
- 12:30 PM B19 What Are the Similarities and Differences: ESL/LI Composition Instruction
- 2:15 PM C6 Writing Centers: Research and Evaluation
- 2:15 PM C16 The Content of Basic Writing: Three Proposals
- 2:15 PM C22 Corrections and Conventions in the ESL Class
- 4:00 PM D4 The Evolving Writing Center
- 4:00 PM D23 Large-Scale Writing Assessment and Process of Self-Assessment

Friday, March 18

- 8:30 AM E2 The Politics of Literacy: Gender Race, and Class I
- 8:30 AM E5 Chinese-American Connections: Three ESL Reports
- 8:30 AM E9 Beyond Cultural Literacy
- 10:15 AM F2 The Politics of Literacy II: Open Forum
- 10:15 AM F18 Establishing a Community in the ESL Classroom
- 10:15 AM F20 Alternate Modes of Assessment
- Noon G8 Reading in the ESL Composition Class

- Noon G10 Assessing Student Writing
- Noon G12 Orality and Literacy in a Post-modern World
- Noon G13 Collaborative Contexts for Basic Writers
- 1:45 PM H3 Using Computers in ESL, Basic Writing and Minority Programs
- 1:45 PM H13 Social Contexts for ESL
- 1:45 PM H16 Assessment and the Basic Writer
- 3:30 PM I9 The Social Construction of Literacy: A Critique of Ong
- 3:30 PM I12 Theory into Practice in the Basic Writing Classroom
- 3:30 PM I15 Publishing Writing of Adult Literacy Students: Methods and Benefits
- 3:30 PM I16 Testing Our Tests: Challenges to Traditional Assessment
- 5:00 PM J7 Current Research on the Processes of Basic Writers
- 5:00 PM J19 Collaborative Research on Literacy and Learning
- 6:30 PM SIG Conference on Basic Writing: A Reorganizational Meeting

Saturday, March 19

- 10:00 AM K11 Toward a Redefinition of Basic Writing: What We Learned from Harvard's Basic Writers
- 10:00 AM K13 Helping ESL Students Join the University's Community of Writers
- 10:00 AM K15 Perspectives on Large Scale Testing
- 11:45 AM L4 The Writing Center Across the Curriculum
- 11:45 AM L5 Basic Writers and Computer-Based Composition Instruction
- 11:45 AM L11 Composing Processes of ESL Students
- 11:45 AM L13 Politics and the Rhetoric of Racism
- 11:45 AM L14 Ideology and the Basic Writing Class

This issue of the CBW Newsletter is being distributed free. To join the Conference on Basic Writing and receive two issues of this newsletter per year, fill out the application below and send it with a check for \$5.00 to Peter Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore, MD 21237.

Please, complete this form and mail it with your check for \$5.00. Checks should be made out to the Conference on Basic Writing.

Mail to Peter Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore, MD 21237.

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