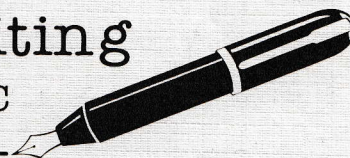


Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



Volume 10, Number 2

Spring 1991

CBW at CCCC

Sallyanne Fitzgerald

The CBW special interest group meeting was scheduled, as usual, for Thursday night during the CCCC's Boston Conference. Because the title, the description of the meeting, and our traditional enticement of wine and cheese had been inadvertently omitted from the program, the CBW board was pleasantly surprised by the size and spirit of the group that gathered to see the *Journal of Basic Writing* (JBW) editors present the Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award and to participate in a discussion of "Race, Class, and Gender in the Basic Writing Classroom."

Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller, editors of JBW, presented the second Shaughnessy Writing Award to Kathleen Dixon for her essay, "Intellectual Development and the Place of Narrative in 'Basic' and Freshman Composition." The \$500 prize is given every two years to the author of the best article appearing in JBW.

Suelyn Duffey, a member of the CBW Executive Committee, then introduced the three speakers and explained the format of short presentations followed by participant discussion. Bill Jones (Rutgers/Newark) opened the presentations by stating his assumption that "racism is the core feature of American life, that white supremacy is a central tenet, that efforts to maintain white privilege and power spring naturally from its assumptions, and that it posits intelligence as innate, unequally distributed among individuals and, by easy extension, hierarchically arranged among races." Given these assumptions, Jones declared that the term basic writer is often a "euphemism and code for minority student" and that having understood that he then knew why basic writing teachers accepted the description of basic writers' behaviors, demonstrated in a momentary writing experience, as characteristic of those writers. Jones asserted that while students may accept the evaluation of themselves as dysfunctional, instructors have a choice of either accepting that evaluation and rewarding poor efforts or of contradicting

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New ESL Journal from CUNY

Carolyn Kirkpatrick

When United States demographics began to shift in the 1970s, basic writing teachers were among the first to know. The growing presence of the "new ESL student" has forced on us a re-examination of both goals and methods and is now the impetus for a significant new publication, *College ESL*, the first issue of which has just come off the press.

College ESL is sponsored by the City University of New York through its Instructional Resource Center, which also publishes the *Journal of Basic Writing*. Harvey Wiener, CUNY's Acting University Dean for Academic Affairs, underscored the need for the new publication: "There simply wasn't another college-level ESL journal focused on teaching." Editor Gay Brookes was chosen after a CUNY-wide search and call for proposals. She is a member of the ESL program at Borough of Manhattan Community College/CUNY and has long been associated with CUNY's ESL Council. Associate Editors are Roddy Potter and Virginia Slaughter; the editorial board of more than twenty members is widely representative, with members from Canada and England, as well as colleges across this country.

College ESL is aimed at a national and international audience of teachers and others who work with the new ESL population, with its large component of adult students, many of them refugees. Most previous ESL literature in our profession, Gay Brookes notes, has been directed to the situation of the international student rather than the new immigrant; however, the new ESL segment of the college population is growing rapidly. Within CUNY it's been predicted that more than 50% of the total student body will come from non-English speaking backgrounds by the end of the decade - virtually all of them from this new ESL population.

According to Brookes, *College ESL* will complement the *Journal of Basic Writing*, with a similar emphasis on pedagogy. The growing importance of the new ESL population has been reflected in an increasing number

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From the Chairs

The Newsletter

It was a pleasure to meet with many friends, old and new, at CCCC; Sallyanne Fitzgerald's report on the SIG meeting begins on page 1. On page 4 of this issue, we report also on CBW Survey #2 regarding assessment/placement practices at members' colleges. We would welcome further comments from our readers on the somewhat surprising results.

Sally Harrold this spring joins Linda Stine in abstracting recent journal articles of interest in our column "Reviews." Sally will assume responsibility for the column next fall as Linda goes off to teach for a year in Zhengzhou, China. Have you read an article in an area of special interest (especially one in a journal that might not come to CBW folks' attention) or published an article yourself? Forward your contributions to Sally, whose address appears with the column on page 6.

Are you attending a summer institute or conference? We solicit accounts (short or long) *from the basic writing perspective* of such yearly events as the NCTE Summer Institute for Teachers of Literature in Myrtle Beach, the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, the Wyoming Conference on English, the summer conference of the Council of Writing Program Administrators, and the conference on the Future of Grammar in American Schools in Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Please let us know if you would like to write such a report; truly, if we knew who was going where, we'd ask you in person.

Executive Committee: Call for Volunteers

Welcome to new Executive Committee members Sally Harrold (Southwestern Oregon Community College), Bill Jones (Rutgers/Newark), and Mary Kay Tirrell (California State/Fullerton). The Executive Committee

meets at the beginning and end of CCCC each year (and corresponds regularly) to plan for our annual meetings, the newsletter, and other CBW activities. Three new members are elected each year, so we're always looking for people willing to involve themselves more actively in the organization.

This is a formal call for volunteers for the CBW Executive Committee and other activities. We once wrote, early on, that all that's required of an Executive Committee member is regular CCCC attendance and zeal for the cause. To this we'd now add ideas about the role of a developing organization like CBW. Send a current vita and your letter attesting to these qualifications to Peter Adams (address in box below).

If you're interested but hesitant about putting your name forward, keep in mind that most CBW members (including the officers) don't know each other except through this organization; it's here that we are meeting new friends in the profession. Volunteers who aren't tapped for this year's slate will surely be called upon in other ways.

Peter Dow Adams
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

1991-92 CBW Executive Committee

Cassandra Canada (Purdue U/Calumet)
Sallyanne Fitzgerald (U of Missouri/St. Louis)
Pamela Gay (SUNY/Binghamton)
Sally Harrold (Southwestern Oregon Community College)
Bill Jones (Rutgers/Newark)
Mary Kay Tirrell (Cal State U/Fullerton)

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. 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 and includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore County, Maryland 21237.

CBW at CCCC

continued from page 1.

those assumptions and providing "honest and humane evaluations" and constructing pedagogies that offer hope. Such efforts will help their students face the "indifference and disdain that racism ensures will always be present in the classroom."

The second speaker, John Trimbur (Worcester Polytechnic Institute), spoke about *class* in the basic writing classroom, raising three questions based on his assumption that most basic writers are from the lower class since they are underprepared because of their socio-economic backgrounds. He asked how well we in the profession speak for basic writers. He suggested that, since the 1970s, there has been a backlash against basic writing programs and asked what caused it and why the anxieties of the middle class caused them to turn against "equal opportunity." Finally, he asked how we teach basic writing, particularly what is our responsibility *vis a vis* students' conceptions of themselves.

The final speaker, Nancy Peterson (University of Texas/Austin), presented a statement written in collaboration with Kay Halasek (Ohio State). "Like Navajo women, we have woven together many threads, the threads of several women's comments on gender and basic writing." Their premise was that gender cannot be separated from the issues raised by the first two speakers: "One's gender alone does not ensure one's empowerment or one's marginalization, for these are also a function of class, race, and age."

Peterson raised questions related to research, curriculum, faculty status, and student roles and relationships. She urged participants to consider gender in our research, for example when we investigate the ways students "configure themselves," their learning styles, their composing processes. She asked how we bring gender into the curriculum. For example, what materials do we use, what issues do we raise, and what methodologies do we use to "accommodate and recognize gender differences"? In examining faculty status, Peterson mentioned the issue of "teacher's marginalization from the whole of the department because of gender and rank." Finally, she questioned the effect of gender on student interaction. She concluded, "To co-opt the title of Carolyn Erickson Hill's new book, our students are 'writing from the margins,' the margins of academia, gender, race, class, and age. And we as teachers of basic writing are teaching and researching from the margins."

Peterson's conclusion could almost serve as a summary of the discussions that followed in small clusters,

Continued at right.

New ESL Journal

continued from page 1.

of ESL submissions to *JBW*, and *JBW* editors Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller have actively supported and advised the staff of *College ESL* in their new venture. "We've inherited a lot of good practices from them and from Lynn Troyka," Brookes comments, and she expects to establish a similar fall and spring publication schedule.

The introductory issue of *College ESL* features six articles on a wide range of topics, from "Politics, Pedagogy, and Professionalism" to an account of an experiment in whole-language instruction. Especially appealing are short annotated lists of recommended reading for both students and teachers.

Brookes and her associates encourage submissions "supported by research or theory" on

- current instructional practices in ESL and other disciplines
- innovations in curriculum and pedagogy
- research studies
- teacher education and training
- the culture, history, sociology, and anthropology of ESL populations
- relevant ethical, legal, and political issues.

Carolyn Kirkpatrick teaches at York College/CUNY.

To receive a copy of the introductory issue and subscription information, write *College ESL*, Instructional Resource Center/CUNY, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10028.

conversations so lively it took a second request from Duffey to re-form the larger group. When the whole-group session was resumed, final discussion focused on Trimbur's troubling observation that basic writing programs have been losing ground and institutional commitment since the mid-1970s – and especially in the present economic climate, with massive budget cuts threatened at CUNY and elsewhere. However, Bill Jones closed out the meeting on a note of hope: We know our students, we know our task, we cannot allow political or bureaucratic difficulties to distract us from our primary purpose, helping our students gain the confidence and ability to develop into proficient writers. As the meeting ended, many participants followed the CBW tradition of going to dinner to continue their conversations.

Sallyanne Fitzgerald directs the Center for Academic Development, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Puzzling Results of Survey on Assessment

Peter Dow Adams

"Basic writing instruction and assessment are intimately linked," said Karen Greenberg, writing in the fall issue of this newsletter. And indeed they are. So, in that same issue, we included a survey of CBW members' assessment practices and their evaluation of those practices. This article reports the results of that survey.

Greenberg, calling on her considerable experience in the assessment field, expressed some frustration. "Writing assessment is such a large industry today that one would expect that most procedures and instruments would be fair, reliable, and educationally sound. Unfortunately, this is not the case." Later in the article, she reported that "the consensus of our profession is that the capacity to detect errors or to fill in blanks in other people's writing has little to do with the capacity to find and develop an idea in language appropriate for a specific purpose and reader... Nevertheless, most post-secondary state-wide writing assessment programs still use multiple-choice tests in conjunction with a brief writing sample." In her conclusion, she asserted that "What we need to improve our programs—a multidraft portfolio test that adequately represents writing for different purposes and for different discourse communities—is a vision many of us are beginning to share."

Because I share Karen Greenberg's frustration—her sense that our institutions are using assessment approaches that most of us in the field *believe* are inadequate if not pernicious—I was startled by the results of the survey in our fall newsletter. First let me report the results, and then discuss why I find them surprising.

Of the 137 members the survey was mailed to, 55 (40%) responded. Twenty-two (40%) indicated that they teach in two-year colleges, 26 (47%) indicated four-year institutions, 5 (9%) indicated "other," and 2 (4%) did not indicate the type of institution at which they teach.

When asked how students are placed in your basic writing course(s), you responded as follows:

	2 year	4 year	total*	% of total
self-referral	6	7	15	14%
TSWE	5	5	11	10%
ACT/SAT	6	14	25	23%
writing sample	11	20	35	33%
other	10	8	19	18%

Note: Since you were asked to check all that applied, the totals are larger than the 55 respondents. Asterisked totals include the 7 responses that indicated either "other" or no response rather than 2 or 4 year institution.

We also asked you to indicate, if you used a writing sample, how much time students had to write it. The responses looked like this:

30 min or less	8	29%
31 to 60 min	13	46%
more than 60 min	7	25%

When asked how decisions are made about students moving from one level to the next within your basic writing program (if there is more than one level), 24 replied that you have only one level of basic writing. The remainder indicated a difference between 2-year schools and 4-year schools, with 2-year schools relying almost entirely on instructor evaluation and 4-year schools relying equally on instructor evaluation and writing samples:

response	2 yr	4 yr	tot*	% of tot
original multiple choice test	0	1	1	2%
wrtg samp equivalent to original	1	3	4	10%
different wrtg sample graded by someone other than instructor	1	6	7	17%
instructor evaluation of course performance	17	9	28	68%
other	1	0	1	2%

We asked on what basis students exit your basic writing program, with similar results:

response	2 yr	4 yr	tot*	% of tot
original multiple choice test	1	2	3	4%
wrtg samp equivalent to original	6	8	14	18%
different writing sample graded by someone other than inst	2	10	12	16%
instructor evaluation of course	19	19	44	58%
other	0	3	3	4%

The final question on the survey asked you to give your *personal opinion* about how well these approaches to assessment were working. To my surprise, the widespread dissatisfaction I expected does not seem to be there. When asked how well the initial placement procedures work, you responded as follows:

response	2 yr	4 yr	tot*	% of tot
very reliably	4	2	8	15%
adequately	9	17	27	52%
sometimes capriciously	7	4	13	25%
often capriciously	2	1	4	8%

Despite the fact that only 33% reported using a writing sample for placement, 67% reported that they think the results are very reliable or adequate for placement.

When asked your opinion about how well your procedure works in deciding when students can progress from your lower to your higher level basic writing course, those of you who have two levels reported a similar degree of satisfaction:

response	2 yr	4 yr	tot*	% of tot
very reliably	5	2	10	28%
adequately	7	8	15	42%
sometimes capriciously	4	4	8	22%
often capriciously	3	0	3	8%

When asked your opinion about how well your college's approach works in deciding when students can exit the basic writing program, you responded as follows:

response	2 yr	4 yr	tot*	% of tot
very reliably	3	4	9	17%
adequately	11	13	6	49%
sometimes capriciously	5	6	1	21%
often capriciously	3	2	7	13%

Even though one third (34%) indicate some degree of caprice, once again, a large majority (66%) appears to be satisfied with the status quo.

These data are very informal; they represent the views of only 55 people, who were *not* randomly selected. Nevertheless, they may suggest an explanation as to why practices that Greenberg describes as not "fair, reliable, [or] educationally sound" persist: perhaps those of us in the field are just not yet sufficiently dissatisfied to demand changes.

Peter Dow Adams teaches at Essex Community College in Baltimore, Maryland.

R ♦ E ♦ V ♦ I ♦ E ♦ W ♦ S Recent Articles on Basic Writing

Examining the Teacher/Student Relationship and its Effect on Student Writing

The following articles, though not focused exclusively on basic writers, explore a topic central to basic writing pedagogy: how the relationship we form with our students through our personal and written interactions affects their writing development.

Tedesco, Janis. "Women's Ways of Knowing/ Women's Ways of Composing." *Rhetoric Review* 9 (Spring 1991): 246-256. In 1987, *Women's Ways of Knowing* (Belenky et al.) challenged William Perry's male-oriented model of intellectual development, proposing a model more reflective of the female experience. In this article in *Rhetoric Review*, Tedesco examines these two models, arguing that both are valuable, but cautioning that they are not parallel schema: "The Perry scheme traces a variety of answers to the following question: *what* do I know and *how* can I access it? The Belenky et al. scheme asks a different, perhaps more fundamental or 'pre-Perry' question: before I ask *what* or *how*, I must wonder—can I know?" (254). A knowledge of both models, Tedesco writes, will help composition teachers view their students through a new "filter," understanding more about students' intellectual growth, their adaptations and regressions, and, most importantly, the ways in which our personal teaching styles contribute to or detract from our students' growth.

Tobin, Lad. "Reading Students, Reading Ourselves: Revising the Teacher's Role in the Writing Class." *College English* 53 (March 1991): 333-348. Tobin also asks us to consider the importance of the teacher/student relationship and acknowledge the central role which teachers play in the composing process as "co-authors" of our students' texts. He explains that, "while we have come to see writing as socially constructed, we

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have failed to understand the teacher's role in the construction of that meaning. We need to develop a theory of reading student texts which takes into account our reading of the students themselves, of our own unconscious motivations and associations, and, finally, of the interactive and dialectical nature of the teacher-student relationship" (335). Whether one agrees or disagrees with Tobin's theories on the impact of transference and counter-transference in the composition classroom, he reaches a conclusion that basic writing teachers, we think, might do well to consider: "As soon as I find myself giving up on a student or, on the other hand, feeling tremendous personal pride in a student's work, I need to question my own motives. I need to discover in what ways my biases and assumptions—both conscious and unconscious—are shaping my teaching" (347).

Zak, Frances. "Exclusively Positive Responses to Student Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing* 9 (Fall 1990): 40-53. Zak focuses in on one specific point of the teacher/student interface: teacher comments on student papers. The article describes an in-class research project conducted in two sections of EGC 100, a pre-freshman composition basic writing course at SUNY/Stony Brook. In one section, Zak employed the full range of teacher comments: positive and negative advice, criticism, suggestions and corrections; in the "positive only" section,

... the central role which teachers play in the composing process as "co-authors" of our students' texts

she limited comments to praise, encouragement, support, approval, descriptions and personal response. She made no suggestions for improvement and provided no corrections. At the end of the term, Zak found both sections showing equal improvement; however, she did find that students in the regular section limited their revisions to the areas pointed out by the teacher, while students in the "positive only" section seemed to gain more authority over their texts. As one student commented in her course evaluation, "Receiving a positive feedback made me think that my writing was very, very good and it made me try to do better and better every time. In fact, it made me have a competition towards myself. I wouldn't hand in anything that I didn't think was good enough" (46).

Rich, Adrienne. "Teaching Language in Open Admissions." *On Lies, Secrets, and Silences: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979. Although, strictly speaking, it is neither recent nor research, Adrienne Rich's essay on teaching in the open admission classroom addresses two fundamental issues in any teacher's relationship with students: the necessity of trust and the necessity of teaching language as a tool of understanding and power—personal, social, and po-

Many basic writers, unlike their teachers, have primarily had language used against them.

litical. Rich notes that many basic writers, unlike their teachers, have primarily had language used against them. Thus, for them to learn to trust language, to see it as a source of freedom, they must trust the teacher of language. Within this attitude of trust, they can come to know their words, their contexts, their struggles, their power. As Rich writes, "The fact that our language itself is tainted by the quality of our society means that in teaching we need to be acutely conscious of the kind of tool we want our students to have available, to understand how it has been used against them, and to do all we can to insure that language will not someday be used by them to keep others silent and powerless" (68).

This is a regular column discussing recent journal articles of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers. For the past three years, it has been thoughtfully compiled, beautifully written, and punctually submitted by Linda Stine of Lincoln University. As Linda is leaving for a year in Zhengzhou, China, this will be her last column. We wish her well and thank her warmly for her contributions to CBW.

In writing the column for this issue, Linda was joined by Sally Harrold of Southwestern Oregon Community College. Beginning with the fall issue, Sally will be responsible for Reviews. Welcome, Sally.

If you've written or read an article of interest, please send a copy to Sally Harrold, Department of English, Southwestern Oregon Community College, Coos Bay, OR 97420.

BULLETIN BOARD

The Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will hold its summer training program Jun 29-Jul 26, 1991, at Appalachian State U, Boone, NC. Contact Elaini Bingham, Kellogg Institute, Appalachian State U, Boone, NC 28606 or call at 704/262-3057.

The Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition will feature speakers Linda Brodkey, Marilyn Cooper, Jim Corder, Peter Elbow, Jeanne Fahnestock, Michael Halloran, Anne Herrington, Susan Jarrett, Debra Journet, Richard Larson, Carolyn Miller, James J. Murphy, and John Schilb and will take place at State College, PA, July 10-13, 1991. Write John Harwood, Dpt of Eng, Penn State U, University Park, PA 16802.

The second Conference on the Future of Grammar in American Schools will be held in Williamsport, PA on July 15-16, 1991. Keynote speaker will be Bill McCleary, editor of *Composition Chronicle*. Contact Ed Vavra, ACC 425, Pennsylvania College of Technology, One College Drive, Williamsport, PA 17701 or call him at 717/326-3761 ext 7736. FAX 717/327-4503.

The seventh annual Colloquium on Assisting Underprepared Students, featuring keynote speaker John Gardner, will take place on Oct 24-25, 1991, in Wilmington, DE. Contact Brenda Tucker, Goldey-Beacon College, 4701 Limestone Road, Wilmington, DE 19808.

The Program in Applied Linguistics and the Institute of African Studies at Teachers College, Columbia U, are sponsoring a Conference on African-American Language and Communication, Oct 25-26, 1991. For information, write the Office of Continuing Education, Box 132, Teachers College, Columbia U, New York, NY 10027 or call 212/678-3065.

A conference entitled *Envisioning Postsecondary Pedagogy for the 90's: Perspectives on Developmental Education*, sponsored by the Institute for the Study of Postsecondary Pedagogy and the School of Education at SUNY/New Paltz, will be held in Albany, NY, from Oct 31-Nov 2, 1991. Keynote speaker will be Henry Giroux. Contact Postsecondary Pedagogy Conference, Humanities 110, The College at New Paltz/SUNY, New Paltz, NY 12561.

The Council of Writing Program Administrators is accepting proposals for its 1992 research grants. The Council will award several small grants (up to \$1000) for research related specifically to the concerns of writing program administrators. Proposals should not exceed four single-spaced typed pages and should describe (1) the research problem and objectives, (2) the procedures for conducting the research (including sample, design, instrumentation, and personnel), (3) a time-line, and (4) a budget. Researchers planning to conduct surveys may include in their proposals the free use of the WPA mailing list. All WPA grant recipients will be asked to submit their research report to the Council's journal, *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, for possible publication before submitting it to other journals. Please include your name, affiliation, address, and telephone number on your proposal. The deadline for submission is Oct 17, 1991. Send three copies of proposal to Karen Greenberg, Chair, WPA Grant Committee, Department of English, Hunter College, CUNY, 695 Park Ave., New York, NY 10021.

The *Journal of Basic Writing* invites submissions related to all aspects of basic writing. Of particular interest are accounts of teaching under unusual or difficult circumstances, cross-cultural reports, experiences with the new technologies, and articles taking a fresh approach to their topic. Write editors Peter Miller and Bill Bernhardt, *Journal of Basic Writing*, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

The *Writing Lab Newsletter* is an informal means of exchanging information among those who work in writing labs and language skills centers. Brief articles describing labs, their instructional methods and materials, goals, programs, budgets, staffing, services, etc. are invited. Those wishing to subscribe are requested to make a donation of \$10 per year, checks payable to Purdue University. (The fee was erroneously listed as \$7.50 in the last newsletter. Sorry. -eds) Submissions and memberships should be sent to Muriel Harris, Editor, Writing Lab Newsletter, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

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.