

Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



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CBW Session at CCCC Examines Black English

This year at CCCC, the Conference on Basic Writing sponsored a panel entitled "Black Students, Standard English, and Basic Writing" followed by a Special Interest Group (SIG) meeting. Associate Chair Carolyn Kirkpatrick introduced the speakers: Miriam Chaplin (Rutgers, Camden), Eugene Hammond (University of Maryland at College Park), and Lisa Delpit (Morgan State University, Maryland). Geneva Smitherman (Michigan State University at Lansing) served as respondent.

Miriam Chaplin, former chair of CCCC, opened her talk entitled "Black and White Basic Writers in High School and College: What Are the Differences?" by explaining that she uses the term "Black English" because it's the term found in research reports, although she "wholeheartedly embraces the term African American."

Chaplin conducted an exploratory study (Educational Testing Service, 1986-87) to learn whether there are differences between black and white students' writing performances. She reasoned that if she could identify strategies used by black students in writing, she could then develop a writing program "that could be used by teachers to reinforce different strategies and correct weak ones. . . . This is a positive way," she explained, "of allowing testing to reform instruction."

She studied the essays of black and white students who were writing for the National Assessment of Educational Progress and black junior high students writing for the New Jersey High School Proficiency Test. A team of readers attempted to identify the features in the writing and to guess whether the writer was black - 60% of the guesses were accurate. Readers tried unsuccessfully to determine which features informed their correct guesses.

While two strategies, conversational tone and cultural vocabulary, were used more often by black than by white students, the study revealed "far more similarities than differences." (A full report of this study is available from ETS.)

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MLA TO HOLD SECOND CONFERENCE ON LITERACY

The MLA will hold its second national conference on literacy September 13 - 16, 1990, at the Pittsburgh Hilton & Towers, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This year's conference, "Responsibilities for Literacy: Communities, Schools, and Workplaces," intends to create an atmosphere in which those interested in literacy might see how reading and writing skills are taught and how literacy functions in various contexts. Toward that end, the MLA will gather literacy practitioners, researchers, teachers, and community leaders from across the United States and Canada to present their work. In addition, the business world will be well represented, as will unions, federal projects, and state literacy initiatives. Anyone interested in diversified literacy communities will find a cornucopia in Pittsburgh.

Now, if you're asking yourself whether you need take the time and expense to attend yet another conference during the academic term, don't feel alone. I asked the same question of David Laurence, Director of English Programs at MLA. He told me that this year's conference would have a decidedly different "feel" to it than the last one, held in September of 1988 at Ohio State, because greater care had been taken to assure that panelists reflected the state of literacy in all contexts of our society, not just universities and colleges. According to the MLA's tentative program, the following "complex and often conflicting political, social, and economic aspects" of literacy will be explored as panelists "consider how general views of literacy - what it is, whom it is for, and what it is for - inform the day-to-day activities of their literacy efforts":

- What shared responsibilities and opportunities for collaboration arise from these conditions?
- What do employers' calls for better-educated workers mean for higher education and the schools?
- What modes of instruction best prepare learners for

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From the Chairs SIG SCOREBOARD

You may recall that we'd scheduled a double-header for the CCCC meeting just past in Chicago: A panel, "Black Students, Standard English, and Basic Writing," to be followed by a SIG networking meeting. To look at it one way, our average was .500.

The panel was a big success both in attracting a large audience (184 persons, by one count) and in stimulating conversation about issues related to linguistic diversity and language growth—as had been intended. The panel also prompted much deeply felt controversy—as had not been foreseen. The heated exchanges generated by the panel presentations could not be contained in the scheduled "networking" format, so the SIG meeting itself was abandoned in favor of informal discussions—some of which lasted for more than an hour (and some of which continued intermittently for the rest of the conference). For more, see accounts by Pamela Gay and Bob Roth beginning on pages 1 and opposite.

We'd do it again, but we were sorry to see the SIG meeting melt away. What we lost was a planned survey of those present, introduction of our new Executive Committee, a brief presentation by the editors of *JBW*, and organized table conversations on topics of common concern—as well as the chance to sign up many new members. We'll try to play catch-up with a true networking SIG meeting next March in Boston.

ORGANIZATION & GOVERNANCE

This year's election confirmed a slate consisting of Chair Peter Adams; Associate Chair Carolyn Kirkpatrick; and Executive Committee members Cassandra Canada, Suellynn Duffey, Sallyanne Fitzgerald, Pamela Gay, Jeanne Gunner, and Bob Roth. (See biographical notes on page 12.) In drawing up this slate, the Co-

Chairs and interim Steering Committee debated several possibilities: a formal election, with paired nominees for each position; a pool of candidates for Executive Committee with those drawing the most votes to serve; and the option we chose, this fixed slate.

Truth to tell, none of the possibilities seemed as happy a solution as the rise-from-the-ranks volunteerism that prevailed in our early years as a SIG. However, we feel the need to ensure both openness to new people and continuity of the organization, and we don't see how these can be accomplished without a formal mechanism.

A choice from a greater number of candidates would appear to be more democratic and "open." On the other hand, we're a new SIG and don't know each other very well. Arranging for such an election by mail would be a heavy burden for this organization, demanding (it seems to us) solicitation, printing, and circulation of position statements from nominees.

Instead we settled on a fixed slate, not only as the least cumbersome procedure, but also because it allowed the nominating committee (composed of the current officers) to ensure a range of representation on the Executive Committee, with attention to institutional background, ethnicity, gender, and geography.

We plan to present such a slate again next fall, when three new members of the Executive Committee will be chosen. But we need to hear members' views: perhaps someone can come up with a mechanism for future elections that is at once informal, democratic, and efficient.

In the meantime, we call for volunteers for the three positions that will open up next year. If you're interested in serving, send your vita with a letter stating your interest, your ability to attend CCCC for the next two years, and your thoughts about the development of this special interest group.

Peter Dow Adams
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

The *CBW Newsletter* is published twice a year, in the fall and spring, by the Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of the Conference on College Communication and Composition. The editors are Peter Dow Adams & Carolyn Kirkpatrick. We welcome unsolicited manuscript submissions.

Opinions expressed in these pages are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the officers of CBW, CBW's Executive Committee, or CCCC.

Membership in the Conference on Basic Writing is \$5 for 1 year, \$9 for 2 years, and \$12 for 3 years. Membership includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore County, Maryland 21237.

Panel on African American Basic Writers Stirs Needed Controversy at SIG Meeting

The SIG meeting at the 1990 CCCC in Chicago was planned to be a follow-up discussion of the more formal panel presentations of Miriam Chaplin, Gene Hammond, Lisa Delpit, and Geneva Smitherman on "Black Students, Standard English, and Basic Writing" sponsored by CBW. We achieved both more and less than we'd hoped – more controversy and less focus, more diversity and less conclusiveness.

Several African American educators were troubled by what they apparently heard as Gene Hammond's assumption that African American basic writers might have low self images or might need to give up some of their own positive cultural identity in order to learn the conventions of Standard Written English. Feelings were heated. One listener exploded, "Was that a serious talk or just a spoof?" Another tried to clarify his objections but left in anger. A third explained, "I write well, just as my parents did. I don't need to be told there is something wrong with me just because I can speak [Standard] English!"

Gene explained that his intention had been to show that any negative effects were need not prevent us from helping African American students learn and succeed. After Geneva Smitherman's responses restored some

We achieved both more and less than we'd hoped – more controversy and less focus, more diversity and less conclusiveness.

calm, Peter Adams invited all to have some wine and cheese and to regroup at round tables in the back of the room for talk instead of a formal meeting. Many did. Of the seventy or eighty folks who remained, about sixty gathered at the tables. Discussion was lively and often intense.

At my table, we discussed many things – Black Eng-

lish, students' self confidence, voice in writing, computers in the teaching of composition, and so forth – but mainly the politics of literacy. Some acknowledged that there was need to raise the issues Gene Hammond had prompted in order to serve African American students' needs. Others expressed strong concern that many African American writers are automatically labelled as

At my table, we discussed many things... but mainly the politics of literacy.

"basic" or "remedial."

Henry Evans (Hunter College) proposed an interesting historical theory suggesting that the creation of remedial courses in the sixties was inherently biased. When the influx of white European students after World War II necessitated the creation of more writing courses in New York City colleges, Evans said, those courses were called "English 1, 2, 3, and 4" and were considered regular credit courses. And when the children of those white immigrants didn't need so much writing instruction, colleges cut back to just English 1. But when there was an influx of African American and Hispanic students in the sixties, we created "basic writing" or "remedial" courses, made them non-credit, and even started charging tuition. Evans's theory evoked much debate.

At all the tables, discussion seemed both intense and cordial. All the wine and cheese were consumed. Twenty-three new people joined CBW. Despite the controversy and absence of conclusiveness, we felt we had accomplished something important, for we had helped to reopen examination of the complex interrelationships among race and class, politics and literacy. Geneva Smitherman encouraged us to do it again next year, saying we had reminded people that "Black English is still alive" and that we had started a lively and important debate.

Bob Roth
Middlesex County College, NJ

Results of Membership Survey in Last Newsletter

In the fall 1989 issue of this newsletter, we tried an experiment asking members to mail in a questionnaire answering a series of questions about their basic writing programs. We aren't pretending to scientific rigor in this survey, but we do think the results are interesting enough to merit a report.

Out of 274 active members when the questionnaire was mailed in January, 53 returned the form – a response rate of 19.3%.

Question 1: Levels of institutions replying were as follows:

	#	%
two-year institutions	17	32
four-year institutions	33	62
other	3	6

Question 2: We asked how many *levels* of basic writing courses your program offered, with these results:

	all		2 year		4 year	
# levels	#	%	#	%	#	%
1 level	19	36	3	18	14	42
2 levels	30	57	13	76	16	48
3 levels	3	6	1	6	2	6
4 levels	1	2	0	0	1	3

Question 3: Asked which of the following most accurately described your upper-level writing courses (or your only writing course, if you have only one), you responded as follows:

	#	%
a grammar/skills course		
with some writing	1	2
about equal emphasis on		
grammar/skills and writing	8	15
a writing course with some		
emphasis on grammar/skills	32	60
a writing course with little or		
no emphasis on grammar/skills	7	13
other	2	4
no response	3	6

Question 4: Asked which of the following most accurately described your lowest-level non-ESL writing courses, those of you with lower-level courses responded as follows:

	#	%
a grammar/skills course		
with some writing	6	18
about equal emphasis on		
grammar/skills and writing	16	47
a writing course with some		
emphasis on grammar/skills	7	21
a writing course with little or		
no emphasis on grammar/skills	4	12
other	1	2

Question 5: Asked to rank the emphasis given to various kinds of writing in your *upper-level* writing course, you responded as follows:

	greatest emphasis		second	
	#	%	#	%
impromptu essays	2	4	8	15
essays with emphasis	38	72	6	11
on process/revision				
essays based on	2	4	7	13
rhetorical modes				
paragraph writing	7	13	7	13
other	3	6	5	9
no writing	0	0	0	0
no response	1	2	20	38

Question 6: Asked to rank the emphasis given to various kinds of writing in your *lower-level* writing course, those of you with lower-level writing courses responded as follows:

	greatest emphasis		second	
	#	%	#	%
impromptu essays	2	6	2	6
essays with emphasis	14	41	4	12
on process/revision				
essays based on	0	0	2	6
rhetorical modes				
paragraph writing	15	44	6	18
other	2	6	3	9
no writing	1	3	0	0
no response	0	0	17	50

We wish more of you had responded, and we're hopeful that you will find these kinds of data interesting enough so that more of you will complete our next questionnaire.

Facts, Artifacts Update

At CCCC this past March, over 35 basic writing teachers devoted Saturday afternoon, a time when nearly everyone is eager to be finished with conference activities, to a workshop on basic writing, "What Happens When We Treat Basic Readers and Writers Like Graduate Students? (Examining the Facts Behind *Facts, Artifacts and, Counterfacts*)."

Some of you reading this newsletter undoubtedly attended the post-conference workshop; others of you will remember the CBW meeting in St. Louis when our topic of discussion was the *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* (FAC) approach and our speakers were contributors to that volume.

So, why is any of this news? And why is it of concern to the readers of the *CBW Newsletter*? It is news because those workshop attendees asked for, hoped for, needed, and wanted a network for continuing communication among themselves, a means of keeping in touch with one another. And this column is a first step in that continuing communication. It is news for the others of us in CBW because the recent workshop addressed issues raised at the CBW meeting in St. Louis that ushered in the organization's renewal in 1988. Both of these events indicate a continuing and possibly growing effort among basic writing teachers to reach out to new and challenging curricula for their students.

There are many of us scattered across the country who are interested in the FAC curriculum for more than novelty's sake. We are interested because of the rich theoretical underpinnings of the course, because of its ability to provide students an entree into academic studies while at the same time affirming and extending their intellectual performance instead of minimizing or trivializing it, because the course integrates reading, writing, and inquiry, because of any number of additional important reasons.

While it was gratifying to the workshop leaders (Sylvia Robins and Julia Fogarty, Delta College; Mindy Wright and me, Ohio State University) to read the evaluations that claimed we had just offered a "terrific" workshop, the evaluations are important to all of us for other messages they hold, messages that urge us to be self-reflective as teachers. Listen to the following excerpts from those evaluations, some of which comment on the main activity, reading a scholarly article and coming to small group consensus about its significant points:

It's always good for me to be placed in the student role and be forced to stumble toward an understanding without having the teacher's advantage of composing it (at least somewhat) in advance.

The most worthwhile part of . . . [the] workshop was going through the process of negotiating meaning. . . . I felt some of the frustrations my students must feel as I plowed through . . . [the] text.

The participants remind us overtly, as above, and subtly, as below, of our own similarities to students:

The uncertainty I feel about implementing the course is not as troubling as it was initially.

What I got is a firmer commitment to give this model a try. . . . I came in wanting you to tell me what to do. I'm leaving realizing I have to figure it out for myself.

If the workshop succeeded, it did so in part because it gave people a sense of their own strengths as a result of their participation in the community we established that afternoon.

All of us who teach basic writing are people whose everyday teaching lives involve the challenges of literacy education, the questions of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the issues of cultural criticism that arose in the workshop and that are at the forefront of scholarly discussions in English and language studies. With some notable exceptions like Mike Rose, Lynn Troyka, David Bartholomae, and Anthony Petrosky, our voices are not often heard in these discussions. We need to use our powers of community and self-reflection to recognize the strengths in ourselves, the resources we offer one another, and the contribution our voices can make to the profession as a whole. We need to hold onto the network we already have (CBW) and extend its web so that we may find among ourselves the power to make our voices heard.

If you wish to join a network of people involved with the FAC approach, please write to Sylvia Robins, Delta College, University Center, Michigan 48710. Include your name and address, the school where you teach, and your suggestions (if any) about what activities the network might undertake.

Suellynn Duffey
Ohio State University

CBW Session on Black English continued from page 1.

"A black learning style is not the issue; instruction is the issue," said Chaplin. "The only instruction for many black students in urban schools has been drill in the conventions of language with no opportunities for students to write extended discourse." She called for "a movement away from a deficiency model of instruction toward a possibility model that celebrates strength."

Using her investigation as a backdrop, Chaplin has developed a writing program around the 14 strategies students used in effective essays. "The program contains 40 separate writing experiences in four modes," she explained. While skill development is part of the program, Chaplin emphasized that skills are not taught in isolation. The program stresses that "writing conventions, like all other conventions, have one purpose: to make writing socially acceptable."

In introducing Gene Hammond, Carolyn remarked that this panel presentation had been created in response to his call for basic writing teachers and researchers to address the problems of black student

A black learning style is not the issue; instruction is the issue.

writers struggling with Standard Written English (see *CBW Newsletter*, spring 89). In his talk, entitled "Black Student's Writing Weaknesses: A Study in Perceptions," Hammond acknowledged the contribution of Geneva Smitherman's *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977) and agreed with Miriam Chaplin that teachers are the single most important factor in the educational process.

Hammond pointed to a "clash between language and culture." He believes that retention rates of black students lag substantially behind those of white students because the "messages of our society" come in "a dialect that blacks have come to regard as white" and because "to learn that dialect is to risk betrayal of one's people and one's culture."

Hammond suggested addressing this tension in four ways: "(1) students must learn to distinguish the acquisition of Standard English grammar from the acquisition of white ways; (2) teachers of writing should distinguish between spoken English (all dia-

lects of which ought to be part of class dynamics) and written English, which should be required for all to learn; (3) teachers should acknowledge the power dynamics between the standard American dialect and black dialect but place those dynamics in an international context; and (4) teachers must make the reading of both black writers and international literature a top priority for themselves and for their students."

... a clash between language and culture

"As more black writers write in American [Standard] English," said Hammond, "the whiteness of the language will begin to acquire color, and the threat of cultural imperialism will diminish." The most we can do as teachers, Hammond continued, "is point out the problem and try to convince black students that written English is their language too; it may be predominantly white, but it is not exclusively white."

Hammond called for an international perspective on English, to shift it "from being a tool of white oppression to being the acknowledged language of international education and political discourse." He suggested that we extend our cultural boundaries through reading and that we teach grammar "early and often." Hammond concluded by recommending sentence building exercises for all ages.

"What I have to say," began the third speaker, Lisa Delpit ("Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator"), "holds for all those who do not feel enfranchised by the power system in this country."

Like Chaplin and Hammond, Delpit stressed the critical role of the teacher in the development of students' writing abilities. Most students demand "a strong presence of a teacher" because they are aware that the teacher may be their "sole source of clear, explicit information" about language conventions. However, "while students want teachers' direct instruction and involvement," said Delpit, "they also express some resentment at having to learn such conventions." Hammond had asked teachers to try to convince black students that Standard Written English is "not exclusively white." Delpit, however, made clear that students are "aware of being excluded, of being made to feel inferior by the equivalent of linguistic racism."

Delpit pointed out, as have others, that children who come from a culture of power receive instruction in

the conventions of language from birth. The fact that some children "must work to acquire what other children come by naturally is taken as another sign of inferiority." Students "often view themselves as lacking for not having access to 'the right way to talk.'" The reason why they demand grammar is that they are "very aware that they are engaged in culture learning." They want "to know the rules in the new setting in which they find themselves," and they depend upon their teachers to teach them these rules.

Like Geneva Smitherman, Lisa Delpit views Black English/Black language/Afro-American language as "much broader than relatively minor differences in syntax and pronunciation." While Hammond suggested students overcome the "clash between language and culture" by learning to distinguish between the acquisition of Standard Written English and the acquisition of "white ways," Delpit maintained the "difference is not just an issue of grammar. . . . We're not just teaching grammar," she emphasized. "We're teaching essentially a culture, a world view, cognitive organization, attitudes and values."

Delpit advocates the teaching of language conventions within the context of empowerment and liberation. "The teacher who wishes to empower students must listen to the concerns of the students. If we talk empowerment without listening, we're only *talking* empowerment. Students will neither *be* empowered nor *feel* empowered when they believe their voices are not being heard." This does not mean, she explained, that we must automatically adopt the instructional guidelines students suggest. They are likely to make recommendations (to teach grammar or use a skills rather than process approach, for example) based on their previous experience. Delpit urges teachers to

There is a false dichotomy . . . between skills and process approaches.

engage in a dialogue to show students how their concerns are being met. Teachers "must justify their methods if they wish to engage collaboratively in teaching and learning." If their methods are not meeting students' concerns, Delpit said that teachers must be willing to modify or abandon those methods.

Furthermore, "the teacher who wishes to empower linguistically diverse students," Delpit believes, "must also address the political nature of codes of language." The teacher and students, said Delpit, "should collec-

tively celebrate the students' home language." She asked teachers "to examine *with* students how language has changed over time as a result of who is or was in power."

Delpit believes there is a false dichotomy (a "killer dichotomy," Ann Berthoff would say) between skills and process approaches. She praised the type of program Miriam Chaplin created because it "allows students to own their writing." Like the other speakers, she asserted that "good teachers know you must begin with the needs of particular students." Delpit, further,

Black English is alive, well, and full of color.

stressed the importance of student involvement in their own learning and concluded by urging us "to listen to what our students have to say, to learn from them, to take them seriously, and to define our pedagogy in a way that takes into account their perspectives."

Geneva Smitherman began her response by expressing concern about what she called a "new reactionary linguistic scholarship . . . [which] attempts to establish that there's no such thing as Black English." Smitherman commended CBW for "recognizing that Black English is alive, well, and full of color."

However, the findings of her own study (1983) of student writing showed a significant decline in the use of Black English features over ten years (1969-79). Smitherman is now studying essays written in 1988-89 and plans to compare them to the earlier sample in order to get "a generational perspective" on the question.

Smitherman praised Chaplin's idea of building a whole program on the strength of the students and Hammond's notion of English as a world language. She believes "Americans are very ethnocentric. . . . Everyone needs to learn a language other than their own," she urged. The proposed CCCC language policy calls for all students to be conversant with three languages: the world English, their own language or dialect, and a foreign language.

"Curriculum diversity," Smitherman said, is important. "If the true history of the culture were taught appropriately, then we could deal with these cultural insecurities of students of color." She called for the

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CBW Session on Black English continued from page 7.

inclusion in the curriculum of the cultural contribution of African Americans.

As Hammond and Delpit maintained, continued Smitherman, "students want [to be taught] grammar." Grammar is "easy to point to," she explained, "but what's really empowering is *thinking*, and they don't want to do that – that's too hard." Students want their work corrected, but "researchers tell us that the study of grammar per se does not transfer into writing [improvement]." Smitherman found that "most socio-linguistically conventionally correct" papers in her study (in terms of "s" and "ed" endings, for example) were also very short "as if students were playing safe." They also tended to be repetitious and to be empty of logic and thought. While editing is important, said Smitherman, it should be "the very last thing" students do. "Empowerment is not just mastering mechanical, socio-linguistic conventions," Smitherman concluded.

Although Carolyn Kirkpatrick had asked the audience to hold their questions and comments until after the panel presentation, talk about the relationship of language, culture, and power stirred the audience. Several members rose from their seats and spoke after Hammond's presentation.

While Hammond had said that he believed black students must learn to distinguish the acquisition of Standard English from the acquisition of white ways, he also had said that because the acquisition of a second dialect "improves access to a freer and more powerful life," the risk of students losing some of their culture is "worth the trade." He then told a tale of eight Eskimos who literally lost their lives because they could not find any other way out of their cultural dilemma.

A black woman asked Hammond if he really believed what he had said – "I heard," she said, "that if you

... Standard Written English as a club to beat students into submission

learn Standard English as a Black English speaker, you're going to give up some of your culture." Some wondered aloud if the focus of this panel implied that all black students are poor writers or that black students do not have the ability to write as well as white students. "There are black students who write and have historically written at high levels of proficiency," explained one black male in the audience. "I speak Black English,

but I write [Standard] English very well," he continued. "There are plenty of black people out there who can read and write, and I'm one of them," exclaimed another black male, disturbed by what he had heard. One person walked out, not waiting to hear the last presenter.

At the round table discussions which followed the presentations, some basic writing teachers expressed reservations about what they had heard as an endorsement of the teaching of grammar. In his talk, Hammond had said "grammar should be taught early and often" and had handed out what he called a sentence-building exercise. While Chaplin had stressed the importance of giving basic writers extended writing practice, she had also said her program included skills development, but that "skills should not be taught in isolation." Delpit too had advocated teaching language conventions, but "within the context of empowerment and liberation."

Attitude toward the place of students' own dialects in the classroom also sparked some discussion. Hammond had suggested that all dialects should be part of classroom dynamics, but Chaplin found in her study that black students used conversational tone (that is, they wrote like they talked) more than white students did. Some teachers pointed out that basic writing students of any color often do not distinguish between spoken and written English and wondered how we can expect our students to speak in their own dialects in the classroom and then go away and write in Standard English.

Cassandra Canada, a member of the executive committee of CBW, observed that we need to "address the issues of minority voices and differences between using Standard Written English as a club to beat students into submission and presenting it as a means toward more effective communication of students' ideas to a broader audience (not necessarily white, but educated – within and without the academic community). All students," she stressed, "need to become more aware that people of all colors write – and yes, most use Standard Written English."

The large turnout at this year's CBW session indicates the topic is of "special interest" to this group. Geneva Smitherman had begun her remarks, "I've got so many things to say, I could rap forever, and I can tell by looking out there that a lot of you have some hot, burning questions." We agree, and we hope you will voice your concerns at the next CBW SIG meeting at CCCC in Boston, and we continue to rap.

Pamela Gay
SUNY/Binghamton

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Recent Articles on Basic Writing

BLACK STUDENTS, STANDARD ENGLISH, AND BASIC WRITING

To follow up on our CCCC session (see reports beginning on pages 1 and 3), the following reviews call your attention to articles by three of the panelists.

Chaplin, Miriam. "Issues, Perspectives and Possibilities." *College Composition and Communication* 39 (February 1988): 52-62. Chaplin's CCC article, which is a revision of her Chair's Address at the 1987 CCCC in Atlanta, defines the general problem explored by the panelists. "Preparing teachers to cope with diversity and identifying appropriate content, methodology and means of evaluating instruction and learning are the core issues in the new reform movement in higher education," she writes. To teach diverse students effectively, Chaplin advocates learner-based instruction, based on students' experiences rather than skill proficiency. In addition, she calls upon composition teachers to extend their influence outside the classroom and become political change agents.

Delpit, Lisa. "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator." *Harvard Educational Review* 56 (November 1986): 379-385. "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children." *Harvard Educational Review* 58 (August 1988): 280-298. In 1986 Delpit summarized her assessment of the difference between process- and skills-oriented writing instruction with these words: "Progressive white teachers seem to say to their black students, 'Let me help you find your voice. I promise not to criticize one note as you search for your own song.' But the black teachers say, 'I've heard your song loud and clear. Now, I want to teach you to harmonize with the rest of the world.'" She argues for a combination of the two approaches, one that stresses acquisition of necessary writing skills but only in a meaningful context, not as isolated and meaningless sub-skills.

The second article continues her argument and examines the "culture of power" existing in the classroom and society. "Teachers do students no service to suggest, even implicitly," she states, "that 'product' is not important. In this country, students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to

achieve it. And that product, based as it is on the specific codes of a particular culture, is more readily produced when the directives of how to produce it are made explicit."

Therefore, she proposes that minority students be taught explicitly the codes needed to participate in mainstream America while also being shown the arbitrariness of those codes, that teachers should not resist exhibiting personal power as an expert source, that black teachers and parents must be heard in the discussion about what is best for minority students, and that it is the responsibility of the majority to initiate that discussion.

Smitherman, Geneva. "Soul 'N Style." *English Journal* 64 (September 1975): 12-13. "Toward a National Public Policy on Language." *Research in English* (September 1986) ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 268 527. Smitherman has been writing provocatively and passionately about culture, power, and language for several decades now. Back in 1975, she stated her argument this way: "Lord knows we don't need to add more folk (Black or white, for that matter) to the economically exploitative Doublespeak Club or the inhumane, 'Standard'-English-Speaking Racist Club. Rather we need skilled Blacks who can rap and communicate with power and persuasion, with or without s'es and ed's—doan matter—and who will use that Nommo power for community, national and world improvement." She argues for serious scholarly study of Black English and the need for teachers to get beyond correcting students' surface "errors" and begin teaching the kinds of communication skills needed to live in and improve our multicultural world.

At the 1986 CCCC convention, Smitherman elaborated on her views. She proposed that composition teachers call for a three-part policy on language that would (1) "reinforce the need for and teaching of the language of wider communication" (her term for what

Continued on next page.

Editors' Note: Readers should also know about two books cited at the CBW panel: Both Miriam Chaplin and Geneva Smitherman were contributors to *Tapping Potential: English and Language Arts for the Black Learner*, Ed. Charlotte Brooks, published by the Black Caucus of NCTE in 1985. Smitherman's classic *Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America* (1977) was reissued in 1987 by Wayne State University Press.

Reviews

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is often called Standard English) but in the context of language as power, not simply to be "correct"; (2) "reinforce and reaffirm the legitimacy of non-mainstream languages and dialects and promote mother tongue instruction as a co-equal language of instruction along with the language of wider communication", using the students' indigenous language as a base on which to expand their language skills; and (3) "promote the acquisition of one or more foreign languages, preferably a language spoken by persons in the third world, such as Spanish, because of its widespread use in this hemisphere."

Linda Stine
Lincoln University

This is a regular column discussing recent journal articles of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers. If you've recently written or read an article of interest, please send a copy to Linda Stine, Master of Human Services Program, Lincoln University, PA 19352 for review.

MLA Literacy Conference

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the social circumstances of workplaces and communities?

- How do we negotiate between the claims of the individual learner or worker and arguments for comparative learning, union-management collaboration, and work teams?
- What force can and should the humanities exert on our nation's economic and political future?
- What conditions of school, community, and national life are necessary for teachers to work effectively?

A look at the proposed key panel topics demonstrates a commitment to exploring literacy in all its dimensions and contexts:

- Adult Learners
- Defining, Measuring, and Assessing Literacy
- English as a Second Language
- Historical Perspectives on Literacy
- Labor and Management Perspectives on Workplace Education

- Literacy, Race, and Class
- Literacy and the Electronic Word
- Partnerships, Alliances, and Collaboration
- The Politics of Literacy
- Prison Education
- Teacher Research
- Schooling Inside and Outside Schools
- State Literacy Initiatives

The list of representative panelists and organizations further underscores the contextual diversity proposed for this conference, ranging from names well-known to CCCC members such as Pat Bizzell, David Bleich, Linda Flower, Henry Giroux, Shirley Brice Heath, and Jacqueline Jones Royster to representatives of such less-familiar organizations as various adult literacy projects, the Association of Junior Leagues, the Center for Applied Linguistics, Clorox, and Levi Strauss.

The registration fee for this conference is \$55. The number of participants will be limited to 750; those interested in registering should do so early. The first 300 persons requesting registration are guaranteed a space. After that, MLA reserves the right to control registration in order to provide the broadest possible representation of participants across teaching, community, and industrial boundaries. Send registration requests to David Laurence, Director, English Programs, Modern Language Association, 10 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003-6981 or call (212) 614-6325.

Andrea Lunsford remarked of the first MLA Literacy Conference (CBW Newsletter, Fall 1988), that "it would help if more comp and rhetoric people would become involved with the MLA." While talking with Stephen Olsen, Assistant Director of English Programs at MLA, I mentioned the Lunsford comment and asked why teachers of basic writing should come to this conference, what they could get that they don't get at CCCC. His answer, I think, sums up not only what this conference can do for us, but also how involvement with MLA might broaden our horizons: "This conference provides an opportunity to get together literacy practitioners from groups that normally don't talk to each other - teachers, community organizations, union programs, corporations. We hope that these groups will begin a conversation about common goals."

I thought Stephen Olsen's answer was reason enough to attend the MLA Literacy Conference this year. And I hope to see you there.

Cassandra Canada
Purdue University at Calumet

Basic Writing and African American Students Studied in Tennessee

Questions about the effects of basic writing programs on African American students are often debated but seldom addressed by direct research.

The following article describes a series of three studies conducted by the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Memphis State University comparing the effects on African American and white students of both assessment and instruction for basic writers in Tennessee community colleges. The members of the Center are Jerry N. Boone, Todd M. Davis, Robert A. Kaiser, Robert O. Riggs, and Olivia Wilson. The editors would be interested in learning of similar studies elsewhere.

A series of studies is being conducted in the Center for the Study of Higher Education at Memphis State University to examine the impact of a state-wide mandatory testing and placement program in Tennessee's community college system to determine how it relates to the retention and academic progress of African American students. Using the Board of Regents' data base for Tennessee's ten public community colleges, studies have, thus far, been conducted in the areas of test speededness, inter-rater reliability, and remedial and developmental studies.

The Board of Regents' Academic Assessment, Placement and Remediation Program (AAPP), implemented in fall of 1985, requires all first-time community college students to provide ACT composite scores of 16 or higher or SAT scores in excess of 700. Students not able to meet this requirement must complete the AAPP skills assessment, consisting of a 20 minute essay on an assigned topic, a 30 minute reading comprehension test consisting of 35 multiple choice questions based on several passages, a 30 minute, 50 item multiple choice test designed to measure ability to discern logical relationships, and three levels of timed, multiple choice mathematics tests. Students placed by this testing in remedial or developmental courses must complete those courses and then pass an alternate version of the AAPP before they are allowed to enroll in degree-credit courses.

Study 1. The first study conducted by the Center for the Study of Higher Education investigated whether the AAPP served as "power tests" or as "speeded tests." In an analysis of all 3,151 first-time freshman students

with ACT scores of less than 15 who were enrolled in Tennessee community colleges in fall of 1986, these researchers found striking differences in performance between white and African American students. For the white students, the AAPP did serve as a power test: 88.9% completed the test and virtually all completed at least 75% of the test. For African American students, the test clearly functioned as a speeded test: Only 73.7% completed the test and only 94.4% completed 75% of the items. In an era in which test bias is an important issue, the researchers point out that a test should function in the manner in which it is described by the manufacturer for all racial groups.

Study 2. Another study investigated inter-rater reliability for the placement essays, which had been scored following CUNY holistic procedures. A stan-

... studies like these should be conducted widely to insure the evenhandedness of our programs

dard package of ten writing samples was rated by each of the raters in the state who had scored the AAPP exams in the fall of 1987. This study found that inter-rater reliability varied widely throughout the state, from a high Kappa score of .91 to a low of .36. Fewer than half of the community colleges in the state achieved the minimum acceptable inter-rater reliability of .60. The investigators conclude that holistic scoring, as practiced, may not be sufficiently reliable for making decisions of such importance to individual students.

Study 3. A third study investigated the differences in retention rates for the 5,139 African American and white students enrolled in Tennessee community colleges during fall of 1986. Analysis of retention over three quarters suggested that, *at comparable ability levels*, attrition is higher for African Americans than for whites.

These studies suggest both that our assessment procedures and our developmental courses themselves may not treat African American students with equity and that studies like these should be conducted widely to insure the evenhandedness of our programs.

Robert O. Riggs & Todd M. Davis
Memphis State University

1990-91 CBW Executive Committee

The newly elected Executive Committee of CBW took office at the SIG meeting at CCCC:

Chair **Peter Adams** (Associate Professor and until this year Director of the Writing Program at Essex Community College, Baltimore) talked Carolyn Kirkpatrick into joining him in the revival of CBW after their realization that it was missing from the program at CCCC in Atlanta. Peter is a member of the CCCC Committee on Computers and Writing and of the Task Force on Communication and Participation in CCCC; he is the author of two basic writing texts.

Associate Chair **Carolyn Kirkpatrick** abetted Peter Adams in the reorganization of CBW and has since collaborated on its activities as co-chair and co-editor of this newsletter. Associate Professor of English at York College/CUNY, Carolyn has longtime interests in written language learning, in basic writing curriculum development, and in instructional applications of word processing; she is co-author of two basic writing textbooks and a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Basic Writing*.

Cassandra Canada is pursuing her Ph D in rhetoric and composition at Purdue U. While teaching full-time at Purdue-Calumet, she is developing her expertise in developmental reading, developmental writing, and freshman composition. She has presented papers at the National Basic Writing Conference and at the Illinois Reading Council Conference. In 1988-89, she was Assistant Director for basic writing at Purdue.

Suellynn Duffey has been interested in basic writing since 1977 when she taught in Ohio State's basic writing program during its first year of existence. Since then, she has completed a dissertation on basic writers (case studies of revision) and has delivered papers at various conferences on basic writing, testing, and revision (CCCC, Penn State, St. Louis Basic Writing Conference, and others). She now directs the basic writing program at Ohio State and in the near future expects to pilot several courses that pair basic writers and honors students in the same classes.

Sallyanne Fitzgerald is Director of the Center for Academic Development, University of Missouri at St. Louis and has been a member of both the CBW advisory and steering committees; she developed and chaired the National Basic Writing Conference at UMSL in September of 1985, '87, and '89. Sally also serves as chair of the Midwest Writing Centers Association, has just finished

a stint on the board of her local NCTE affiliate, and is on the board of the Gateway Writing Project. She's at work on a basic writing text focused on integrating the arts of language.

Pamela Gay is Director of Basic Writing at SUNY/Binghamton where she also helps coordinate writing across the curriculum. An article entitled "A Portfolio Approach to a Biology-Linked Basic Writing Course" is forthcoming in *Portfolio Evaluation* (Boynton/Cook). She has also written about computers and basic writers and is writing a book for developing writers. In 1983 Gay was awarded an NIE grant for her research on the role of attitude in the development of writing abilities.

Jeanne Gunner is a lecturer in UCLA Writing Programs and coordinator of the program's Composition Theory Group. She has been a member of CBW since 1985. Her two composition textbooks reflect her professional interest in the teaching of basic writing in the university context. In presentations at CCCC and at the National Basic Writing Conference she has addressed issues in the basic writing curriculum and the status of composition professionals.

Bob Roth (Professor of English at Middlesex County College, NJ) is a frequent presenter at CCCC on matters related to audience and gender; he joined CBW at its reorganizational meeting and served on the advisory board last year. A community college teacher, he is active in matters related to curriculum development at his college and has served on the Advisory Board of the Center for the Study of Writing in New Jersey.

CORRECTION

The editors were pleased to hear from a reader alerting us to an error in the fall newsletter and pleased to be informed that three topics which we had reported as "surprisingly missing" from the Basic Writing Conference last fall were in fact not missing at all.

Our report on the conference observed that "missing were presentations on black students, on ESL, and on writing centers." Dean A. Hagin from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale writes that he and his colleagues Lisa Bayer and Linda Pfeister did address these topics. Their papers dealt with restructuring of the *writing center* at SIU Carbondale to better serve basic writers, *black students*, and *ESL students*.

BULLETIN BOARD

Papers for the Ohio Association for Developmental Education Conference to be held in Marietta, Ohio, in November should be submitted by June 1 to Phyllis Salter, Sinclair Community College, Dayton, OH 45402. Or call her at (513) 226-2701.

The National Project on Computers and College Writing Conference will be held in New York City on June 1-3. Contact the City University of New York, Office of Academic Computing, 555 West 57th street, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10019.

The Midwest College Learning Center Association is sponsoring its second summer institute June 18-22 at Oakland U, Rochester, Michigan. Write Martha Casazza, National College, 18 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60603 or call (312) 621-9650.

The Wyoming Conference on English will take place on June 25-29 at the U of Wyoming in Laramie. Speakers include Henry Gates, Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar, Gerald Graff, Jasper Neel, Richard Sterling, and Marcie Wolfe. Write Tilly Warnock, Conference Director, Wyoming Conference on English, University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY 82071.

The 1990 Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will be held from June 30 to July 27 at Appalachian State U in Boone, North Carolina. Write Director, Kellogg Institute, National Center for Developmental Education, Appalachian State U, Boone, NC 28608 or call (704) 262-3057.

The Martha's Vineyard Summer Workshops will sponsor two sessions this summer: July 2-13 and 16-29. Topics at the first session include "Designing the Integrated Curriculum" and "Reading/Writing/Responding": the second session includes presentations on "Gender and Writing," "Literacy in a Multi-Cultural Society," and "Case Study Design/Analysis." Contact Edward Jossens, Martha's Vineyard Summer Workshops, 406 Holmes Hall, Northeastern U, Boston, MA 02115 or call (617) 437-3637.

The Bard College Institute for Writing and Thinking will conduct week-long workshops on "Teaching Writing and Thinking," "Writing to Learn," "Reading and Writing," and "Narrative Thinking: Fact or Fiction?" from July 9-13 at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson,

New York. Write Paul Connolly, Director, Institute for Writing and Thinking, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York 12504 or call (914) 758-7431.

The WPA Summer Workshop/Conference will take place this year in Portland, Oregon, from July 23-26. The workshop, an intense seminar for new or experienced WPAs, runs from July 23-26. The conference, entitled "Status, Standards, Quality: The Challenge of Wyoming," runs from July 26-28 and features keynote speakers James Slevin (Georgetown) and Carol Hartzog (UCLA). Write Duncan Carter, Department of English, Portland State U, P.O. Box 751, Portland, OR 97207.

A conference on **The Future of Grammar in Our Schools** is being held at Winchester, Virginia, on August 10 and 11. Contact Ed Vavra, Shenandoah College, 1460 College Drive, Winchester, VA 22601 or call (703) 665-4587.

Responsibilities for Literacy, a conference sponsored by the Modern Language Association will take place at U of Pittsburgh from September 13-16. Attendance will be limited to 600 people from communities, schools, and work places. Contact David Laurence, MLA, 10 Astor Place, New York, NY 10003-6981 (See article on page 1).

The University of New Hampshire will sponsor a conference entitled, **Reading and Writing (in) the Academy: Power, Pedagogy, and Politics** on October 5-7. Contact Pat Sullivan, English Department, U of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

The National Testing Network in Writing and the City University of New York announce the **Eighth Annual NTNW Conference on Language and Literacy Assessment** on November 9, 10, and 11, 1990, in New York City. The conference theme is "Multiple Literacies: Assessment Strategies for a New Decade." Topics to be explored in panels, workshops, and forums include new models of literacy across the curriculum, computer applications in assessment, and research on literacy assessment. Write to Professor Karen Greenberg, NTNW Director, Department of English, Hunter College, 695 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021.

CBW Newsletter is happy to print in the "Bulletin Board" announcements that are likely to be of interest to its readers. Send such announcements to the editors by October 1 for the fall issue and April 1 for the spring issue.