EDITORS' COLUMN

Some time back in the process of putting it together, we started calling this our "dialogic" issue: so many of the pieces highlighted conversation, dialogue. Now it is of course a truism that articles in writing journals are "conversations," even "conversations about conversations." But this is true of the articles assembled here in such extraordinary ways that it behooves us to say why. So let us count the ways.

It hits you with the first word of the first article's title: "Dialogizing Response in the Writing Classroom: Students Answer Back" by Pamela Gay. Though "Dialogizing Response" may seem to court redundancy, Gay shows how, on the contrary, students experience teacher commentary and evaluation as a silencing, a pre-emptive strike on their own thinking about their success, even their intentions. Left unarticulated, students' reactions to teachers' responses can have little impact on our work, much less theirs, but Gay challenges us to hear the responses to our responses, to let students talk back to feedback.

Feedback plays a crucial role in "Basic Writing: Curricular Interactions with New Technology" by Susan Stan and Terence G. Collins: beginning with an expansive view of how technological developments and pedagogical change have paralleled each other, Stan and Collins are not content to describe technological innovations and trace general trends in their use (though that, surely, would have been helpful enough); they use their nationwide survey to identify specific practices, successes, and needs. Instructors who have made the technology work for their basic writing students—and also those who need help to do that—get a voice in this article.

Voices that might go unheard include unarticulated silences, resistances to giving voice to certain kinds of thought. Candace Spigelman's "Taboo Topics and the Rhetoric of Silence: Discussing *Lives on the Boundary* in a Basic Writing Class" gives particular attention to what students don't want to talk about. Mike Rose's important book gave rise to some very effective discussion and writing from her students, but Spigelman is particularly interested in the critical point at which discussion shut down, the conversation stopped. And she engages Mike Rose in a conversation about what to do to get it going again.

"Mediated Texts: A Heuristic for Academic Writing," by Eileen Biser, Linda Rubel, and Rose Marie Toscano, is about translating—in literal and significant ways—student conversation into academic prose. Seeking accommodations for their deaf students, the authors have developed a means of having students talk through a second draft with an interpreter, working from that transcript to develop a final version. Though this talking is in American Sign Language, Biser, Rubel, and

DOI: 10.37514/JBW-J.1998.17.1.01

Toscano suggest and even spell out the relevance and power this "talking through" stage can have for basic writing and ESL students.

"Talking through" might also be a powerful heuristic for academic scholarship, something we find borne out by the outcome of what we think is a very successful experiment. We were so impressed with panel presentations of some graduate students in composition and rhetoric (and with their conversation afterward) that we invited them to hold an online, potentially publishable discussion of the issues that most concerned them and their basic writing students. The result, "Assessing Our Assessments: A Collective Questioning of What Students Need—And Get," is a rich, probing, provocative conversation, one that ought to be a source of pride to the participants: Elizabeth Bruna, Ian Marshall, Tim McCormack, Leo Parascondola, Wendy Ryden, and Carl Whithaus.

Talk among colleagues is one thing, Harvey Wiener reminds us, and productive talk with those outside the academy is quite another. His "After the Attack on Basic Writing—And After" analyzes the vituperation and misunderstanding visited on basic writing in politics and the press, typically under the banner of "standards." Wiener, who once held the City University deanship created for and by Mina Shaughnessy, carefully articulates how the field of basic writing has been misrepresented by those on the outside and inadequately represented by those of us within, too quiet about our successes, too inattentive to public perceptions, too busy with specific students and classes to put together the kind of data that would defend an educational enterprise now so generally assailed. Reviewing controversies so recent only deadlines could keep headlines from becoming more new sources, Wiener has given us some bracing predictions about the changes the field of basic writing will likely see before long.

Our last piece continues a conversation started by its author, Ira Shor. In last spring's issue of *JBW*, his article "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality" provoked considerable discussion, including two written responses submitted to *JBW*, one by Karen L. Greenberg and one by Terence G. Collins. Here, Shor responds to those responses, and in a way that ensures that, not just for these three scholars but for all of us, the thinking and the discussion will go on. Since the conversation is about whether basic writing (less as a field of scholarship than as a site of instruction) will go on, that much, at least, is reassuring. And it is emblematic, in a way, of all the conversations (about conversations) in this issue. Taken together, they constitute an important promise to all of us associated with basic writing. Rife with perils, beset by threats, basic writing is also productive of some of the best teaching practices and the best thinking to be found in any field. The pieces gathered here offer a compelling testimony to that, and they promise that the conversation(s) will continue.

—**George Otte** *and* **Trudy Smoke**