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The *Journal of Basic Writing* publishes articles of theory, research, and teaching practices related to basic writing. Articles are refereed by members of the Editorial Board (see overleaf) and the Editors.

The *Journal of Basic Writing* is published twice a year, in the spring and fall. We welcome unsolicited manuscripts and ask authors to consult the detailed "Call for Articles" in this issue. Subscriptions for individuals are $15.00 for one year and $28.00 for two years; subscriptions for institutions are $20.00 for one year and $38.00 for two years. Foreign postage is $5.00 extra per year. ADDRESS:

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require five copies of a manuscript and an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only.* Papers which are accepted will eventually have to supply camera-ready copy for all ancillary material (tables, charts, etc.). One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing, social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory, grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; English as a second language; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.

EDITORS' COLUMN

Community is a contested word in this issue, but it has also revealed unsuspected resonances and vulnerabilities to us here in New York City since September 11th. Sorry for the lateness of the issue, we have other reasons for wanting to invoke what has happened, yet we also know the new convention of simply citing the date obscures the fact that it was not just an event but a catalyst for a chain of changes that continues to unwind. We are not interested in listing disruptions. It's just that, even now, we can't imagine beginning this column without acknowledging what happened at the beginning of this academic year — and continues happening in consequence. May we all experience more safety and sanity in the future than we have in the recent past.

But back to the issue. We lead off with some pieces that represent an interesting departure for us (and most journals). Aware that, in Joseph Harris and Mark Wiley, we had two authors writing on different sides of an issue — the idea of "community" — we encouraged them to engage each other even as they were preparing the versions of their work they would publish. Invited by us to offer up a version of a conference keynote that was still notes for a talk, not yet the paper it has since become, Joseph Harris was able to read Mark Wiley's piece and respond to it as he was preparing his final version — something he notes as he begins "Beyond Community: From the Social to the Material." Mark's "Rehabilitating the 'Idea of Community,'" already reviewed and revised, was in its final version at this point, so he elected to do a separate, short piece as a response to Joe's work. Needless to say, we're very glad that another medium, e-mail, allowed two contributors to have a kind of dialogue while developing and presenting their views.

E-mail made another contribution to this issue, in a way. A new listserv — Teaching_Basic_Writing — has been set up, moderated by Laura Gray-Rosendale (a past *JBW* contributor) and sponsored by McGraw Hill; its modus operandi is to invite experts to publish overview statements on particular areas of interest, then lead a discussion of these on the list. Tom Reynolds' piece on training BW teachers became the basis for his article "Training Basic Writing Teachers: Institutional Considerations" (where you'll find information on the TBW list as well). It may be due to its point of origin (though we also know Tom well enough to know it is characteristic of him) that the article does not presume to deliver answers but, instead, elects to pose provocative and useful questions, questions that direct our attention to our own

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institution-specific goals and contexts, our own enabling and disabling constraints, our own (dare we use the word?) communities.

Speaking of which, Donald McCrary, in "Speaking in Tongues: Using Womanist Sermons as Intra-Cultural Rhetoric in the Writing Classroom," shows how consideration of the kind of discourse that conjures community can help to interpenetrate circumscribed venues of language use. With a rich offering of examples, not least of all ones drawn from his own classroom, Don shows us a compelling paradox: that making boundaries visible grants them a kind of transparency; acknowledging the walls of the classroom and what they shut out, he finds, can sometimes make us and our students that much more able to see beyond them.

Another piece rich in classroom-based examples, used in a way we found especially appealing, is Anmarie Eves-Bowden's "What Basic Writers Think about Writing." Her own classroom-based research is nested in an account of what a new teacher (and a newcomer to the field) has had to learn about basic writing, and what (with its help) she thinks her students need of that new knowledge. We may sometimes think too much about the field as so much ground covered, forgetting that it is, for each individual who comes to it, terra incognita to be rediscovered again and again. Here the scholarship is not simply reviewed but tested against the hard facts of the classroom: not just what the scholars (and one teacher) think the students need but also what the students think.

Finally, there is Trudy Smoke's valedictory piece. Here we must drop the editorial we, so that one of us, the other editor, can refer to this exemplary fosterer of scholarship and publication in the third-person. As Trudy prepares to step away from *JBW* after more than half a decade as co-editor, she takes an opportunity to reflect, but she is due some reflection about her as well. The role of editor is necessarily an exercise in self-effacement: an editor knows her work to be successful precisely to the degree it is invisible. But take it from one who knows: the hours Trudy invested in *JBW* are way beyond reckoning — invaluable to the journal as well as countless — while her patience and energy seem still more boundless. During a time when the enterprise of basic writing was increasingly under attack, wracked by controversy and contention (especially from without), she kept the keel of *JBW* even and steady, dedicating herself in particular to showing the world just how thoughtful and insightful the practitioners and scholars who submitted work to this journal are.

The contributors to this issue are clearly cases in point, as we trust you will find.

-- George Otte *and* Trudy Smoke

Joseph Harris

BEYOND COMMUNITY: FROM THE SOCIAL TO THE MATERIAL

ABSTRACT: *This revised version of a talk given at the 2001 meeting of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors continues a line of thinking in* A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966 *(Prentice, 1997), which offered a critique of current use of metaphors of community in teaching writing as both utopian and confining. This essay suggests alternate ways of imagining writing and teaching as taking place in more open, contested, and heteroglot spaces, proposing three counter-concepts to community: public, material, and circulation.*

I write this essay in response to a series of invitations to reconsider work I have done on the uses and limits of the idea of community in teaching writing. The first came from Caroline Pari, who invited me to speak in the fall of 2001 to the 25th annual meeting of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS) on the theme of "Redefining Community." I said yes, glad of the chance to meet with a group that has influenced the teaching of writing since the days of Mina Shaughnessy – and, of course, unaware of how charged the concept of community would become in New York in the weeks after September 11th. The second came from George Otte, who asked me at the CAWS conference if I would prepare a version of my remarks for this issue, and who mentioned that Mark Wiley was writing an essay for *JBW* on "Rehabilitating Community" that responded to my work. And the third then came from Mark Wiley, who graciously allowed me to read his essay as I was writing this.

I mention these invitations both for the chance to thank Caroline, George, and Mark, and because I hope that situating my comments in this way will help me make my central point – which is that we need to be skeptical of terms for social groupings like *community* which valorize what they claim merely to describe while at the same time aware of how much of what we think, write, and teach is shaped by the mate-

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rial circumstances of our work. Along with the rest of the world, I watched first in horror at the events of September 11th and then in awe as the citizens of New York City turned to help their neighbors with extraordinary courage and generosity. Having done so, I was not going to lecture on the meaning of community to a group of New Yorkers a few weeks later. And yet I had been invited to say something about the social contexts of the teaching of writing, and I have never lost my uneasiness with the use of metaphors of acculturation or conversion, of moving from one community to another, to describe learning. The academy imagined as a series of gated intellectual communities, bounded by disciplinary norms and checkpoints, seems to me to have little to offer students and teachers of writing, for reasons I offer in the closing chapters of *A Teaching Subject* and which Mark Wiley summarizes nicely in his essay. But what I perhaps fail to do very well in that book is to move beyond critique, to offer alternatives to metaphors of community. How can we talk about writing and teaching as social practices without resort to metaphors of consensus and enclosure? My sense is that we need a change in idiom. I would thus like to bring forward here a set of terms that I think can help us imagine our work as teachers as taking place not within the bounded and familiar space of a disciplinary community but in more open, contested, and heteroglot spheres of discourse. Those terms are *public, material,* and *circulation.*

But let me make two quick disclaimers: First, I claim no originality in offering these concepts as alternatives to community. I will try instead to show that all three are now emerging as generative ideas in our field. And, second, I have no desire to argue over semantics. The program that Mark Wiley describes in "Rehabilitating the Idea of Community" seems a powerful, tactical response to the problem of how to reach out to students at his college who feel alienated from academic work. The last thing I would want to do as a theorist is to get in the way of such efforts. What Mark's essay helps me understand better—and so, I hope, to clarify here—are my own impulses in arguing against an easy reliance on the idea of community. When I began to think and write about community, I did so out of a strong sense of kinship with scholars like Richard Hoggart and Richard Rodriguez—who had both written eloquently about the sense of loss that can haunt working-class youths when they find themselves newly schooled as part of the professional, middle class. I wanted (and still want) to argue for a mode of teaching that resists the fusing of social values with the acquiring of critical skills, and so was (and am still) wary of invitations to join a "community" of middle-class professionals. My objection has thus always been to imagine the *goal* of intellectual work as agreement or team play, rather than as dissent or argument. But I have never meant to suggest that the classroom or college should be a tense, indifferent,

or combative place. On the contrary, my experience has been that for people to work through their intellectual disagreements in a serious and sustained way, they need to feel at ease with one another—not as members of some abstract, organic, disciplinary community, but simply as interlocutors who have agreed to hear each other out at this time and in this place. This seems very much the aim of the Learning Alliance that Mark Wiley describes—to create a social network that encourages students not simply to absorb but also to talk and argue together about the ideas they encounter in their classes. If *that* is what community means, then I'm all for it. But I would continue to insist that our job is not to initiate students into a discrete world we think of ourselves as already inhabiting—to induct them, that is, as members of our disciplines and professions—but rather to help them find ways to use the texts, practices, and ideas we have to offer in discussing issues that matter to them.

Public

If the teaching of college writing once made a kind of comfortable sense that it no longer does, then it is not hard to see why. For the most part, the faculty of the 19th century American college knew exactly who their students were and what instruction they required—they were young gentlemen aspiring to the elite professions of the ministry, law, medicine, or finance. The task of the professor of belles lettres (or oratory, or composition) was to imbue his charges with the verbal skills and sensibility required to take on such roles. But if this view of students as gentlemen scholars has seemed more nostalgic than convincing for at least the last 50 years, then no compelling alternative to it has yet emerged. Instead composition has simply tended to imagine students as, well . . . *students*—as people whom we are asked to help get through the business of school. Taken to its logical conclusion, this form of thinking has ended up picturing students as apprentice members of the academic disciplines, in training as developmental psychologists, literary critics, cultural anthropologists, or the like. But there is something dispiriting and confining about such a way of imagining students, and so some teachers have begun to construct writing courses that cast students instead as something more like *public intellectuals*—that is, as writers whose work tries to address readers and issues outside of the academy.

Now *public* is surely as vexed a term as *community*. In its classic formulations, the *public* refers to a social space existing outside the direct control of either the state or private business where individuals can discuss issues of general concern. But Bruce Robbins has rightly complained of the phantom-like quality of this concept, of how the

public sphere always seems just out of reach, either receding into a nostalgic past or glimpsed as part of a utopian future. And a distinguished series of theorists—Lippman, Dewey, Habermas, Sennett, Fraser—have argued vigorously over the meanings and uses of the term without ever going so far as to suggest that anything like a robust public culture has ever been achieved in mass society. In more practical terms, if *public* also implies *national*, then few of us can hope to attain the level of publicity enjoyed by media intellectuals like Cornel West or bell hooks. On the other hand, though, Susan Wells has argued convincingly against the pretense that training students in brief and ineffectual forms of civic discourse like letters to the editor will somehow help them enter a public culture that may or may not actually exist. My sense is that the term is more useful as an adjective than as a noun—that we might best speak of certain uses of writing as *more or less* public, as opposed to more or less private, or more or less disciplinary.

One form of teaching towards public-ness in this adjectival sense asks students to consider how their lives are connected to and shaped by social events and forces. Amy Goodburn, for instance, discusses a first-year writing course she has taught in which students are asked to identify a historical event that has somehow had an impact on their own families or communities, to do research on the event and its local effects, and to write an essay reflecting on this intersection of the public and personal. Goodburn reports that many students began by writing about the sorts of events one would commonly find in history textbooks—The Battle of the Bulge, the Great Depression, Vietnam—but often shifted to events and issues that were, literally, closer to home: combat troop reunions, a polio epidemic in a small town, the impact of the birth control pill on the women in a writer's family, and so on. Such a course asks students to write about their lives in ways long familiar to composition teachers but also to problematize such work by viewing their experiences as not wholly personal. Similarly, in a first-year course on Writing the Modern University here at Duke, my colleague Pegeen Reichert Powell asks students to write on a set of public controversies that directly concern them as college students: a set of debates over the quality of intellectual life at Duke, the recent campus campaigns against the sale of clothing made in sweatshops, and the imbroglio over whether or not student newspapers should have run advertisements arguing against racial reparations. In writing on such issues, students are asked to imagine themselves as something more than just students, as participants in an institution whose actions and policies have consequences in the world. Courses like those designed by Goodburn and Reichert Powell thus offer students intellectual training that is framed not as part of a disciplinary project but as a way of commenting on, and perhaps entering into, a set of more pub-

lic concerns.

Another form of teaching towards the public asks students to become more directly involved as writers in the neighborhoods and communities around their schools. I am thinking here of what is often known as service-learning, a movement whose influence on the teaching of writing is well-described by Thomas Deans in his recent *Writing Partnerships*. Deans identifies three models for connecting writing courses to communities: writing *for, about,* and *with* the community. The writing *for* the community approach puts students to work as writers for local, non-profit agencies, helping to produce the kinds of documents (proposals, newsletters, press releases, brochures, manuals, and the like) that such organizations need in serving their clients. Writing *about* courses ask students to work in community settings and then to draw on these experiences in writing academic essays about the politics of work, literacy, or schooling. In contrast to the more pragmatic tasks emphasized by the writing *for* model, the focus here is on helping students acquire the moves and strategies of critical or intellectual discourse. The third approach, writing *with* the community, has students collaborate with local activists and neighborhood residents in creating materials for a public discussion of issues impacting their communities.

The driving force behind service-learning is clearly its politics, its vision of service to others as an integral aspect of professional life. But we shouldn't lose sight of how the intellectual agenda of service-learning also shares with other forms of critical teaching a disquiet with disciplinary boundaries and a desire to see writing as a mode of social action. It is that impulse to push beyond the walls of the academy, to apply critical habits of mind to something other than disciplinary work, that most interests me about what I am here calling public teaching.

Material

In the late 1980s scholars in composition began to take what is now known as a "social turn," shifting their focus from the composing processes of individual writers to the broader contexts of literacy, and foregrounding issues of race, gender, and ideology in teaching. While this turn has always struck me as salutary, there is also a way in which an increasing interest in the workings of power seems often to have been accompanied by a decreasing attention to the workings of texts. The question, for instance, of what specific skills students might need to acquire in order to claim authority as writers in the university could sometimes seem to get lost in discussions of the politics of academic discourse. Similarly, and ironically, the question of what practical

moves compositionists might need to make to gain more control over their courses and programs often seemed to be subsumed by sweeping (and unfeasible) demands for all writing teachers to be put on the tenure track. And so the 1990s saw both the establishment of composition studies as a research field and an increasing reliance of composition programs on part-time faculty and graduate students to actually teach writing to undergraduates.

To work through this paradox I believe we need to shift our focus from the global to the local, the ideological to the logistical, the social to the material. In arguing for such a concern with the physical, economic, and institutional constraints on the work of writing teachers and students, I am following the lead of Bruce Horner in *Terms of Work for Composition*, an exceptionally rigorous study of how the intellectual project of composition has been shaped by the site of its work—that is, by the demands of administering the first-year writing course. One response to these pressures, unfortunately tagged as the New Abolitionism, has been to suggest that composition somehow disentangle itself from overseeing the universal requirement—that we quit our defining affiliation with the service course and instead become a field of study much like any other in the academy. My interests, though, center less on forging a new discipline and more on reforming the work that goes on at the contested and politically-charged sites of basic and first-year writing. To do so, I think we will need to find ways of improving the conditions of work for three sets of stakeholders in composition: *undergraduates, teachers*, and *administrators.*

Undergraduates

I teach now at a private university where almost all undergraduates are between the ages of 18 and 22, go to school full-time, reside on campus, and are supported by their parents—a context in which I can assume that academics is their central concern. But this is not the situation faced by many writing teachers, especially those in public and urban universities, whose students must often try to wrest time for study from hours in days that are already over-committed to work, family, and commuting. It's easy to see how such schedules might overwhelm even those students who are well-prepared to take on the work of a writing course. So what about those who have been badly served by their high schools, or who are struggling to learn English as a second language, or who come from families or neighborhoods skeptical of the value of college? Some of the most humane work on teaching in the last 10 years has directly addressed such questions, insisting that we view students not simply in the context of our classrooms but in the full context of their lives. For instance, in her landmark study, *Time*

to Know Them, Marilyn Sternglass tracks the progress of several working, first-generation college students at the City University of New York, demonstrating that they can succeed in the academy, can indeed do very strong intellectual work, *if* they are allowed to pursue their studies beyond the traditional four or five years of college and *if* tests which measure little more than their ability to produce idiomatic and error-free prose are not set up as curricular roadblocks for students whose first language is not English. In order to achieve the democratic hopes of American higher education, Sternglass suggests, we need to be willing to work with adult students over extended periods of time and to help them in balancing the demands of school, employment, and family.

This hopeful and patient vision of teaching has been continued by two younger scholars who have both worked closely with Sternglass. In "Class Dismissed," Mary Soliday shows how she and others at City College have tried to make the writing curriculum less of a series of arbitrary obstacles and more of a delimited and coherent learning experience for beginning undergraduates. Soliday offers an incisive class-oriented analysis of the university curriculum, suggesting that the layering of required courses in the early years of college study can, in the name of rigor, actually serve as a covert form of insuring that many working-class students will run out of time, energy, or funds before they even get to take courses in their intended majors. Similarly, in *Defending Access*, Tom Fox offers a spirited argument against the ways an uncritical embrace of the notion of "standards" limits access to education by minority and working-class students. Fox begins his book with a concise history of how appeals to standards have served as a gatekeeping mechanism in US colleges over the last century —with a special focus on the uneasy complicity of compositionists with such efforts. He then moves on to offer several compelling examples of how teachers can act to deflect attention away from formalist measures of writing abilities (with their correspondingly reductive understandings of student writers) and toward a more rhetorical sense of literacy. He insists in order to grasp students' achievements and difficulties in the academy, we need to look beyond the walls of the classroom, to situate their work as students in the (often daunting) material circumstances of their lives. When we consider what many non-traditional students go through simply to remain in college, Fox suggests, what might at first seem mediocre performances on their part begin to appear almost heroic. What we can't do, Fox asserts, is to judge the work of minority and working-class students according to an abstract set of standards that fails to account for the ways the economic realities of their lives impinges on their careers as students.

Teachers

We similarly need to find ways that allow the teachers in our programs to make use of the scholarship in our field. To attend CCCC or read our journals is to come into touch with an array of thoughtful, nuanced, and informed approaches to teaching composition. But it is hard, realistically, to imagine that teachers who are overloaded and underpaid—often working on a per-course basis, with little support from or contact with other faculty, and sometimes teaching several sections of basic or first-year writing at a number of different campuses—will have the time or inclination to keep up with recent scholarship in composition, design innovative courses, and respond to student writing in detailed and careful ways. And yet one should not expect any teacher to do less. We don't need new theories of rhetoric or composing, or new approaches to classroom practice, in order to improve much of the teaching that goes on in our programs. What we need are ways to give teachers the time and support they need to do their jobs well, and the power to hold them accountable for doing so. Curriculum is personnel. So long as the first worry of a writing program director is simply to make sure that all the sections she is responsible for actually get staffed, then the quality of teaching in that program will suffer. Composition has been a textbook-driven field because so many programs are staffed in large part by a contingent army of part-timers and graduate students who have little formal training in teaching writing and thus limited abilities to design courses on their own. The long-term solution to this problem is not to write better textbooks (or at least not simply to do so), but to create a better supported and more professional faculty.

One way to do so is to insist that writing be taught by tenure-stream faculty—and where this is possible, it should be done. But the very scale of the enterprise at many universities, which must staff scores or hundreds of sections of writing courses per term, coupled with the aversion that many tenure-stream faculty show towards teaching beginning undergraduates, often makes such a solution impracticable. In such cases we need to consider alternatives to tenure which offer writing teachers some real measure of job security and professional authority—and not simply continue current hiring practices in the hope that the revolution will some day come. No one response will suit all programs. In some institutions, collective bargaining might be the most effective tactic; in others, it might be longer-term contracts for experienced teachers, or postdoctoral fellowships or visiting lectureships for recent PhDs, or named instructorships for advanced graduate students. Or other programs might open up the chance to teach first-year writing to scholars outside of English, or think of ways of recasting the course in composition as a writing-intensive seminar taught by faculty

across the disciplines.

The point is to think outside the box—to imagine that our first charge is not to support the graduate program, or to defend tenure, or to make sure that current staff are given as many sections as they want, but rather to set up working conditions that support the most effective teaching of writing to undergraduates that is possible. I am encouraged that many recent and compelling proposals for doing so come from non-tenure-stream faculty—in the pages of the Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Forum in *CCC*, by Michael Murphy in his longer *CCC* essay on "A New Faculty for a New University: Toward A Full-Time Teaching-Intensive Track in Composition," and in Eileen Schell and Patricia Stock's volume of essays detailing strategies for improving working conditions for writing teachers, *Moving a Mountain: Transforming the Role of Contingent Faculty in Composition Studies and Higher Education.*

Administrators

In thus shifting focus from curriculum to labor force, a familiar figure in composition gains a new importance: the writing program administrator or WPA, whom it now seems possible to picture not as a mere bureaucratic functionary but as an activist reformer in the university, the person best situated to argue for improved working conditions for composition students and teachers. In *As If Learning Mattered*, Richard Miller argues that academics need to embrace their roles as mid-level bureaucrats in large corporations (universities) if they are to have much hope of changing how those institutions work. This point seems especially relevant to the situation of many compositionists, who are often pressed into managing one of the largest programs of the university without being offered the status or power of chairs of much smaller departments. One response to this crisis of authority has been to suggest that composition should aspire to become a discipline in its own right, with the imagined effect of turning the director of composition into something more like the chair of the department of rhetoric. I think that this would be a strategic mistake—that much of the interest and energy of composition stems both from its *not* being a discipline in the traditional sense and from its engagement in the vital if sometimes inchoate project of first-year writing. Rather than working to set up new departments or graduate programs, then, I would like to see us try to gain more direct control over the staffing and curriculum of our basic and first-year writing programs. At issue here will be whether these programs are housed within English departments or not—and the responses to this question will no doubt vary for tactical reasons according to local contexts. But once she gains real control over who teaches first-year writing and how, it becomes easy to imagine the WPA as a key player in the undergraduate curriculum, even if she lacks the

disciplinary cachet of the chair of English, precisely because of her substantive influence on student learning. That is, it seems to me, a key advantage of thinking in local and material terms of programs rather than in the more abstract terms of disciplinary communities.

Circulation

My argument so far has pulled me in two directions: On the one hand, my interest in teaching towards the public sphere has led me to advocate pushing beyond the concerns of our disciplines; on the other hand, my commitment to the material reform of writing programs requires an intense focus on the institutional structures in which we work. I think that this tension can be resolved, though, by distinguishing, as Evan Watkins suggests in *Work Time*, between the meanings that circulate inside the classroom and the values that circulate outside it. Watkins points out that while many teachers of English (or in our case, writing) consider the work they ask students to take on to be critical and oppositional, the value given that work (in the form of grades) outside the classroom is often quite different. And so, for example, while I might think that the 'A' I've given a certain student reflects her ability to interrogate the discourses of power, what that grade signifies to an admissions committee or prospective employer may simply be that she can use language powerfully. Writing from the perspective of the individual professor, Watkins despairs at this lack of control over the value of his work as it travels beyond his classroom, but I think that, from the point of view of a writing *program*, we have a much better chance to collectively define the meaning of what we do. At many universities, almost *every* undergraduate must take at least one course in composition. This circulation of students allows writing programs a remarkable chance to stand for a particular kind of intellectual work in the university by offering courses that, while not necessarily following a common syllabus, are directed towards a coherent set of goals. In this way, an intelligent program can augment rather than constrain the work of its faculty. My argument here is that we need to strengthen the position of our programs within the university in order to promote a view of writing that pushes beyond disciplinary boundaries.

A key part of advancing such an agenda will be to find ways in which the writings of students might circulate beyond the classroom. New web-based technologies that allow writers to exchange and respond to texts online have already begun to sidestep the need for the classroom to serve as the physical site where hard copies of papers are traded among students and teachers. In allowing much of the routine work of a writing course to take place *outside* of the classroom, I have

found that such technologies help me move more quickly and powerfully *in* the classroom to precisely the sort of close work with student texts that I have always felt a writing course needs to center on—since students enter class having already read one another's work and prepared to discuss it. Teaching in such an environment offers one a glimpse of how the decentralized, digital university imagined by John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid in the closing chapters of *The Social Life of Information* might actually work—as a place to which people come less to gain access to an archive of materials than to interact with a set of knowledgeable people. In such an emerging university, we might find it even more useful to picture the writing class not as an enclosed community but as a public space crossed by many persons and discourses. And certainly the Web offers at least the increasing possibility that student texts might find their way outside the confines of the writing classroom, that students might begin not merely to analyze but also to participate in the ongoing disputes and controversies of our culture.

I don't mean here to equate putting up a web page with political action. But I do think that in looking for ways to help student texts travel beyond the classroom—through service-learning, through participating in campus debates (as in Pegeen Reichert Powell's course), and perhaps through web work as well—we can start to loosen the grip of disciplinarity on our own ideas of writing. In a brilliant essay on "Composition and the Circulation of Writing," John Trimbur argues that we have been too willing to think of the writing classroom as a quasi-domestic space, where we act *in loco parentis* in assigning and monitoring student discourse, making sure that their work conforms to one standard or the other of authority. Trimbur suggests that we instead ask students first to analyze and then to intervene in how a particular social issue gets discussed in competing spheres of discourse: academic, journalistic, governmental, popular, activist, and so on. And so, for example, as a final project for a course he teaches on Writing about Disease and Public Health, Trimbur asks students "to work in groups to produce in any medium they choose (e.g., brochures, pamphlets flyers, posters, videos, radio announcements, skits, Web sites, t-shirts) public health publicity on teen or college-age sexuality" (214). The point of such teaching is to problematize (rather than reinforce) the role of expertise in producing knowledge. The crucial issue in teaching writing, for Trimbur, thus has to do "with whose questions we take up—students, laypersons, and experts in the disciplines and professions" (217). I worry that in locating the act of writing in a single place, in a hypothesized community of academic discourse, we limit the chances students get to do work that is truly critical of the culture of expertise to which we, as professional intellectuals, belong.

At the close of "Rehabilitating the 'Idea of Community,'" Mark

Wiley asserts that learning communities cannot simply attempt to "recoup the past" (p. 31), to recreate a kind of safe and familiar space protected from conflict, but must rather help students "move between home and public space" (p. 30-31). I couldn't agree more. But I must also say that I know of few visions of community that also don't seem to lapse at points into a nostalgia for the mutuality of family or the small town. And so, for instance, in the principles that Wiley lists for the Learning Alliance, we learn that: "Good communities . . . encourage cooperation, compromise, and consensus . . . develop identity through group norms, standards, and values . . . [and] promote caring, trust, and teamwork" (pp. 30). These are hard values to argue against, and yet I find myself still, at this late moment, wanting to ask: Whose norms? Whose team? How does one learn how to dissent as well as to cooperate and compromise?

Again, I admire the work of the Learning Alliance in helping students acquire the discourses of school and to engage with the ideas and persons they meet at the university. We need to find more such ways of supporting the efforts of faculty to connect with undergraduates as intellectuals. And I am glad to hear Mark Wiley argue that "a community is not a club" (p. 24) and that the sort of learning community he advocates does not aim for the "safety of familiarity and like-mindedness" (p. 31). But once such qualities of warmth and cohesion are stripped away from the concept of community, I'm no longer sure what's left to distinguish it from other ways of imagining social groups. Rather than trying to rehabilitate an old idea, then, I'd like to see us work towards a new sense of writing as a social and material practice.

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Mark Wiley

REHABILITATING THE "IDEA OF COMMUNITY"

ABSTRACT: *Learning communities have become increasingly popular ways for working with students, especially first-year students, yet there has been little discussion of these structures in the composition literature. Given that the root metaphor of conflict informs many first-year writing pedagogies and in light of Joseph Harris's critique of "community" as a key word, talk of learning communities may invoke fears of a return to conservative tenets of expressivism. Community-like elements, however, are regularly noted by other scholars as informing practices in many writing classes. The apparent success of learning communities and the continued use of community in our classrooms should therefore cause the field to re-consider how we define "community." Such re-considerations should not only respond to Harris's insightful criticism but also build on research and theory that suggest why learning communities can be effective vehicles for curricular and institutional change.*

Learning communities have become popular topics of discussion at national conferences and in the literature of sub-fields such as student life and development, the first year experience, and undergraduate education. Many two-and four-year colleges and universities are experimenting with learning communities as potentially effective ways for creating curricular coherence and for helping students succeed academically (see Gabelnick et al.; Lenning and Ebbers; Shapiro and Levine). Several learning communities are intentionally designed for first-year students, particularly those identified as "at risk," to ease the transition between high school and college. However, learning communities are rarely mentioned in composition's scholarly journals. Why? Perhaps learning communities are old news in that some of the tenets underlying them have been staples of first-year writing pedagogy for years—student-centered classrooms, collaborative and active learning, and frequent student-teacher contact. Or, it might also be the case that because *conflict* appears to be the root metaphor organizing writing pedagogy, particularly basic writing, (Harris, "Negotiat-

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ing"), scholarly discussions encouraging the development of community in the classroom are perceived as a return to assumptions associated with expressivism—the classroom as a sort of pastoral environment, free of conflict, where like-minded students can nurture their individual voices. There is a notable irony, however, in that the lack of explicit theoretical discussions about community in our field's scholarly literature is offset by many casual references in that literature to community building and community-like elements that apparently contribute to successful learning in the writing class.

Recall that in 1989 Joseph Harris made a compelling case for rethinking the way community should be used in our work with students ("The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing"). In his well-received critique of community as that term had been used in the composition literature, Harris argued that the term should be reserved "to describe the workings of . . . specific and local groups," such as individual classrooms and academic departments. He claimed further that we take a "material view of community: one that, like a city, allows for both consensus and conflict..." (20). Harris extended that critique in 1997 ("Community") by offering *public* as "a positive opposing term. The opposition between terms is organized by competing images of how people live. Talk about "discourse communities" reflects an idealized version of community as "romantic, organic, and pastoral" and one "where everyone pretty much shares the same set of values and concerns." Harris links uses of community with idealized and utopian conceptions of social life. Rather than community, Harris argues, our classrooms might resemble public spaces "where differences are made visible, and thus where the threat of conflict or even violence is always present" so that our students might cultivate "*civility*, a willingness to live with difference" (109).

Harris's argument to limit the use of the term community was appropriate and necessary, yet his initial and later critiques of discourse communities and the idea of community itself has taken the concept in a direction that, while helpful for training public intellectuals, seems to me to do little to address some of the compelling needs of our students, especially basic writers, needs to which learning communities are intentionally designed to respond. Although Harris focused on the community concept and did not discuss learning communities per se, based on his debunking of the term, it would appear that the learning community movement could be read as an educational reform effort based more on nostalgia and utopian fantasies than as institutional re-organization to help students stay in school, thrive, and graduate. Harris's arguments have reduced the concept of community to near uselessness, yet the seeming success of learning communities suggests otherwise. Moreover, it is odd that in a field such as rhetoric and composition, dominated as it is by social constructionist theories of knowl-

edge in which social relations among individuals are crucial to knowledge-making and dissemination, and in a field where many believe that writing as a form of social action should aim toward social justice, little sustained serious discussion is given to potentially effective forms of social relations that might be encompassed by richer conceptions of community. What follows here then is an attempt to rehabilitate ideas of community, not so much to define it, but to identify qualities, values, and social structures associated with the concept that might not only help our students persist to graduation but also to flourish while they are in college. In opening such an inquiry, I want to first describe some of the thinking behind learning communities and how they have been defined, and then consider why they can be effective. In light of Harris's criticism, finally, I'll suggest a direction we might go to rehabilitate a concept that persists, not because it represents a nostalgic wish for better times (although it certainly can be used that way), but because it represents something fundamentally good about human beings in their relations with one another.

The *Community* in Learning Communities

The idea of community as it appears so far in the learning community movement is focused on re-organizing the scenes of teaching to promote student learning more conscientiously. Probably the most well known and frequently cited definition, but by no means the only one, is offered by Faith Gabelnick, Jean MacGregor, Roberta Matthews, and Barbara Leigh Smith.

> Learning communities purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or course work so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students . . . [L]earning communities are also usually associated with collaborative and active approaches to learning, some form of team teaching, and interdisciplinary themes. (5)

Learning communities emphasize curricular coherence; active learning; and making connections, that is, connections between ideas presented in different disciplines and making social connections —student-to-student and student-to-teacher. Although Gabelnick et al. originally described five types of learning communities in the 1980s, they have since identified three fundamental underlying models that can be varied and combined to fit a given context. Anne Goodsell Love and Kenneth Tokuno describe these three models as (1) student cohorts in larger classes, (2) paired or clustered classes, and (3) team-

taught programs.

In the first model, the simplest of the three, cohorts of students are enrolled in the same sections of larger courses, with the number of these courses varying from two to four. In the second, student cohorts take the same classes together and are often the only students in those courses. Although faculty teach separately, they try to make intellectual connections between or across courses. These paired or clustered courses can be linked by a common theme that is explored differently but in a complementary fashion in each course. Love and Tokuno cite the example of Western Washington University where "The Narrative Voice" links oral history, literature, and health courses.

The last model is also known as a Coordinated Studies Program and is the most intricate of the three. Student cohorts travel in several courses and can meet together in both large and small groups. Faculty form teams and plan the curriculum to integrate the content, assignments, and activities for three or more related courses. They can also teach in each other's classrooms where there is frequent teacher-to-student contact. Seattle Community College offers a Coordinated Studies Program called "Speaking for Ourselves: You Cannot Shut Us Out." This integrated set of courses includes world cultures, non-Western art, composition, modern world literature, and a library research course (Love and Tokuno 10-11).

This brief overview of learning communities fails to do justice to the variety of programs throughout the country. However, my primary purpose here is not to describe that movement but rather to use it as a place to begin inquiry into the community concept. Toward that end, let me turn to an example of a learning community on my campus to show more specifically how such an entity is organized and how it can function successfully. The Learning Alliance, a variation of model two described above, was created in 1992 to address problems typical of most large colleges and universities. The director who designed and still oversees the Learning Alliance was originally asked by the dean of the College of Liberal Arts to create a program that would turn around dismal retention rates and help students graduate in a timely manner. A few key university administrators and staff, more so than any faculty, were the first to recognize and respond to the challenges facing our entering first-year students: They arrive at the university understanding little about college life and university expectations; many are the first in their families to go to college and so cannot rely on their parents for guidance in adjusting to life on campus; a majority work either full or part time while taking four or more college courses. The dismal statistics documented the sad results: about a third of our students were on academic probation by the end of their first year; 52% were gone after their second.

In their first semester in the Learning Alliance, students travel as

a cohort in three courses: two in general education and a two-unit class introducing them to the university. Typically, a composition course (basic writing or university-level) is linked with another general education class. These links might include pairing composition with psychology, history, sociology, political science, or geography, for instance. In their second semester, students enroll in two linked courses, but they change cohorts. They are encouraged to build explicit connections between ideas and disciplines, while their instructors stress active learning and include in their classes frequent writing assignments, group work, workshops, lots of discussion, and extended individual and group projects. Faculty work together to create links between their courses and participate in summer and winter institutes to design their respective curricula. Each faculty pair meets regularly throughout the semester to assess and, if necessary, fine tune the curriculum jointly constructed, and all Alliance faculty meet once a month for an early morning breakfast meeting to discuss any issues or concerns.

Some learning communities are designed for a single term only; however, the Learning Alliance extends beyond the first semester and emphasizes out-of-classroom experiences in addition to the academic. We want students to get involved quickly in campus life, to meet others, and to come to know the university as a place that offers various opportunities—intellectual, cultural, and social. Alliance students receive priority registration each semester, an aspect that appears to be the main selling point for most first-year students. However, they must come in for academic advising each term during their first two years. We hope to ensure that Alliance students are taking effectively sequenced classes that fit their projected majors and professional careers.

In previous years, all Alliance students contributed ten to fifteen hours of community service during both their sophomore and junior years. Because of the resources needed to oversee this component, however, the community service requirement has been reduced to the second year only. Juniors and seniors can still drop by for advising, but it is not mandatory. They also have the option of enrolling in a 400-level Psychology course that will prepare them to become one of thirty-nine peer mentors to other Learning Alliance students. The peer mentor program enables these now older and (we hope) wiser students to work with first-year students in navigating that difficult transition from high school. Some of our basic writing students have become outstanding peer mentors, a gratifying outcome for a few individuals who we initially feared would not remain in school.

Since it began, the Learning Alliance has collected data to document its success by using GPA's, retention data, and graduation rates. Data from the Learning Alliance are impressive: 67% of its students graduate in five years or less compared to the wider university average of 30%; approximately 90% of Alliance students, including BW

students, are retained, while the rest of the university's retention rate after year two remains at about 50%; cumulative GPA's from 1992 to 2001 for all Alliance students (including basic writers) range from a respectable low of 2.6 to nearly a "B" average of 2.9. Currently, the average GPA for Alliance students is 2.74, compared to the overall university's average of 2.2.[1] But this data, encouraging as it is, does not really tell us about the qualitative experiences of students in learning communities such as the Learning Alliance, experiences that beg for further investigation. My point here, though, is not to use the Learning Alliance as an ideal model of a learning community, but to show how such an entity can function successfully on campus. In the next section, I show that the linking of community with learning possesses a long history, a link that continues to inform the composition class. I then go on to suggest why certain kinds of social relations can facilitate learning.

Sociality and Learning

Learning communities, or the idea of learning in groups that function like communities, is nothing new. In their monograph, *The Powerful Potential of Learning Communities*, Oscar Lenning and Larry Ebbers remind us that learning in a community can be traced to the work of Quintilian and even to such texts as the Bible and the Talmud (1). Scholars also note the significant twentieth century influence of John Dewey, Alexander Meiklejohn, and Joseph Tussman (see Shapiro and Levine; Levine, "Beyond"; Gabelnick et al.; Love). Dewey's philosophy of progressive education and student-centered learning has been well documented, so I will not dwell on his influence here. Meiklejohn, Dewey's contemporary, created the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin in 1927. In his attempt to bypass the still dominant elective system, Meiklejohn worked to establish curricular coherence and a learning community on campus (Gabelnick et al. 10-16). Gabelnick et al. note that Meiklejohn "is considered a father to the learning community movement because of his insights about the need to reorganize the structure of the curriculum" (11). Joseph Tussman, a former student of Meiklejohn's, attempted a learning community experiment at the University of California at Berkeley from 1965-69. As it turned out, Tussman's ideas were more influential in the state of Washington than in California when in 1970 at Evergreen State College several faculty re-designed the undergraduate curriculum. The approach they eventually developed "became a model for dozens of learning community adaptations in the 1970s and 1980s" at other institutions (12-14).

The idea of learning in small communities as well as the goals and means of promoting learning should also be familiar to those in

composition where a collaborative, student-centered approach to learning has dominated pedagogy for years. Kenneth Bruffee's often cited argument for collaborative learning was likewise a description of small learning communities embedded within individual classrooms (although he didn't use the modifier "learning"). The composition literature, moreover, is full of examples of how small peer groups in the classroom can contribute to learning. Laura Gray-Rosendale's excellent book, *Rethinking Basic Writing,* provides a recent instance. In her work, Gray-Rosendale meticulously documents and explains the interactions among four students in a writing group as part of a Summer Institute course. She describes this Institute as an attempt "to foster community among its students," and to "'ensure a smooth transition from high school to college'" (57). In concluding her study, she describes the positive influence of the Institute on the students and how each felt participating in a peer revision group helped him or her understand and meet the demands of academic literacy (153-64).

Other scholars have described innovative courses and programs intended to help basic writers either be "mainstreamed" into regular composition courses or help them make the transition more successfully (Soliday and Gleason; Grego and Thompson; Rodby). One common element across these innovative efforts is the development of close ties among students and between students and faculty. Regular meetings of small peer groups with a faculty member is a constant, as students and their instructors work closely on assignments and class projects. Soliday and Gleason remark that the *Enrichment* pilot writing program they developed at City College of New York was intended "to build community on an urban, commuter campus" where typically most students juggle school with job and family obligations. In this pilot program, basic writing students spend two semesters together and remain with the same teachers and class tutors for the entire year. The relationships formed, Soliday and Gleason claim, are "conducive to learning" (65).

Because it appears to be old news, one might conclude that the linking of learning and community should merit little interest. Perhaps it is a truism that we learn best when we are learning with others who want to learn and where participants recognize that each will benefit. Yet what is notable about the present movement is that learning communities are part of educational reform efforts that respond to the neglect of undergraduate education (Shapiro and Levine 2), and that counter the increasing corporatization of higher education. "Community" in these reform efforts, it seems to me, becomes a code word for reminding educators that our common aim has always been to teach, and to teach well, and that the essence of learning is embedded in human relationships. How might this be so?

Learning communities attempt to facilitate student success by

actively encouraging factors identified in various influential longitudinal studies as crucial. Shapiro and Levine summarize these factors as the degree of "student-faculty interaction, student involvement in co-curricular activities, and, most important, peer influences and interaction" (xii). In the final chapter of *What Matters in College?* an updated and expanded study of his monumental 1977 work, *Four Critical Years*, Alexander Astin concludes that

> [v]iewed as a whole, the many empirical findings from this study seem to warrant the following general conclusion: *the student's peer group is the* single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the *undergraduate years* (emphasis in original). (398)

Astin expounds that the effects of peer groups can be viewed from psychological and sociological perspectives. An individual seeks acceptance and approval from her peer group because she recognizes that the peer group is like herself; members share similar beliefs, values, interests, and so forth. From the sociological perspective, the peer group as a collective represents individuals who "identify, affiliate with, and seek acceptance and approval from *each other.*" The group accepts the individual as one of their own and approves of the member's behavior as meeting the expectations of the group (400-01).

Obviously, peer group influence on the individual can either help or harm depending on the circumstances. But certainly well designed learning communities can provide numerous opportunities for students to meet and come to know their fellow students (not just students like themselves) and encourage them to meet in informal study groups, whether on campus or in residence halls. As many in composition have done, we need to continue to think beyond the traditional college classroom—the isolated instructor with a group of students meeting a few hours per week for a quarter or semester only—as the organizational unit for learning. Technology is an obvious aid in this endeavor, but certainly investigating how learning occurs in various kinds of peer groups needs to continue so that their potential as sites for learning can be more fully realized. However, perhaps because peer groups have been criticized for encouraging a too easy consensus (see Trimbur for a discussion) that reinforces narrow thinking and prevents taking on other perspectives, and because conflict as root metaphor privileges difference and negotiating one's position among often several competing perspectives, talk of community feels regressive, as if such communities will coddle students and repress conflict.

Harris argues for an idea of community that would include both consensus and conflict and therefore a pedagogy that would add to or complicate students' "uses of language," a pedagogy that encourages

"a kind of polyphony—an awareness of and pleasure in the various competing discourses that make up their own" ("Idea" 17). Yet, because Harris is also pushing against sentimental, romantic notions of communities of like-minded peers, he privileges difference and conflict. In his later discussion, he elaborates on his vision of the classroom as a public space and proposes to substitute a "community of strangers" for a "community of agreement." People don't come to know one another; instead they come to know their respective positions on issues and the interpretive frames underlying them. That's knowledge worth having certainly, but such a community of strangers may be of limited value to first-year students, especially basic writers, who often find the campus environment un-welcoming and, in some cases, downright hostile. Instead, we might consider other forms of community on campus that include consensus and conflict but that are also designed to promote mutuality among faculty, staff, and students. Such communities of learners can include pedagogies such as those Harris favors, but will also distinguish between conflicts productive of learning and those that aren't.

A Community is not a Club

In *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966,* Harris offers the term *public* in opposition to community. He claims in public spaces, competing interests must wrangle and barter, and this is the kind of classroom he desires where different views are shared and discussed, but not necessarily resolved in favor of a single agreed upon reading orchestrated by the teacher. Rather, students must decide on a reading they want to explore and eventually defend without the security of knowing it is the "right" view, or the only view. Harris wants a classroom scene that resembles city life and organizes his classroom to produce conflict that he hopes will lead to deeper learning and that will help his students practice the identity of public intellectual, an identity that assumes people can come together as strangers in order to debate issues of common interest. What Harris does not want is a classroom community that resembles a "private and chummy club . . . [one he] is least interested in joining" (97).

I share Harris's dislike of the classroom as "chummy club." Viable communities, if they are to facilitate learning on campus, would not be mistaken for clubs. Robert Bellah et al. in *Habits of the Heart* reserve the term community for those organizations that attempt to be inclusive and that celebrate "the interdependence of private and public life," one's calling to a profession, for instance, which satisfies private need and serves public interests. In contrast, what they claim are frequently mislabeled as communities are "lifestyle enclaves." Like a

club, the enclave is "segmental," it typically responds to private needs for leisure and consumption, and (to use Bellah et al.'s elegant phrase) "celebrates the narcissism of similarity" (72). While clubs can have community-like aspects, they tend to be exclusive and elitist, places where differences are suppressed, where strict criteria of who gets in and who is left out are rigidly enforced, and where competition for status dominates over concerns for learning. Examples on our campuses of such clubs are not hard to come by: Fraternities, sororities, and athletic teams, unfortunately, too often become groups that "celebrate the narcissism of similarity."

Where Harris sees opposition between community and public, I see complementarity. Public service, if directed toward the benefit of others and is not motivated solely to serve one's self interests, can extend the experience of community from smaller to larger spheres if social relations continue to be marked by values such as mutuality, empathy, a sharing of common interests, solidarity, and ultimately trust (see Bender 7). Hence, I would argue that the physical forms of community are less important than the quality of social relations that emerges among participants. Yet the opposition Harris pushes leaves little room to consider other forms of community on campus that are not utopian and that are not confined to the individual classroom only, but that still retain these important traditional values. If our students are to acquire these values by seeing them exemplified repeatedly in the work of faculty and peers, they need to participate in campus life for an extended period. One huge problem on large commuter campuses, though, is that students only hang out long enough to attend classes. They thus never feel part of the university, they don't participate in its culture, and they remain "strangers" both to faculty and to one another.

The local form of community Harris advocates is a classroom scene that, while it includes consensus, privileges conflict. Moreover, it is narrowly selective in the preferred identity—public intellectual—he hopes his students will emulate. David Bartholomae makes a similar move in "Inventing the University." The favored identity for students in Bartholomae's vision of the academy is a rather conventional one of student as critic. Both Harris and Bartholomae use the classroom to socialize students to try on a clearly identified role. Consider, though, that college students, and here let me focus on basic writers, may not necessarily embrace the identity of public intellectual, or critic. From my experience, I think most students would reject these roles and seek out something more familiar, something that better suits their young-adult identities.

As others have mentioned, it's unwise to generalize about the identities, needs, and abilities of basic writers (and by extension other students as well). It's particularly unwise when we consider what are

probably very different identities, needs, and aspirations of students attending a two-year versus a state college or a Harvard, Stanford, or Yale. Yet it is safe to say that although we can't predict in advance nor should we circumscribe the identities students might assume, they do need to form a coherent identity on campus that allows them to function within the academic culture, an identity that can accommodate various identities appropriate in other aspects of their lives. This working out of an identity on campus is often forced by new learning experiences, yet some of these conflicts of identity can also impede future learning. Learning communities can therefore be used to address specific conflicts that arise unpredictably for students, conflicts that might obstruct, rather than facilitate, learning.

This working out of an appropriate identity is in some ways consistent with the root metaphor of conflict that Harris says includes "finding a place to speak within a discourse that does not seem to ignore or leave behind the person you are outside of it" ("Negotiating" 31). It is also more complicated, nuanced, and idiosyncratic, than we have imagined. A good recent example that illustrates this complexity is Judith Rodby's research of nonnative English speakers who would have been placed in basic writing under an older program at her campus but who were now in freshman comp ("Contingent Literacy"). Rodby explains that students' willingness to revise was the key factor in determining success in the writing course. She focuses on the locus of motivation for revising and draws upon Urie Bronfenbrenner's framework for explaining how skill development occurs in a given context. Bronfenbrenner's "ecological environment" includes four interconnected levels—micro, meso, exo, and macro—with each level forming a separate system. These systems include relations between people and consistencies of "ideas, belief systems, activities, and roles..." (50). I am not doing justice to her detailed analysis, but the gist is that for the students Rodby studied, it appears that motivation to do well in college arises from congruence among various levels of a given student's ecological environment. Where there are conflicts within these levels, students are less motivated to revise.

All the students in Rodby's study passed freshman [sic] composition, but some struggled more than others. To illustrate, one of the more successful students, Luciana, had a rich mesosystem. She had attended a summer program and ended up scheduling fall classes with several students she met in that program. These students were also together in group tutoring sessions, and two of her courses were linked so there was congruence of subject matter and consistency in the "rhetorical terminology" of her speech and composition courses. Luciana also had a sister-in-law who worked on campus who regularly advised her. Rodby says that Luciana's

> mesosystem functioned like glue holding . . . [her] world together, so that when she moved from school to home, or from one class to another, she inhabited a single, nearly seamless universe of meaning. She did not encounter conflicts of values or even much cultural diversity among her relationships. (50)

Although Luciana's success indicates the power of such mutuality in her social network, the lack of diversity in her campus experiences is a drawback to the social network she established on her own and was apparently overlooked in her linked courses. Learning communities can intentionally build diversity into peer and faculty interactions set up within a given model. Faculty and peer mentors can facilitate students' exploration of underlying cultural and personal frames informing different beliefs and values and subsequently help students reframe these differences based on what they discover in this exploratory process.

In contrast to Luciana, Rodby describes Horatio, a Hispanic student, who appeared to have a strong mesosystem, but who withdrew from participating in his writing class while researching Proposition 187, California's anti-immigrant ballot measure. His research into illegal immigration created a painful conflict for Horatio between his belief that he belonged on campus and a growing realization that Hispanics were not necessarily welcomed in the state. It was only when his composition instructor intervened and helped Horatio see that his essay might educate his peers that he began revising more productively. He eventually passed the course, but just barely. Rodby concludes that "these students . . . had strong macrosystems that instructed them that education, literacy, and good grades would guarantee good jobs and a good future. At one level, this macrosystem ideology pushed these students to revise their writing repeatedly" (60). Rodby also asserts that because these student ecologies are material and social networks, such programs as Summer Bridge and learning communities, among others, help students develop salient connections for themselves. And, I would argue, such communities can help students work through the conflicts that threaten the ideological systems they have internalized.

Rodby's analysis and use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological environment model complements James Paul Gee's theory of literacy whose key term is *Discourse.* Gee's approach can guide us in thinking about how learning communities can help students both learn and acquire "secondary Discourses" of college. Discourse is a "socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts', of thinking . . . and acting that can be used to identify

oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'" (131). Discourse is an individual's "identity kit," a way "of being in the world . . ." that "integrate[s] words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (127). There are, however, many secondary Discourses—each more or less powerful. One's primary Discourse is acquired in childhood, typically in the home through an oral mode and serves as "something of a base within which we acquire or resist later Discourses" (137). School Discourse is a secondary, and usually a *dominant* secondary Discourse because controlling such a dominant Discourse "can lead to the acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) in a society," power that will enable the individual to adapt to and acquire more easily other congruent secondary Discourses (132). Gee notes there are countless Discourses. Pertinent here are examples he cites of "a student" in general or a certain kind of student such as "a student of physics or a student of literature" (128).

When students make the transition from high school to college, they must eventually control other secondary Discourses. In some cases, the degree of difference between high school and college Discourses is minimal; in others, however, the differences are much greater. If we assume Discourses of academia are polyglot and conflicted, all students to varying degrees will need to negotiate an "identity kit" for themselves if they are to forge a literacy that will facilitate academic success. Instead of "negotiating" a position for themselves, though, Gee uses the terms *acquisition* and *learning* to describe how individuals "come by the Discourses they are members of" (138). Effective teaching involves both acquisition and learning, but learning solely leads to "meta-knowledge." "Meta-knowledge," Gee says, is a way of "seeing how the Discourses you have already got (not just the languages) relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are trying to acquire relate to self and society" (141). Such a process involves comparing and contrasting various Discourses which is why it is essential that students be exposed to diversity as a "cognitive necessity . . . to develop meta-awareness and overt reflective insight . . . ."

Diversity accords well with basic writing pedagogies governed by the root metaphor of conflict. I want to argue, however, that there is another secondary Discourse crucial to student success, one Gee mentions, and one that I think is indicated by Rodby's research: This is a secondary Discourse outside of any particular disciplinary Discourse, and what for a lack of a better phrase, I'll call the "Discourse of being a student." That is, a Discourse that represents a given student's identity and affects how that person thinks and acts in class and on campus generally. Some ways students think and act may not necessarily fit their college instructors' expectations and may not be conducive to

academic success. Certainly students, especially basic writers, are often intimidated by their professors and fear talking to them, and they won't ask for help or for clarification on an assignment. Few will take advantage of instructors' office hours. In addition, ways of reading and note-taking, carry-overs from high school, may prove unproductive in the college classroom. Some basic writers are bewildered to discover that a professor's lecture does not typically repeat information in the textbook and instead often challenges or contradicts what they've read. These students sometimes discover too late (or never) that just learning what they take to be "facts" is not sufficient to demonstrate learning to their college teachers, that argument is the dominant mode for creating and presenting knowledge, and that faculty usually like to see students think and argue independently and critically. We especially see these latter expectations in Harris's classroom, too. In some instances, students experience debilitating conflict when their family or religious values are aggressively challenged by professors and/or peers. In these cases, an alert teacher can help students negotiate their conflicts by making them part of the course content (one strategy used in pedagogies informed by the conflict metaphor). This Discourse of being a student, however, must both be learned and acquired, and such a process takes more time than a single semester and will most likely require the attentiveness of more than one instructor.

Learning communities can help students consciously learn this sort of secondary Discourse, a Discourse which can then develop metaknowledge and can serve to help them understand differences among several Discourses (including their primary ones) that define how other students and faculty in various disciplines define themselves. Conflicts between and among these "identity kits" might be more effectively dealt with in small learning communities that can operate both within and outside individual classrooms. These communities can be led either by faculty, staff, or peer mentors—or better yet, led by teams comprised of representatives from each of the three. In the Learning Alliance, for example, student cohorts meet with peer mentors for two hours each week throughout their first semester to learn about various aspects of the campus but also to air problems that arise in their classes or in the dorms. Students who may be experiencing psychological conflicts can often be noticed first by these peer mentors and referred quickly to the appropriate counseling services. Success is never guaranteed, of course, but there's a better chance students will be more willing to work through potentially destructive conflicts rather than be rendered mute by them, which, in the latter case, unfortunately, too frequently means that students "resolve" those conflicts by dropping out—or by letting the institution make the decision by forcing them out because of failing grades.

If Discourses include values and beliefs, this secondary Discourse about being a student must be supported by values that can privilege identities conducive to academic success. These values should be made explicit to all who participate in a learning community, including students, faculty, staff, and administrators. A viable community is grounded on clear values that each member understands, accepts, and is guided by, values whose violation would entail the destruction of the community (see Sergiovanni, *Building Community in Schools*). These foundational values of a learning community must be congruent with the educational mission of the college, or, if I use Gee's terms, congruent with the campus's dominant Discourse concerning the value of undergraduate education and the identities it makes available to its students as involved and caring citizens.

As an example, the Learning Alliance is founded on the following operating principles that inform all of its activities and creates an ethos all students in the Alliance are expected to embrace. These principles are adapted from "Building Community" by John Gardner and "Insights into Community on Campus" by George Kuh et al.

> Good communities incorporate and value diversity—encourage cooperation, compromise and consensus.
> Good communities have a shared culture—develop identity through group norms, standards, and values.
> Good communities foster internal communication—thrive on extensive formal and informal interaction and frequent face-to-face contacts.
> Good communities promote caring, trust, and teamwork—encourage a spirit of mutuality and cooperation where everyone is included.
> Good communities arrange for group maintenance processes and governance structures that foster the development of young people, encourage participation and sharing of leadership tasks, and prepare students for future responsibilities and citizenship.
> Good communities create links with the world—rendering service to campus, local communities, and the society at large.

Learning communities need to be diverse to encourage productive differences and conflict, but they also need to help students learn how to negotiate consensus when collective action is required to accomplish a project or to solve a problem. Learning communities need to be inclusive and membership voluntary, and students (and faculty) should, if they so desire, be able to leave the community after participating for a quarter or semester.

As I see it, schools are poised halfway between home and public

space. We don't want students to leave their identities outside when they step onto our campuses. But many are not yet ready to deal on their own with the vicissitudes and conflicts of the public sphere. We know that students must change if education is to have any value and that learning inevitably involves conflicts of various kinds. Learning communities can help students distinguish between the kinds necessary for their learning and those that might prevent them from stepping out from the safety of familiarity and like-mindedness. In a recent issue of the *WPA* journal, Charles Schuster (writing from the point of view of an associate dean) claims that Composition studies must "become part of the wider campus conversation on restructuring higher education" and that "[u]nless it gets involved, its influence is almost sure to diminish" (94). Because learning communities offer us a way of thinking about such restructuring, we need to have wider conversations about *ideas* of kinds of *communities* on our respective campuses, not to recoup the past, but to imagine social networks on campus that support learning and respond more effectively to students at their point of need.

Note

1 For more details about the Learning Alliance and data regarding the success of basic writers in that program, see my essay, "Mainstreaming and Other Experiments in a Learning Community," in *Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access* (full citation below).

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Mark Wiley

RESPONSE TO JOSEPH HARRIS'S "BEYOND COMMUNITY"

This sort of scholarly exchange within the same journal issue is rare, so I especially want to thank the editors of *JBW* and Professor Harris for giving me the opportunity to respond to Joe's essay (I hope I can drop the formal address here). In his introduction, Joe provides the context for the sequence of this exchange, so I'll not waste limited space repeating that.

Joe and I conversed briefly through email and agreed that our differences were less in principle and more in what we emphasize in our respective essays. Joe is not against the kind of work I advocate represented by the name *learning communities*, and I am not against the version of "materiality" he advocates. But then "against" is probably the wrong preposition to use here. It's more a matter of where we direct our attention and energies regarding this complex and complicated enterprise we call teaching first-year and basic writing. Although we did not articulate the actual principle on which we agree (I had not seen Joe's text before our email exchanges), it seems we both support paying attention to the kind of work our students do in our writing courses and to the quality of teaching offered them.

What we selectively attend to are the different elements involved in that enterprise. He pushes the public nature of writing, or at least pushing some kind of writing possessing a quality of "publicness," a writing that circulates more widely than within the confines of the classroom. And Joe particularly sees the material conditions of teaching as a far more useful site for critical analysis and action. I am paying attention to the quality of social relations between and among students and teachers and to the local institutional structures that can facilitate those relations and encourage a shift in the identities and perspectives students might take on. I hope it is understood that what I focus on requires attention to the material conditions of teaching. Those who create institutional structures that presently go under the name of learning communities are addressing teaching and responding to the local conditions within which that work takes place.

One of the reasons I became involved in a learning community was that it offered the composition faculty I supervise (all are part time) an opportunity to grow professionally and to break free of the confines of the individual classroom. These communities also provide a means whereby student writing can easily circulate more widely within

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the learning community that extends beyond the borders of the single classroom. Participating faculty have the opportunity to transcend disciplinary boundaries because student writing specifically, and student learning in general, are the main concerns, a shift in focus that can, over time, change the purpose of general education courses from introducing students to discrete disciplines to cultivating the critical habits of mind Joe favors. Composition faculty who teach these linked courses are treated as equal to their tenure-track counterparts who typically teach the other discipline courses. Moreover, ideas for imaginative writing projects, like the ones Joe admires, emerge from this faculty interaction.

So, yes, we do agree in principle, and I acknowledge Joe's point about the material conditions of our work, but unless I am misreading him, what Joe advocates is perfectly in line with the goals of learning communities as I understand them. Consider some of his examples— service learning projects that transcend disciplinary boundaries, the sort of work exemplified by Mary Soliday at City College to make the writing curriculum more coherent, the time and support faculty need to develop innovative composition courses— this is work also facilitated through learning communities.

But as I continue to think about Joe's remarks here, perhaps the differences in what we emphasize are less significant than the rhetoric we respectively employ. Whereas he represents materiality as "beyond," I see it as an integral part of the social relations involved in the teaching of writing. Joe wants to move beyond talk about community because he views such talk as regressive. I don't understand though why he keeps insisting that community represents enclosure, like-mindedness, consensus (instead of argument and dissent), and social relations marked by a kind of touchy-feely sentimentality. Joe doesn't know of versions of community that "don't seem to lapse at key points into a nostalgia for the mutuality of family or the small town." I'm not sure what he is referring to, but I know that the many students I have either taught or met through the Learning Alliance have little understanding—let alone experience—of community, and I don't know of any who come from small towns—not those who live in Southern California, anyway. I wish it were true that all students' families offered them the kind of mutuality and emotional support one usually associates with family life, yet the reality, I suspect, is otherwise. That doesn't mean, of course, that students can't get sentimental notions about community from media representations; still, their social experiences overall, it seems to me, do not include anything we might call community where people do support one another and feel some measure of mutual responsibility.

Joe also questions how one learns to dissent and to cooperate and compromise. Perhaps I am naïve and I don't mean to be flip about

this, but I think faculty engage in dissent and still manage to cooperate and compromise regularly. Consider committee work and how we conduct ourselves in our home departments:

I can't imagine we would get much accomplished within them if we did not learn how to argue and dissent as well as recognize when compromise is a better strategy. Dissent can take a variety of forms. As a committee member, I can cast a dissenting vote and still not prevent the committee from completing its project. Dissent in that instance is a strategic way of cooperating, while in other instances a begrudging compromise might signal dissent. Where Joe seems to create a rigid opposition between consensus and dissent, I see in practice a more nuanced dialectic. Joe also asks, "Whose norms? Whose team?" The team belongs to the individuals who comprise it—students, faculty, and staff—who work together to achieve the goal of learning. These same participants help identify the norms they believe will secure that chief objective. Re-negotiation is always possible, and if an individual doesn't want to participate, she doesn't have to.

The rhetoric of "Beyond Community" should be familiar to those in our field who regularly read its scholarship. The title suggests progress: we must import different terms to theorize our work, and of course these terms define and confer value on the work identified. Materiality directs attention to our local scenes and reminds us that, as Joe, citing Richard Miller, notes, we must "embrace...[our] roles as mid-level bureaucrats in large corporations (universities) if ...[we] are to have much hope of changing how those institutions work."

It would be foolish to ignore this institutional reality. I consciously selected the term "rehabilitate" (I rejected "rethink" and "re-imagine") because I liked the corporeal connotations of the word. I wanted to give body to a vague notion. Learning communities are real material structures. They cost money, they take planning, they shift (or potentially can shift) the nature of our work in the isolated comp class. Re-examining an old term for new meanings and possibilities seems like useful work to me. I recognize that "community" (like "voice"), although resonant in the wider culture, has negative connotations in the discipline of rhetoric and composition. Like voice, community sounds so regressive, while "materiality" keeps us grounded in such matters as labor issues and the production and circulation of student texts.

Metaphorically, materiality fits with "construction"; community doesn't. Materiality focuses attention on how power, status, and resources are distributed and maintained. Community assumes that these materials will be used to support learning while members work toward that goal. Whereas Joe sees opposition between community and public, I see complementarity. He keeps insisting (here and in his previous work) that we move away from disciplinary communities. That's fine, but I am moving in another direction and focusing on learn-

ing communities. He keeps thinking about communities as enclosed spaces, I want to consider their possibilities for opening different sorts of spaces on our campuses. I don't want to go beyond the social but instead find new meaning within an old term that identifies work that might resist the negative effects of corporatization on teaching and learning. Sure communities can be co-opted by corporations, but they can also remind us of other forms of relations that are not represented well by terms like "public, material, and circulation."

I want to resist getting caught up in a rhetoric that circumscribes a discursive space marked by oppositions such as regressive-progressive and old-new. Yet I would willingly-- no, enthusiastically-- cooperate with others like Joe who want to attend to the material conditions of our work.

Thomas Reynolds

TRAINING BASIC WRITING TEACHERS: INSTITUTIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

ABSTRACT: *The training of basic writing teachers, discussed in the past as an effort built on improved knowledge of linguistic, cognitive and other kinds of factors related to basic writers, has received less attention recently. With recent work emphasizing ways that basic writing gains definition in local contexts, training is here discussed principally as an institutional effort. Teachers might improve instruction, as well as institutional standing, of basic writing on local campuses by conceiving of training as occurring within and influencing institutional structures.*

When looking back at the history of American composition instruction, one discovers that the notion of writing instruction as remediation was present from the late 19th Century, when Harvard required incoming freshmen to take a writing course that would address weaknesses found in entrance exam essays (Connors, Berlin). Unfortunately, little exists in the archives about how the early teachers of these courses, usually graduate students, were trained. Betty P. Pylik, in a recent discussion of writing teacher training in this period, describes how awareness developed quickly in the emerging field of English that training was an issue that graduate programs would have to address, but one that few programs actually acted on (6-8).

The field of "basic writing," on the other hand, locates its beginnings, as Deborah Mutnick recently noted, in the era since the 1960's, when non-white working-class students of various ethnicities and races entered higher education in greater numbers (71). Partly as an extension of earlier sentiments about the need for training good composition instructors, but also as part of the move to create an informed view of teaching those writers labeled as "basic," discussions emerged fairly early on in this time over how best to carry out such training. Editor Sarah D'Eloia devoted the entire Spring/Summer issue of *Journal of Basic Writing* to this topic in 1981, a statement of how important training was considered to be by the relatively new field. Discussions have moved beyond, or away from, many of the concerns raised in

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1981, but what D'Eloia says in her introduction still holds up remarkably well:

> While there are important similarities in the programs, we do not yet appear, as a profession, to have reached a consensus about that balance and synthesis of writing, critical reading, teaching writing, and hard information about various subjects which will best prepare the beginning teacher of basic writing. Nor do we seem agreed on the kinds of experience and information useful - and perhaps rather readily accessible - to teachers of writing in general and other kinds of experience and information in addition that may be necessary for those who will teach at the college level across barriers of dialect, language, and almost complete inexperience with writing (2).

D'Eloia's comment suggests a "consensus" that in significant ways has not come about in the last twenty years. Should training emphasize linguistic knowledge? literacy training? composition? writing within subject areas? all of this? - answers are difficult and depend on a great many factors.

Perhaps recent trends in the field toward local conceptualization of basic writing suggest that consensus around some of the major concerns of training basic writing teachers will not come soon, if at all. If, as Laura Gray-Rosendale has shown, even the ways that "basic writers" are identified has been persistently problematic (6-11), then it is difficult to imagine that a uniform approach to training will fit the different versions of instruction appropriate for these students. Like instruction itself, the training of basic writing teachers may be viewed productively as training for particular circumstances in particular institutions.

Still, in attempting to share knowledge across institutions, I believe that a productive framework for such a discussion can be provided by taking a look at where most basic writing teachers go to work each day. Our local institutions, although different in significant ways, may hold more common interests than are generally acknowledged when considering the importance of training basic writing teachers. Across institutions, training concerns a number of constituencies operating within an identifiable structure. Although no one structure is typical, a school might operate, for example, with top-level administrators concerned about retention of students, writing program administrators and faculty concerned with creating a program with a common vision of good instruction operative across sections, adjunct teach-

ers seeking decent, worthwhile employment while holding together often complex lives, and perhaps graduate teachers with varying levels of experience who seek knowledge and need training that will benefit them in a tough job market. Students, another major stakeholder in every institution, are generally uninvolved in teacher training, and should be more often. Admittedly, the interests of these groups are neither as unitary nor as easily divided as I've indicated here. Adjunct teachers, for example, are more often than not interested in scholarship that makes their teaching jobs interesting and meaningful for them. Different schools will have different constituent groups and interests that bring them to their work, but I want to suggest that effective basic writing teacher training involves recognition of the structures that we work within.

If one mark of basic writing instruction is, as I believe, to be at the center of diverse interests looking to exercise control over access to higher education institutions, then training represents one of the more important considerations of this field. Whether we gain access to resources that allow us to go about training, how we go about it, how we conceive of its purpose, how it exists within larger structures, both institutionally and socially - these are difficult and important questions. Although we are pressed from within the field to make instruction relevant and affirming of student linguistic backgrounds and interests, we work within institutions that often continue to identify and either raise or lower the gate for students according to standards formed with the beginnings of the composition course in this country. However we, as college teachers, work out issues such as those posed by D'Eloia, we do so from positions within institutions.

Here I discuss training as a gesture made within institutional power structures that can be influenced in various ways in order to help bring about good basic writing instruction. Effective training of teaching assistants and other instructors for basic writing courses involves recognizing and working within the criss-cross of interests held by individual "players" in order to meet the needs of students. I write here from my fairly deep experience in one institution, the University of Minnesota General College, where I have worn the many "hats" (tutor, graduate teacher, non-tenure track teacher, co-coordinator, faculty member) of the well-supported basic writing program and participated in teacher training for over a decade. Although my discussion is heavily informed by this experience, I in no way wish to discount other models and environments for the training of teachers. Nor do I pretend to offer here a comprehensive approach to basic writing teacher training. Instead, I offer questions, observations and discussion with the hope that others will re-consider training as an institutional presence made visible through their own campus configurations of basic writing instruction, recognizing and acting on locally conceived

priorities.

How do we approach teaching and training?

Teacher training is likely to be viewed differently depending on how one fits into it - as a faculty trainer, as a graduate student teacher, or as an adjunct. We each bring our interests and needs to an effort that takes shape through the processes of involvement and learning that make up the training. In my experience, training works most effectively when addressing diverse interests under a common programmatic banner.

Honoring the diverse interests of all participants raises a primary question of how individual interests might be brought into balance with institutional concerns. One tendency that I have observed in many training sessions is for less experienced teachers to rely on the one thing that all academics hold in common, their own more or less successful institutional writing pasts. Although success may have come with great difficulties along the way, teachers have been achievers as writers in school contexts. How should we, as teachers of students who have been identified in wider college and university settings as "under-prepared," value that experience? The question does not suggest a response that easily embraces the institutional term and reinforces the long history of condescending, unjust instructional practices that start and end with student "failure" as the operative term. Rather, a critical examination of our own writing history that places us in the position of teacher within this institution can play a part in developing more just conditions for writing instruction.

As a start, teacher training for basic writing courses might be thought of as a process of both engaging and dis-engaging one's own history as a writing student. What do I mean by this paradoxical statement? Sometimes, when talking with teachers in training, there is a tendency (a natural, intelligent one) to fall back on the example provided by a favorite teacher or class in order to build an approach that will now work for us. Of course it's great to remember and gain inspiration from excellent or heroic teachers. Mike Rose draws on such an experience in *Lives on the Boundary* when he recalls a committed teacher who took him seriously enough to discover that he was a misplaced vocational track student. Engagement with this kind of life-changing individual history can only make us better teachers. In many cases, mine included, looking at one's writing instruction history is also a matter of acknowledging class and race privilege and factors that led to owning and participating in institutional practices. Providing instructors a way to place such history into dialogue with already-set program goals and assumptions seems necessary for a program's growth and an individual teacher's development of useful teaching

instincts.

More than merely an individual matter, however, teacher training might also be envisioned as a space where the history of the broadly conceived institution itself is held up to scrutiny, and so our individual histories become a matter of continuing, or interrupting that history. Similarly, Wendy Swyt, drawing on the work of Jennifer Gore and others, has written of the need for teachers to interrogate the ways that we create, and are created by, our "authority" as teachers within institutions (32). To approach teacher training with this idea in mind is to recognize the ways that privilege can unthinkingly become part of the teaching assumptions that are, in a sense, awarded with institutional teaching positions. For members of groups that have traditionally been on the "inside" of the project of higher education, examination of the ways that more advantaged writing histories have contributed to exclusionary practices may help to analyze and improve those conditions in the future. Gaining awareness that speaking and writing a home dialect that has been valorized in institutional literacy situations to the exclusion of others, for example, may help teachers conceive of teaching as an activity with different institutional responsibilities than if such knowledge were ignored or left unsaid.

In a similar vein, remembering that we continue to learn, *as writers*, can also be a productive way to position oneself in relation to institutional assumptions. Sharing the struggle of writing, which always involves working through immediate problems and learning new ways to solve or deal with them, is a valuable part of the close connections we form with students in our classes. Lynn Bloom has captured the power of such sharing in her 1990 article, "Finding Family, Finding A Voice: A Writing Teacher Teaches Writing Teachers." Student comments to Bloom indicated that her frank sharing with her students over her own and their writing led to a powerful learning experience that was not achievable through mere reading about teaching (10-11). By making visible what the institution considers invisible work for teachers who are also writers, Bloom significantly interrupts the institutional status quo. Outside of the classroom, such moments might be found in teacher training sessions during which written work such as class assignments, conference presentations and notebook entries are shared and treated as writing.

Facing our institutional writing histories also includes those many idiosyncratic, non-systematic moments of learning that are not necessarily reproducible in our own teaching of writing. In my case, I'll always remember my freshman humanities teacher who was sometimes so involved with our text for the day that he found himself in the corner, lecturing to the wall. I found his unconventionality quite appealing and indeed inspiring for me as a person learning to read and write more effectively. Never questioning his method, and loving his

intensity, I knew simply that what this guy did *worked* for me. But is this an approach that I should adopt for my basic writing students? I don't think so. At least not without serious thought and discussion. I would want to discuss with colleagues how this approach, when taken out of my own experience and placed into my basic writing class, would create an institutional identity for me that might (would, definitely!) seem strangely remote and indulgent to a group of students, many of whom already find college a dislocating, remote experience.

Increasing our odds of success with learners of all sorts (basic writers) should also involve looking outside our experience and learning about what others have thought about and studied. As Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner have documented, much research exists on the single trait, namely "error," that continues to mark students as basic writers. Harrington and Adler-Kassner convincingly argue that lack of engagement with such work or the work ahead of us is to block mobilization in professional and public forums (20). Training of basic writing teachers can effectively begin, or continue, the work of communicating our knowledge on such basic issues. Encouraging observation and study of such issues within a program gives credit to teachers who are participating, whether consciously or not, in a charged political and social effort to provide access to powerful literacy channels.

Focus on what others have studied is also a tacit acknowledgment that individuals and groups differ in their identity with, and participation in, the life of any college. Conceiving of training as an effort that connects teachers to texts that promote change of past institutional inequalities is parallel to the efforts that many basic writing teachers make with their students. In a recent article, for example, Tom Fox studies African American students at Chico who simultaneously embrace and change the institution by way of exposure to, and encouragement around the use of, texts and rhetorics that demonstrate resistance (79-85). Similarly, teacher training can encourage teachers to be aware of and make useful for their teaching those professional voices (like Fox's) that challenge unjust and non-productive literacy practices of the past.

In addition to recovering moments of past individual writing instruction that might be made meaningful for students, then, *disengagement* from our own histories and a turn to researched methods is an important starting point for training. It is possible, and I'd argue, necessary, when training to teach basic writing both to hold on to meaningful strands of personal institutional literacy history and also learn from researched methods and positions insofar as each plays a part in creating an institutional identity with which to approach teaching.

I also remember that encountering research as an inexperienced teacher can be a daunting experience that closes, rather than opens,

good possibilities for teaching. If a teaching approach appeared in print, then it must be worth a try in my classes, I probably thought at one time. I'm sure that such thinking has led to a few awkward, Andy Kaufman-in-the-ring (minus Kaufman's brilliance) type of teaching experiences for me when I did not run my "informed" thoughts by colleagues. On this level, a thoughtful practice of teaching involves some weighing of what has been researched against one's own inclinations to act differently. Training sessions, with both experienced and less experienced teachers collectively participating in this dialogue, can help us all to make good choices and take good chances. Sensitivity to the needs of different teacher training participants involves not only an engagement with past successes, but encouragement of innovative practices. Experimentation is always part of a teacher's development and encouraging teacherly imagination can aid already-tested methodologies. Placing our individual histories, impulses, and insights into conversation with existing knowledge about teaching basic writers will make training an exercise that also moves the field forward with better teaching.

How should (and can) training be positioned within any one institution?

Approaches to teacher training in any one location will pragmatically involve interests and concerns of faculty and instructors, administrators, and, most important, the students who will receive the instruction. Richard Miller has written about the need to recognize that we work within institutions with deep histories and administrative structures that we ignore at the risk of being defined by those forces. Participation in these structures can be "entirely unglamorous" and "utterly anonymous", as Miller indicates, but teacher training is one way that basic writing teachers hold power to influence that structure in order to improve conditions for students.

In my own setting, it has made sense to try to join training, where possible, to administrative interests or initiatives. In a field that is often viewed by others within the academy with suspicion, training of basic writing teachers, when conceived of as part of a viable institutional entity among others on campus, can function as cement that joins basic writing programs to larger, sometimes more permanent or powerful administrative structures.

Heads of basic writing programs, who in this sense are also administrators of sorts, need to take the lead and think carefully about what role training plays on campus. At the University of Minnesota General College, this has often meant pioneering training that other programs or departments might emulate, conducting at least part of

the training through a formal course offered to all interested graduate students, whether teaching in our program or not, and involving other college groups in our training. On this latter point, for example, the writing coordinators invite the writing center to join the teachers in training sessions in order to promote a functional, effective working relationship that makes sense to all involved. We also encourage the writing consultants who work in the writing center to be intellectual collaborators. Undergraduate students themselves, they often provide ideas and insights that we (teachers) need to hear and work into our sometimes more distanced observations and plans. In the exchange, otherwise distant institutional structures are given faces and voices that encourage collaboration. All these efforts hold value not only as good training but also as ways to make basic writing more integral to a particular school's institutional structure. Pointing out to college-level administrators that such work is also work on retention, since better instruction and support of students should result in higher retention rates, joins the interests of the writing program to those of administrators.

I also recognize, of course, that different campus situations have more or less contentious relations with administrators who would rather see basic writers disappear from campuses than help them succeed. In other situations, supportive administrators are forced into corners by legislative bodies. Working conditions in these kinds of situations do not always allow for the luxury of gathering constituents together and talking over their work. Ensuring survival of the courses themselves takes up time that might be spent planning and conducting training. Training itself suggests a certain well-preparedness and stolidity that can make a political statement about longevity (the program will improve over time), quality instruction (do administrators really want this?), and improved working conditions (at whose expense?, the question is often immediately raised). Denial of the possibility of conducting training likely places any basic writing program in a more tentative institutional position. It is the positioning within often contradictory institutional forces, always with an eye on program survival, that makes basic writing teacher training a complex effort. And one that immediately involves participants' political sensibilities.

How is training tied in with formation of community?

Teacher training works well when a community of basic writing teachers, with regular lines of communication and opportunities for sharing teaching strategies, successes, and frustrations become part of the work landscape. I've learned from teachers that I work with that training in our institution is welcome as an ongoing part of doing the

job rather than as a single how-to-run-the-dishwasher type training that might take place in a week-long pre-semester session. To this end, following up pre- or post-semester training with regular, informal meetings during the semesters provides our instructors a chance to develop as practicing teachers who talk to other practicing teachers. This is different, and often more effective, than gathering occasionally to read a common journal article or talk about a current method discovered at a conference. But these activities, too, might be fair game and provide a way to talk about what is *actually* working in our classes. Since received knowledge about basic writing is only made meaningful in its present application (is this something that will work here and now for my students?), communication about classroom moments, the moments of practice that are at the same time embedded with theoretical foundations, also improves teacher training efforts.

Debate of priorities and desired outcomes within a program plays a role in mediating these discussions. As a matter of institutional life, such talk provides the possibility that some propositions produced from it might then work their way (via faculty or support staff forums, for example) into other institutional structures and actively shape basic writing instruction. Who holds power to enter voices into certain institutional forums is of great consequence in this view, a point that faculty and administrators need to consider and act on. In our college, for instance, adjunct faculty are in the process of forming a standing college committee, partly as a way to improve access to such forums. Creating conditions for teachers that encourage participation in institutional life is important to creating a sense of a program working together toward improved instruction.

Longer training sessions at the beginning and end of each year can also be effective when they stem from our teachers' classes and discussions, some of which have already been started in earlier small-group sessions or hallway discussions. As teachers of our particular program's students, we tackle concerns such as dealing with assignment sequences and reading strategies, addressing the problem of challenging all of our incredibly different students in our sections, grading student work, and making our classes inviting multicultural spaces for learning. Creating larger workshop spaces for more thoughtful, engaged reflection during a time when classes are not in session encourages teachers to take the time to make improvements to their courses.

Our training sessions have become increasingly conscious of institutional conditions enacted by training procedures. In our program, training is almost always interactive, as often put together by graduate or adjunct volunteers as faculty, around issues arising from the

teaching in the program. When working out responses to such issues, creating an environment that recognizes the ways that teaching load, rank, identity issues, and power, generally, play a part is important for maintaining a sense that we are a group not only working toward the goal of good instruction but also a group that performs this work with differences. Our discussions include such immediate concerns as who is paid for doing what, and who has time and resources for getting certain tasks done. Although attention to this kind of concern can add to meeting times, it helps to externalize institutional considerations that can otherwise lead to hidden resentment and outright hostility.

We do not always arrive at common approaches or solutions to problems - consensus is difficult to achieve on this level, as it is across institutional realities. One recent discussion in our program, for example, of a classroom problem involving what constituted "free speech" and "respectful speech" resulted in different teachers siding with various ethical, legal, and pragmatic analyses. Inconclusive discussions are, however, brought within the range of propositions that our institution works with as providing instruction to our group of basic writers. It also helps us that we have written a collective mission statement for our program that we may refer to as we contend among ourselves. We agree to disagree at times, but with the understanding that our discussions have aired issues that will continue to be worked on with a focus on our own student writers.

How can training provide opportunities for professionalization?

Professionalization opportunities are also important for renewing and improving the collective local knowledge that shapes our program. Above I mentioned community—I know how hard it is to create a local community in some cases because there is only one person teaching basic writing on campus or because other circumstances work against it. Like many adjuncts, I have held part-time work in a college where I never had the opportunity to meet other teachers in the program. Fortunately, at least in my experience, the active national community of basic writing instructors welcomes and values the contributions of instructors of different academic ranks. Informing instructors of the Basic Writing Special Interest Group at 4C's, the listserv devoted to basic writing (CBW-L), and the journals in the field (most directly, *Journal of Basic Writing* and *BWe-Journal*, but also composition journals, *Teaching English in the Two-Year College, Journal of Developmental Education, Research in the Teaching of Developmental Education*, and others) provides ways for folks to enter and become involved with the field on

a level beyond the local campus.

Involving publishers, too, can put folks in touch with editors and authors of textbooks and hopefully influence future approaches. McGraw-Hill's recently implemented listserv discussion, for which a shorter version of this piece was first conceived, is a good example of a forum connecting people from around the country who otherwise would not have the chance to talk to each other. Extending conversations held in these kinds of venues to local institutions via training gives a sense of timeliness and often a feeling of confirmation that many issues do cut across institutions. Funding trips to conferences in order to learn more with peers might also be considered training, especially for those in isolated campus situations. Although such connections might not substitute for same-campus collegiality, establishing connections and holding conversations with people of like institutions can serve some of the same purposes.

Closer to home, professionalization opportunities can include helping teachers appreciate and get credit for their expertise within the institution. Our teachers document their teaching practices and other activities with a teaching portfolio that is read annually by supervisors. Innovative assignments, course syllabi, classroom observation letters, teaching philosophy statements, and other documented activities form the basis for the portfolio. Besides providing a good way to collect and document their work and growth in the job, instructors rely on their portfolios for job searches and setting new goals. Portfolios provide a way for individuals to show how their training activities and individual efforts have had an impact on their teaching and so on the institution.

How does training participate in creating literacy conditions for instructors and students?

Complicating the picture of what to tackle on a micro level with teachers is our field's knowledge that whatever we end up doing participates in re-creating (or changing) institutional conditions of students seeking to gain literacy that will help them in material ways. Good leadership in training can function as a signal to teachers that a well-considered direction is being set by administrators, and that the training itself represents an effective first step for overall goals to be met by the entire program.

Training efforts often benefit from finding ways to make program work visible as part of larger literacy processes, an effort that involves gaining a window on non-institutional sites of literacy. One way that this can happen is through talk to literacy researchers and

workers outside of our own institutions. I remember how, when Shirley Brice Heath made a visit to our campus and talked about one of her ethnography projects, I began to see the work of our program as significant within a larger framework but also in need of a better understanding of our students' reading backgrounds. Moments like these are important to the foregrounding of close-by contexts within a larger, connected field of literacy.

Understanding training as an act of opening up for, rather than "clamping down on," teachers, serves to open conversations that lead back into the program's work, as I've suggested above, but also outside of the program. Jeanne Gunner, in a 1999 *WPA* article called "Identity and Location: A Study of WPA Models, Memberships, and Agendas," raises the issue of program administrators needing to break out of the "insularity" of their own programs. For basic writing programs, the work of establishing orientations to outside forces that affect our work such as technological trends, legislative directives, and community socio-economic realities, as well as making inroads into other professional conversations (one of Gunner's primary concerns), starts with training that values an openness to what lies beyond our own programs. Training provides an opportunity to discuss and begin to conceive of influencing the conversations that shape basic writing instruction. Helping instructors see that their local work really does mean something in the larger debate about access and definition of education and literacy gives a sense of the importance of the project of teaching basic writing.

Sally Barr Ebest has found that writing program administrators across the country, when surveyed about graduate school preparation for their jobs, recommend internships and a course in writing program administration for students intending to become writing program administrators in order to fully prepare them for WPA work. Ebest herself points to an internship with Marilyn Sternglass in a basic writing program as an important part of her own training (81). As far as composition and basic writing overlap, this recommendation also makes sense for graduate students seeking employment as basic writing teachers. Training teachers for basic writing courses involves an education in how to work effectively within local institutional structures. Much of the work that training does relies on experience in a particular locale and a sensitive reading of the possibilities within the institution. Can such knowledge be taught in a classroom or through internship at an institution that might be unlike the one where they will hopefully find more permanent work? I think it can be a good start. I end with some questions that I hope will aid people who perform this work.

Possible Discussion Questions About Teacher Training

Facing Our Own Writing Student Pasts

What worked for us as students and why? What might be carried over?

Where can our past teachers and their methods be placed among possible approaches?

How did our own relative institutional privilege, or lack of privilege, play a part in achieving success as writers/college students?

What beliefs about writing and literacy instruction have we developed through our own student experiences?

Training Within Local Institutional Structures

What do our campus administrators (at various levels) expect from the basic writing program or classes? How much of this kind of knowledge is available and visible?

What kind of training will improve overall instructional climate, not only for writing teachers but for all?

What alliances with the basic writing program are possible/desirable within the institution (Writing Center, Special Programs for 1st generation students, Writing Across the Curriculum initiatives, retention initiatives)?

What alliances are possible outside of the institution?

Creating a Community of Basic Writing Instructors

How is training perceived by instructors? Do they have a stake in what happens?

What are the regular lines of communication established for the discussion of basic writing instruction on the campus (within the program and beyond)?

How are power differences among instructors acknowledged and managed?

Is there a central on-line location for basic writing instructors?

Do instructors have knowledge of, and support for entering, professional communities?

How can the sense of community extend to non-writing class instructors who also teach basic writers in their courses?

Organizing Training Sessions

What topics matter to instructors? What do they say they want to discuss?

What topics, if any, need to be included (Approaches to student error? Dialect issues? Classroom workshop techniques? Approaches to reading for writing? Accommodating students with disabilities? Teaching with available technology?)?

How are sessions organized and run? Who gains *de facto* expert status?

Viewing Training as Part of Larger Literacy Processes

How does the training on any campus contribute to current debates within the field?

How does the training on any campus contribute to current national/international literacy debates?

How does training value difference?

How can training extend to learning about larger literacy processes?

Professionalization

Do instructors have ways to see their work as valuable and themselves as experts?

What kind of mentoring channels exist?

Do research projects extend to non-tenure track faculty?

How can graduate students join the work of teaching basic writing to their graduate studies?

Note: As has been indicated, a shorter version of this article appeared as a position statement prompt discussion on a new listserv for BW teachers sponsored by McGraw-Hill and overseen by Laura Gray-Rosendale. To subscribe to that list via the World Wide Web, visit http://mailman.eppg.com/mailman/listinfo/teaching_basic_writing – or, via email, send a message with subject or body 'help' to teaching_basic_writing-request@mailman.eppg.com

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Donald McCrary

SPEAKING IN TONGUES: USING WOMANIST SERMONS AS INTRA-CULTURAL RHETORIC IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM

ABSTRACT: *This article explores how womanist sermons – produced by womanist theologians who create new texts and analyze existing texts using a womanist hermeneutics that locates and resists multiple oppressions – can be used in the writing classroom with other-literate students to help them produce hybrid discourse that problematizes and expands what is acceptable and progressive rhetoric within the academy. Representing student discussions of womanist sermons and analyzing students' "secular sermons," the article demonstrates how exploring womanist sermons can help non-traditional students create provocative and analytical essays that utilize a much fuller range of their linguistic capabilities.*

Many writing theorists and critical pedagogues question the efficacy and ultimate effectiveness of privileging academic discourse and forcing it upon other-literate students—a term that designates someone who might be treated as an outsider in society, including school, because his or primary language, culture, and perspective are considered non-mainstream. Regarding other-literate students and language acquisition, Marilyn Cooper and Michael Holzman argue that "the particular languages of academic discourse exclude students who come from backgrounds other than young, white middle class American" (205). Keith Gilyard, resisting the academic discourse immersion approach, supports an educational "setting in which teachers genuinely accept [students] as they come and respect them enough not to sell them myths of simple assimilation" (164). Victor Villanueva, also challenging the enculturation of other-literate students into academic discourse, believes that "when we demand a certain language, a certain dialect, and a certain rhetorical manner... we seem to be working counter to the cultural multiplicity that we seek" (183). Patricia Bizzell is another theorist who encourages both cultural and linguistic multiplic-

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ity in the writing classroom, significantly problematizing and refining the relation between academic discourse and the other-literate student. Recently Bizzell has suggested that "it may no longer be necessary to inculcate traditional academic discourse. Rather, what is needed is more help for students in experimenting with discourse forms that mix the academic and non-academic..." ("Basic" 5). Labeling this mixed discourse "hybrid academic discourse," Bizzell is careful to note that while she recognizes academic discourse as fluid and contested, the "constant" of academic discourse is its "privileged social position" (6). Moreover, like Gilyard, Bizzell acknowledges that utilizing hybrid discourse or mastering standard English will not guarantee "school success, economic opportunity and political power" for marginalized or other-literate people (7). Nonetheless, Bizzell champions hybrid discourses because they create opportunities for doing new and exciting intellectual work by offering alternative ways of meaning making. According to Bizzell, these "new discourse forms" are

> openly subjective, incorporating an author's emotions and prejudices, forms that seek to find common ground among opposing positions rather than setting them against one another head to head, forms that deviate from the traditional grapholect by using language that is informal, that includes words from other languages, that employs cultural references from the wide variety of world cultures rather than only the canonical Western tradition, and so on. ("Hybrid" 12)

Like Bizzell, I believe that students should be encouraged to experiment with hybrid discourses because they more accurately reflect the complex linguistic abilities that students—in particular other-literate students—possess. Bizzell makes note of "the profound cultural mixing that has already occurred in the United States" ("Basic" 9), and one site that clearly evidences social, cultural, historical, and linguistic mixing or hybridity is the intra-cultural rhetoric of African Americans.

While inter-cultural rhetoric has gained currency as a field of inquiry in English studies because of proponents of hybridity and contact zone teaching such as Mary Louise Pratt who advocates linguistic communication and acquisition between cultures (64), and Bizzell who sees teaching intercultural rhetoric as a way to solve "the problem of how to build bridges from academic content to the prior knowledge that students from less privileged social groups bring to schools" ("Theories" 3), intra-cultural rhetoric—discourses that people engage in among each other or within their own cultures or communities—might be more fruitful to explore with other-literate students because when using ultra-cultural rhetoric a speaker/writer might employ mainstream or standard language as one of its linguistic options but

he or she would privilege the non-mainstream culture and language of his/her own community. Moreover, speakers and writers of intra-cultural rhetoric have a sociopolitical commitment and aim to educate and empower members of their own cultural or ethnic group. Studying intra-cultural rhetoric demonstrates to other-literate students that people like them employ a variety of linguistic strategies, including standard English, to communicate and achieve goals within society while honoring and utilizing their own cultural capital.

One form of intra-cultural rhetoric that has proven useful with my developmental writing students is womanist sermons. Womanist sermons are created primarily by black women who practice womanist theology, which I have explained elsewhere as a praxis that derives from Alice Walker's womanism and "concerns itself with the faith, survival, and freedom struggle of African-American women" (531). Womanist theologians credit Alice Walker's womanism with inspiring them to construe and construct theology differently because Walker's creed exhorts black women to band together to combat the oppressions they face in society, including those visited upon them by black men and white women (xi-xii).

Like their secular counterparts in the womanist movement, black churchwomen— clergy and laypersons—were faced with discrimination by white men and traditional Christian theologies, by black men and liberation theology, and by white women and feminist theology. Appropriating Walker's womanism, which spoke to the "tridimensional reality of race/sex/class oppression" that many black women faced, black female theologians fashioned a womanist theology that represented their unique positions as theorists and practitioners of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Jacquelyn Grant, who many credit as the first black women to establish a definition of and parameters for "womanist theology" offered this explanation of its function in 1989:

> To accent the difference between Black and White women's perspective in theology, I maintain that Black women scholars should follow Alice Walker by describing our theological activity as "womanist theology." It accents, as Walker says, our being responsible, in charge, outrageous and audacious enough to demand the right to think theologically and to do it independently of both White and Black men and White women. (*White Women's* 209)

In creating a theology that represented black women, womanist theologians formulated a radical biblical hermeneutics—heretofore called womanist hermeneutics—that not only opposed multiple oppressions but also spoke to the lived experiences of African-American women. For example, womanist theologians, examining the Bible

through a black female-centered lens, privilege the story of Hagar, the Egyptian slave who is forced by the patriarch Abraham and his barren wife Sarah to produce a male heir for Abraham. The theologian Delores Williams interprets the Hagar story as revealing "predicaments of poverty, sexual and economic exploitation, surrogacy, domestic violence, homelessness, rape, motherhood, single-parenting, ethnicity and meetings with God" that represent the reality of many black women (5). Another instance of womanist hermeneutics is challenging the focus on sacrifice and suffering in the journey of Jesus Christ. JoAnne Terrell, for example, advises against strong identification with Jesus' suffering, privileging, instead, Christ's intercession because it "signals the end of the gospel story and the beginning of Christ's significance for us, 'on our behalf'" (125).

A primary source for transmitting womanist hermeneutics is the womanist sermon. In addition to sharing with congregants radical and empowering interpretations of the Bible and reinforcing traditional black sermonic features—emphasis on tone, style, diction, and structure, for example—womanist sermons offer new textual opportunities —in particular written— for exploring appropriation and hybridity. I emphasize written texts because, as McHenry and Heath explain, black sermons have a "strong basis in literate sources," that are often ignored because "their oral performance has received the lion's share of attention from scholars" (419). McHenry and Heath further explain that "[n]umerous written sources—spiritual, political, and rhetorical—produced the skillful and memorable flourishes of the 'literary' that lay scattered within sermons delivered orally" (419). While literate sources are evident in spoken sermons, written sermons allow us to better examine and analyze those sources, revealing the hybridity that is a central feature of the black sermon. Womanist sermons expand and problematize the linguistic, social, and spiritual functions of the traditional black sermon, incorporating not only different English dialects, specific African-influenced linguistic strategies such as call and response and repetition, and traditional rhetorical strategies and structures but also texts and ideas produced by women of all backgrounds that have been historically excluded from sermonic consideration.

As intra-cultural rhetoric, womanist sermons are useful in the writing class because they represent familiar, accessible hybrid linguistic forms that are grounded in other-literate culture but cognizant of the language and culture of the dominant society. Moreover, these sermons offer provocative, liberating, critically conscious arguments and strategies for uplifting black women and other oppressed peoples.

In this paper, I will represent the class discussion of two womanist sermons, and analyze two student essays in response to an assignment linked to the sermons we read. The first sermon the class discussed was "Mary of Bethany: The Best She Could" written by the Reverend

Suzan D. Johnson Cook. The Johnson Cook sermon is found in *Preaching in Two Voices*, a collection of sermons by the pastors Johnson Cook and William D. Watley, in which they alternate preaching eight sermons on the same Bible passages and topics, a structure that illustrates the multiple interpretive quality of the Bible. In her sermon, Johnson Cook explores John 12:1-8, a Bible passage that portrays Mary's anointment of Jesus' feet with costly oils, an act for which she is upbraided by Judas Iscariot, who argues that the oil could have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus reprimands Judas and defends Mary, saying, "Let her alone, let her keep it for the day of my burial. The poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me" (John 12:1-8). The overall idea or theme that Johnson Cook extracts from the passage is the importance of recognizing and accepting the different gifts that people, in particular women, have to offer.

Johnson Cook introduces her sermon by using the motif of the Sunday family meal, which remains a significant cultural event in many African-American homes. Employing this cultural sign, Johnson Cook goes on to compare a nephew who was silenced at the dinner table by an elderly relative to Mary of Bethany whose generosity was summarily dismissed by Judas Iscariot. Although Johnson Cook employs traditional linguistic strategies such as argument and exemplification, repetition, and metaphor to support her ultimate thesis—that the church should accept, recognize, and reward the contributions of women, in particular female pastors—she also uses non-traditional linguistic strategies such as black cultural awareness and identification, personal reflection, and womanist hermeneutics to produce a hybrid text or discourse that connects deeply and meaningfully with her audience.

The second sermon the class discussed was "Wonderfully Made: Preaching Physical-Self Affirmation," written by Chandra Taylor Smith. In contrast to Johnson Cook's subtle progressions, Smith presents an overtly political sermon that nonetheless includes both traditional and non-traditional approaches to rhetorical meaning-making, including womanist hermeneutics, popular black cultural references, and predominantly black scholarly authorities. Like Johnson Cook, Smith begins the sermon with the Bible passage under review, in her case Psalm 139: 13-14, which reads as follows: "For you created my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." As the title of the sermon suggests, Smith uses the psalm to construct a sermon about the importance of physical self-affirmation for black women. Smith's' sermon addresses the pain black females suffer from being assaulted by mainstream standards of beauty. Smith argues that while God made black women beautiful, the racist society tries to denigrate or deny that beauty: "What is 'in' does not always affirm our natural physical beauty that is of God. The normative Western ideal of

beauty has been historically designed by a racist as well as a sexist standard" (244). Smith's critique of hegemonic Western values serves to remind black women that their ideas of beauty are often imposed from without by a society that feels hatred toward them, a hatred that Smith imbeds in America's social and religious history (245).

In what follows, I will represent the class discussion generated by our reading of the sermons. Then I will explain the formal essay assignment derived from the class exploration of womanist sermons. Finally, I will analyze two students essays produced in response to the sermon assignment.

Class Discussion

We began the discussion of womanist sermons by reading Suzan Johnson Cook's "Mary of Bethany: the Best She Could." I asked the students to read the sermon and write about what rhetorical strategies Johnson Cook was employing. Although we had discussed rhetorical strategies throughout the semester, students were unsure about what I was asking and many of them simply responded to what they liked about the sermon. I took this as an opportunity to connect with the text on the students' level of engagement, so I encouraged them to respond in whatever way they felt comfortable. An African-American female student said that she liked how the pastor talked about her family, in particular the Sunday family meal. "It reminds me of meals I've shared with my own family," the student said. Another student agreed that the beginning of the sermon was evocative of her own family, but she was surprised at Johnson Cook's stance about her nephew. "The minister at my church wouldn't have defended the boy. He would have said that the boy shouldn't have been talking with grown folks." Another students echoed that comment, saying that her parents always taught her that children shouldn't talk around adults and that her church was the same way. A male student asked the class if they thought Johnson Cook was wrong to defend her nephew. A female student asked to hear his opinion, and the male student said that he had always hated to be told to shut up when he was a child. He then remarked, "Isn't womanism about being 'womanish,' and not having to hide how smart you are, even if you are young? Is the boy being fresh or out of line just because he has something to say?" We had talked at length about what Walker meant by "womanish" and most of the class agreed that she was talking about situations just like this one, in which children were silenced merely because they were children, which Walker believed was wrong.

In order to begin helping the students to understand the sermon as rhetoric, I asked them what effect Johnson Cook's personal reflec-

tion about the Sunday meal had on them as the audience. A young Haitian woman said that it made Johnson Cook seem more human to her because she still participated in the Sunday meal, which showed that she cared about family and tradition. Another student seconded this comment, saying that Johnson Cook was both traditional and non-traditional, that she had a non-traditional job for a woman, but she still did some traditional things. An older female student challenged Johnson Cook's narrative about the family meal. First, she said that she didn't believe that Johnson Cook always made or had time to be a part of the meal. Then, she said that her own pastor was always away at a conference or running out after church to do something else. Finally, she said that if Johnson Cook was really such a prominent person then she probably didn't have time to be with her family that often. I took the student's statement as another opportunity to talk about rhetorical strategies. I asked the students to consider that Johnson Cook could not attend the Sunday meal very often, or even that there was no weekly Sunday meal in her family. Why might she write that she did attend the meal and that it was important to her? The older student responded that she believed Johnson Cook wants the audience to see her as both a pastor and a regular woman, so she says that she attends the Sunday meal because she knows people will respect her for that. An African-American male student responded, "it sounds like you're saying that she has to stay in her place.." The older student said, "I guess I am saying that. She is a womanist and all that, but she has to also be their pastor. If her church is anything like mine, then she has a lot to deal with being a woman. A lot of women won't like her acting like she's too big or too busy for the meal."

Several students agreed with this assessment, which allowed me to discuss the family meal scenario as an element of introduction that serves several purposes in the sermon: It reinforces the sermonic theme, establishes the pastor's character or personality, and prepares the audience for unconventional womanist thinking. One student questioned whether Johnson Cook was actually that deliberative in her writing, arguing that pastors were simply "led by the spirit" in their sermons, not purposely constructing a sermon for specific effects. I responded that while traditional black preaching did incorporate spontaneity into its structure, most pastors planned their sermons, producing at the very least a structure or form to follow. I likened this type of preaching to jazz improvisation, by which the players understand the structure of the song but know how to play or improvise within that structure. I further explained that we were reading a written version of Johnson Cook's sermon, which was structured, developed, and revised, perhaps several or more times. While the sermon would change if actually delivered it in front of an audience, Johnson Cook would make

sure that she included her key points and maintained a certain relationship with the audience. I asked the students to read or hear sermons with the understanding that the writers or speakers are making deliberate, conscious choices to produce deliberate, conscious meanings or effects.

After this discussion, students began to locate specific strategies in Johnson Cook's sermon, such as the use of cultural references and the consistent theme of female empowerment. When I asked the class to write about the rhetorical strategies in the next sermon we would discuss, Chandra Taylor Smith's "Wonderfully Made," they seemed much more confident and eager to do that work.

The discussion surrounding the Smith sermon was more focused, but not without controversy or conflict. Many women in the class appreciated Smith's frank discussion of body image, societal standards, and self-love as obedience to God. They understood and appreciated how Smith makes her argument, selecting Bible passages that illustrate God's desire for women to love themselves as they are. They also acknowledged and welcomed Smith's critique of women's magazines, especially her analysis of popular black magazines such as *Essence* and *Ebony*, which Smith argues perpetuate a destructive, white supremacist notion of beauty. One female student complained that the fashion industry promoted the "tall, skinny model-type," which was incompatible with the body types of many non-white women. Another woman argued that even white women didn't look that way, explaining that few women are five-foot-nine and 110 pounds. This comment elicited both laughter and assent as people nodded their heads in agreement. However, one male student sheepishly complained that just because he liked women who looked like models didn't mean that he was brainwashed; rather, he "naturally" liked women that way. After quieting the catcalls that greeted this remark, I asked the student what he meant by being naturally attracted to models. He explained that liking model-type women was merely the way he was, not something influenced by the media or the fashion industry. A Caribbean woman said that in her culture men liked women who were more curvy and "womanly" than American culture. She believed that what you found attractive was culturally grounded. I pointed out to the male student that the tall, thin model as a standard of beauty is a rather recent phenomenon in our society. For centuries, I explained, the Rubenesque woman was the standard of Western beauty. Even as recently as the fifties and early sixties, I continued, voluptuous women such as Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, and Jayne Mansfield were the epitome of mainstream beauty, and even today there are competing notions of what constitutes beauty, evidenced in, for example, the marketing of the female wrestler Chyna. The idea of beauty as a social construction

was an important topic, central to Smith's sermonic intent. I asked the student to analyze rhetorically how Smith supports or critiques this idea.

Identifying Smith's use of outside sources, a female student pointed to Smith's inclusion of several authorities who analyzed the destructive standards of beauty in America and from where these standards originated. One student noted Smith's use of the work of Joseph R. Washington who "traces the negative images of black people back to the mythology of the 'curse of Ham'" (qtd. in Smith 244). The student found this reference important because it not only illustrated the social construction of beauty or identity but also the dangers of racist biblical interpretations. The same student noted that Smith establishes and supports her argument about socially-constructed, white supremacist concepts of beauty by using a succession of authorities—Washington, Margaret Miles, W.H. Grier, and P.M. Cobb—who all discuss some aspect of racist constructions of the inferior physical qualities of African-Americans. Another student pointed to Smith's interpretation of Psalm 139: 1-14, which Smith reads, unlike other biblical scholars, as a "song of praise and affirmation," not a lament (246). The student admired Smith's ability to use or interpret the Bible passage to serve her own purposes, namely to impress upon the black female audience that "God has made your body, in all of its natural textures, colors, and curves beautiful to behold" (247). This was an important class moment because most of the students had some working knowledge of the Bible and Smith's radical interpretation reinforced the idea that textual meaning, even in a sacred text, is never fixed.

Locating other instances of using source materials as a rhetorical strategy, several students applauded Smith use of Baby Suggs' call for radical self-love in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to support her sermonic theme of positive self-affirmation in the midst of racist attitudes and assumptions. I asked the students to explain why they admired this rhetorical strategy, and a Puerto Rican female replied that most of Smith's audience had at least heard of the book, even if they hadn't read it. Others, she continued, might have seen the movie. She herself knew about the book and movie because Oprah Winfrey devoted an entire show to promoting them. Another student explained that *Beloved* was the type of book that you know you're supposed to admire, even if you don't know anything about it. She too admitted to seeing only the Oprah Winfrey show about the movie, but knew even before then that the book was considered important. She also knew that Toni Morrison was a great writer. A student asked her how she knew Toni Morrison was great if she hadn't read her, to which a young male student responded by saying that "there's a whole lot of white writers like Shakespeare and stuff that a lot of people haven't read, but no-

body questions how great they are." Some of the students laughed, but the student was quite serious. He continued, saying, "some things you just know without actually really knowing because you live in the society. I guess it depends on how something might affect your life whether or not you should find out for yourself or not." We ended the conversation on that note, with my request that students consider seriously the student's idea and to write about what things in society they knew without really knowing and which of those things did they want to experience for themselves.

Formal Assignment

I asked students to write secular sermons in order to help them explore and implement the rhetorical strategies present in sermons without being restricted to religious arguments that would primarily be substantiated by the Bible. Through writing secular sermons, students can employ sermonic forms and strategies to organize and develop their arguments without discussing religious ideas that might impinge on private beliefs and practices. Here is the secular sermon assignment that I gave my students:

> As I believe you have come to understand, womanist sermons are, in essence, expository essays that present a specific idea and endeavor to persuade the audience to its point of view. Womanist sermons employ a radical biblical hermeneutics in order to present ideas important to black women's secular and sacred understanding. For this assignment, I want you to write a "secular sermon," that is, a non-religious text that argues a specific position or claim using the rhetorical strategies found in womanist sermons. For example, you might use outside sources, audience awareness, personal reflection, non-standard dialects, and repetition to present a position or thesis about school vouchers or the images in hip-hop music. You might explore an issue or idea about which the society is talking—Will our involvement in Columbia lead us into another Vietnam? Should euthanasia be legalized?
>
> What you sermonize or "preach" about is up to you. Your only requirements are that you advance an idea or state an opinion, and attempt to use some of the rhetorical strategies that exist in the womanist sermons we discussed in class.

The secular sermon assignment gives students the opportunity

to exercise their own understanding of language and writing, standing upon a platform of knowledge from which to grasp the concepts of traditional and non-traditional rhetoric. Writing their own secular sermons helps students to understand better what they might already know about rhetoric, say, the five-paragraph essay style, and to embrace opportunities for playing with what they already know. Moreover, students might become more aware of and attentive to the audience while writing secular sermons, which will help them to organize and develop their ideas. Overall, the secular sermon assignment offers students a structure that is by nature playful, which allows them to explore their own rhetorical awareness without the burden of institutionally imposed correctness or compliance. Before I discuss and analyze the first student sermon, I want to note that I have masked the identities of the students I present here.

Student Texts

The first secular sermon I will analyze is about gays in the military. The writer, Tony, chooses a controversial topic, as many beginning writers do; however, Tony is able to make this topic meaningful for him by weaving personal reflection, source materials, and opinion throughout the essay, endowing it with insight and relevance beyond the rote "arguable thesis" essay assignment that is a staple of much basic and freshman writing instruction. Here Tony both prepares the audience for his argument and introduces his topic by explaining the societal oppression visited upon gays:

> In my life I have seen injustices. People making false accusations about people they don't even know. They force others to conceal their true feelings. To live a life structured by what other people feel should be the "norm." This is very difficult for many people. You try to hold back a feeling that is enchained in your soul. For many it is the life long struggle between what is the lesser of two evils. One example of this is the idea of living a life with an artificial awareness of oneself. The other is living the life of a homosexual and being chastised and ridiculed by others. This is especially true of the military. Gay men and women have to hide behind a facade of lies.

Tony doesn't explicitly state his thesis in the current-traditional essay sense. Instead, he appeals to the audience's sense of fairness and compassion by discussing the mistreatment of gays in society, and the painful consequences of that treatment. Moreover, Tony shows that

the military mirrors the overall society in which gays are often forced to suffer closeted lives of quiet desperation or open lives of ridicule and abuse. Tony's political stance is supported by his reading of womanist sermons, which encourage the resistance of multiple oppressions in society, including homophobia and heterosexism. Although we did not read a specific sermon challenging homophobia or heterosexism, the sermons we did read all located oppressed groups within society and advocated for their freedom. For example, the Johnson Cook sermon champions the right of children and women to participate fully in society. A sermon we read by Susan Hagood Lee chronicles the struggle of a battered wife to liberate herself from her abusive husband and reject the idea that God ordains women to be subordinate to men. The Taylor Smith sermon resists mainstream images of beauty and embraces the diverse beauty of African-American women. These sermons offer not only a structural but also an epistemological guide for critique, a critique that is often complex and provocative.

We see this complexity and provocation in Tony's refusal to discuss the issue in simple terms. Rather than claiming that being "out" solves a gay person's problems, Tony explains that both closeted and out gays face specific unenviable positions, on which he refuses to place a value judgment. This equivocal stance allows Tony to focus on the more provocative issue: that social climate and conditions, in particular within the military, need to be altered so that all gays can live in peace and freedom.

The next movement of the essay finds Tony using an outside source, " William Eskridege, a renowned legal scholar" to explain why the government might feel "that if you allow gays in the military, you open the doors to a haven of sexual abuse and misbehavior." However, rather than challenging this uniformed fear of homosexual promiscuity in the armed services with another source or his own opinion, Tony uses a long personal reflection to show both that gays are not sexual predators and that the military is unnecessarily and unjustly homophobic:

> In 1995 I was unemployed and I couldn't find a job. My last hope was the armed forces. I had to take my physical with a group of other young men. Everyone was walking around in his skivvies. I was too overwhelmed by everything that I had to go through to even think of my sexuality, until, I had to see the Doctor on a one to one physical.

Later in the narrative, Tony reveals that a sergeant asks him to fill out a form with this question crossed out: "Are you a homosexual or have enacted [engaged] in any homosexual act?" According to Tony,

the sergeant mentions the policy to him then takes "a long pause as though he were waiting for me to tell him something." Although Tony expects entrapment—"They could be using it as a ploy to catch people off guard with the question"—he is sworn in that very day, only to be informed weeks later that he was rejected for testing positive for drugs. Tony doesn't trust the test, however, and concludes that "[s]omething was really wrong. I felt the military was doing something underhanded. I was being singled out. I wear an obvious symbol [pink triangle] of the gay community, a symbol tattooed on persecuted gays during the holocaust. I knew that someone would know that."

The hybrid or heteroglossic nature of Tony's text is influenced by his exposure to womanist sermons, in particular his use of personal reflection to make or undergird a political point or critique. Womanist sermons rely heavily on personal reflection and narrative but always in the service of a critical position. For example, Johnson Cook's "Sunday meal" motif does serve to bring her closer to her congregation, but its larger point is about the unjust silencing of the young nephew, an idea that allows Johnson Cook to later challenge the silencing of women in the church and the greater society. Like Johnson Cook, Tony uses his personal reflection to make a social critique; in his case, we must stop the military's harassment of gays, an idea he develops skillfully in his subsequent paragraphs.

After establishing that the military has a negative attitude toward gays, Tony extends this analysis by discussing briefly an anecdote about a gay soldier then using a gay officer's testimony about military harassment that appeared recently in the New York weekly the *Village Voice*. Tony uses these personal testimonies to substantiate the idea that gays suffer harassment in the military. However, in the next movement of the essay, the solution section, Tony uses a more formal authority, "Dr. Gregory Herek, Ph.D. associate research psychologist at the University of California at Davis and an authority on heterosexuals' attitude toward Gays..." Tony provides some of Dr. Herek's impressive credentials because he understands that he will need a powerful authority to help him convince the audience that gay harassment in the military is wrong and that the situation can and should be changed.

Using authorities to support or advance one's position is a key feature of womanist sermons, and the authorities are selected according to what audience the sermonist is addressing. Taylor Smith, in her sermon, uses many academic authorities because she is trying to impress upon her audience of young women that the damaging mainstream image of beauty is a serious issue not only for them but also within the greater society. Johnson Cook, on the other hand, invokes more familiar and culturally grounded authorities—Spike Lee, for example—because her audience is generationally diverse and her con-

cerns more local—how people treat her and one another within the church. However, both sermonists integrate references skillfully, providing students with accessible models for both locating and incorporating source materials.

In a very effective rhetorical move, Tony develops the solution section of his paper by citing Dr. Herek's testimony before "the House Armed [Services] Committee on May 1999," during which he "proposed five recommendations for implementing a nondiscriminatory policy." Tony quotes Dr. Herek's recommendations to support his contention that gay harassment in the military can be addressed and possibly eradicated:

> (1) Establish clear norms that sexual orientation is irrelevant to performing one's duties and that everyone should be judged on his or her merits. 2) Eliminate false stereotypes about gay men and lesbians through education and sensitivity training for all personnel. ... 5) Take a firm and highly publicized stand that violence against gay personnel is unacceptable and will be punished quickly and severely. Attach added penalties to antigay violence perpetrated by military personnel.

Tony demonstrates that he has control over the sources he uses by responding to the recommendations he cites. For example, after the fifth recommendation about punishing antigay behavior, Tony offers this critique:

> I agree with this statement, but the choice of words is all wrong. I feel that we are all the same. Homosexuals don't need any special treatment. Violence against anybody should be taken seriously. The perpetrators should be punished quickly and severely. It doesn't make a difference the color of your skin or the person you sleep with. What matters is the loyalty to serve and protect the country.

Tony renders a rather sophisticated analysis of Herek's idea in that he is able is to challenge the military's treatment of gays while understanding and respecting the idea of unity that is necessary to maintain a standing army. This type of complex, hybrid thinking—the ability to integrate two seemingly opposing ideas—permeates many womanist sermons. Johnson Cook, for example, is able to embrace family, church, and home, while fighting for liberty for all people, in particular women, within those realms. Taylor Smith is able to embrace the idea of human attractiveness, while challenging and dismantling those mainstream institutions and attitudes that would tell us only one standard of beauty exists. Tony consistently demonstrates integrated

thinking in his essay, creating space both for those who support and oppose gays in the military to find common ground.

Using the rhetorical strategy of repetition, a prominent feature of womanist sermons that we discussed extensively in class, Tony concludes the essay by reinforcing the idea that solving the problem of gays in the military can bring Americans closer together, a socially aware and activist thought that suggests greater unity through embracing difference, a central theme in many womanist sermons:

> Someday ... I hope all of this will be resolved. It takes a lot of work on the part of politicians and us to make this happen. We have to stand up for the rights of all people. This is a country of freedom. This is a country that has a motto of freedom of speech. This is a country with a motto of pursuit of happiness. This is a country that has seen many nations rise and fall. This is a country of United States. So, why can't this be a country of united people?

Tony's repetition of the "This is a country" phrase makes us more aware of the ideas the phrase introduces: "freedom," "freedom of speech," "pursuit of happiness," "many nations," "United States," "united people." Tony also reinforces the idea of unity, and gay people as a part of that unity, by repeating and pairing "United States" with "united people." In fact, throughout this paragraph, Tony skillfully uses repetition to imply that defending "the rights of all people," including gays, is woven into the very fabric of our society. Repetition is a widely discussed feature of womanist (and black) sermons, so I won't revisit those discussions here. However, I will say that both Johnson Cook and Taylor Smith utilize repetition in their sermons and this sermonic feature was intricately explored in the classroom.

Ending his essay with an inviting but demanding appeal, Tony creates a hybrid discourse that utilizes the many rhetorical and critical approaches evident in womanist sermons to argue for the inclusion of gays and other oppressed peoples in the military and the greater society.

The second secular sermon I will analyze, another departure from the traditional essay form, exhibits social awareness and heteroglossic experimentation, including the use of creative writing. Patricia, an older African-American female student who writes fiction, in particular short stories and poetry, wanted to write a serious paper about child abuse that would allow her to use her creative writing skills. She asked me if she could combine creative and critical writing, weaving together a fictional story and research writing. I told her that the approach sounded interesting, but she had to reveal at some point that the story was fictional; and this would take great care and skill. Since we had

read and discussed sermons that privileged the personal, Patricia wanted to use a more personal voice in her paper but with a degree of detachment or safety. Creating a fictional persona helped Patricia to move from the personal or subjective to a more general, objective position within the same text as she discussed the sensitive issue of sexual child abuse.

Like the sermons we read in class, Patricia's essay exhibits rhetorical purpose and audience awareness. Patricia begins the essay with a traditional narrative structure, taking the audience into a specific time in the life of her character, a young African-American boy whom she never names. Here Patricia writes about the first time the character is abused by a family friend:

> Being naive and not knowing what was happening to me, I just cried. He was covering my mouth with his hands so the neighbors wouldn't hear me screaming. After the incident, he told me that if I ever told anyone he would kill me. I was horrified about the fact that this guy told me this in a crude way.

The abuse event comes in the third paragraph of Patricia's essay, after which she interrupts the narrative to discuss the problems of abuse in our society, a discussion that identifies both the severity and prevalence of this crime in our society:

> According to my research, child sexual abuse is more common than what society portrays it to be. One out of five boys will be sexually abuse in the United States by the age of 18. Every child is vulnerable to sexual abuse. Today's parents must face the possibility that someone may hurt or take advantage of their child....Sexually abused children often do not tell anyone about their experiences because they are too young to put into words what has happened....They often feel confused by the attention and feeling accompanying the abuse, are afraid no one will believe them or blame themselves and believe the abuse is a punishment for being bad....

Patricia's essay begins with a powerful narrative but is nicely balanced with the analysis of the problem. As in the sermons we read, Patricia's essay illustrates rhetorical awareness about how an idea can be explored, about what might interest or affect the audience. Like Johnson Cook, Patricia begins with a story, but Patricia's story portrays the very serious consequences of child abuse, which compel us to pay attention to her more conventional use of source materials because we understand that real children undergird the research she presents. Although Patricia does not attribute or incorporate outside

sources as skillfully as Tony, she does select source material entirely relevant to her analysis of the sexual abuse of children. Properly attributing sources is a convention that Patricia will learn in time. What is important here is that she has demonstrates facility with a far more difficult skill—locating and discussing source material that extends or supports her major idea. If a student cannot successful execute this reading/writing task, then correct citation becomes a moot point.

Like Tony, Patricia, influenced by the womanist sermons we analyzed, uses repetition to reinforce the strategy she considers most effective in ending child abuse: parents must listen to or communicate with their children. This idea appears in the narrative section—"I really had no [say about] whom my father invited over"; in the analysis section—"Listening to children is a very important part in helping a child recover from a sexual abuse experience"; in the solution section—"Another approach would be for parents to make children comfortable about speaking their mind"; and in the conclusion—"[Parents] must also create an environment that allows their sons to feel safe talking about sexual abuse or potential abuse they may suffer." Patricia repeats the idea of listening to and not silencing children because in both the narrative and research sections effective communication appears to be the primary preventive approach. In her rhetorical efforts, Patricia is, I believe, supported by her exposure to womanist sermons, which provide her forms for shaping ideas and experiences that are transformative for both herself and the audience.

Influenced by their reading, discussing, and writing about womanist sermons, both Tony and Patricia produce secular sermons that employ linguistic hybridity, critical awareness, integrative intellectualism, and rhetorical maturity. Appropriating rhetorical strategies, social criticism, and heteroglossic experimentation from womanist sermons, students in my developmental writing classes are able to produce critical essays that evidence awareness of audience, research and documentation, traditional and non-traditional supporting detail, and the relationship between personal struggle and social activism. My students benefit from reading, analyzing, and responding to womanist sermons—intra-cultural rhetoric produced by and directed toward people like them—because the sermons situate them at the center of forceful rhetoric, where they are encouraged to use all their linguistic capabilities, including knowledge of standard English, in the service of often radical ideas that are socially, politically, and culturally empowering. Womanist sermons help my students to connect personally with a challenging hybrid discourse that supports their own efforts at discoursing with and within the academy.

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Anmarie Eves-Bowden

WHAT BASIC WRITERS THINK ABOUT WRITING

ABSTRACT: *This article explores basic writing students' current writing processes, their thoughts on their writing, and their introduction to a structured writing process model. Findings are based on a semester-long study and include observations of and interviews with basic writing students at Sierra College of Rocklin, California. Ultimately, the article suggests that educators can assist basic writers in becoming successful college writers by introducing them to a structured writing process model while also helping them to become reflective about their own writing processes.*

The following research is based on observations made to discover what skills basic writers see themselves as possessing, and how these self-perceptions correlate with what skills they need in order to succeed in college English. This project helped me to learn more about the students I am teaching, and taught me more about how I can help each of my students grow excited about becoming better writers using their current writing abilities.

I surveyed and interviewed basic writing students as well as consulted the research already done. I have explored what basic writers think of their personal writing process, discussed a cognitive writing process theory model with them, and conducted follow-up student interviews to see if my students saw themselves as using a structured writing process. I wanted to know what my students thought of themselves as writers and how the current writing process of each might limit the ability to succeed on a typical college writing assignment.

I became interested in this topic when, as a graduate student, I was introduced to a writing process model for the first time. It seemed strange to me that no one had bothered to show or teach me how to follow such a model during my undergraduate years. The model included aspects of writing I learned on my own through trial and error. Since I began teaching, it occurred to me that discussing such a model early on in basic composition courses made sense for students who did not have as great a love for the written word as I. Why deprive students of a model, if that makes the process of writing easier to understand? Those students who struggle often look for assistance outside of themselves and become frustrated when they cannot find the

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help they need to succeed. Having a model from which to learn the basic steps of a structured writing process may be helpful to many basic writing students as well as their instructors.

What follows is a whirlwind tour through the last 30 years of basic writing. It simplifies and compresses for the sake of sticking to what seem to me, at least, the highlights.

In 1972, Donald Murray, urging his colleagues to "Teach Writing as a Process not Product," divided the writing processes into three simple stages: prewriting, writing, and rewriting. He acknowledged that the amount of time a writer spends in each stage depends on his or her personality, work habits, maturity as a person, and the ambitiousness of what he or she is trying to say. Writing is not a rigid step-by-step process, but many basic writers see it as such. Since the real challenge lies in teaching students to become recursive in their writing process steps, Murray suggested that instruction in how to write is best achieved less through lecture and more through practice, allowing students to focus on writing as a process, not just a product.

Mina Shaughnessy (1976) agreed that teaching writing as process rather than product is key, and she stressed, still more emphatically, that, contrary to a common misconception that put the burden of change on the students, it is in fact teachers who should change to help their students. She went on to elaborate a developmental scale used to place teachers who are learning to teach in the open-admissions classroom, placing the responsibility of students' education as much on the instructor as on the student. Shaughnessy demonstrated that when teachers take an interest in their basic writers' instruction in the writing process, when they learn to value as well as demand work from their students, basic writers have a better chance of becoming stronger writers.

How basic writing students are educated led Sondra Perl (1979) to investigate whether basic writers have a stable composing process which they use whenever they are presented with a writing task. She found that they did, but it also seemed an impoverished process: simply having a process does not mean that one is a proficient writer. Some of Perl's students, not knowing what to write, began by writing the essay topic or question out in order to explore it, reflect, and then further develop those ideas. Without knowing it, they were using free writing and brainstorming, the first steps of a typical writing process. Next, Perl observed students' thought processes shifting from thoughts about their intentions to the actual words on paper and back again. Although students' techniques were underdeveloped, they were composing in a recursive manner. Soon after students began composing (often too soon), they began editing. Although editing is important, many of the students confused rules, had selective perception, and/or failed to take their audience into account. Perl's work stressed the

importance of having students become aware of what and how they write so they can better implement improvements.

One such improvement lies in recourse to revision, according to Nancy Sommers (1980). She felt some models of the writing process directed attention away from revision, making it no more than an afterthought. During her interviews with them, Sommers found that her basic writers availed themselves of four operations in revising: deletion; substitution; addition; and reordering of word phrases, sentences, and themes. They rarely if ever reconceived the whole piece or revised at the level of ideas. Although students were revising, their revision took place only on a local level and missed global issues of organization, structure, logic, and content.

As one way to appreciate those larger issues and their significance, Mike Rose (1983) contended that basic writers need to read more in order to write better. He stressed that reading and writing are intimately connected in ways we are only beginning to understand. And understanding their connection can become part of a holistic teaching approach, one that views composition as a process of thinking, learning, reading, and writing. As Rose would have it, writing to a varied audience should play a central role in teaching basic writers how to produce coherent texts. Many basic writers have not had the opportunity to read and/or write academic discourse extensively in an academic discourse community. Rose suggested determining the organizational patterns required by basic writing students and then teaching these patterns through reading as well as writing, a holistic approach to teaching that should help basic writers learn to write more proficiently. Rose's article was notable in his suggestion that basic writers' writing processes are unpracticed and in need of organization and structure.

Patricia Bizzell (1990) went so far as to suggest that basic writing students' thinking processes need as much remediation as their writing. For her, the teaching task at hand is not only to convey information but to transform students' world views, particularly by reconsidering the relationship between thought and language. According to Bizzell, teachers of basic writers need to have the ambition to teach them how to think, to help them become not just better writers and better students but better people.

In some ways reminiscent of Rose, Marcia Dickson (1995) urged teaching basic writers to become more academic by teaching reading and writing as corresponding processes. The goal, as she saw it, was not correcting the organization problems or surface errors but instead deciphering why students make the writing choices they do and then linking those to reading assignments which help them master form as well as content. Feeling that basic writers tend to write about what they know and, unlike advanced writers, do not write to come to an

understanding of their topic, Dickson saw another reason to implement holistic teaching: because it fosters a higher learning. And encouraging basic writing students to learn why they write the way they do is the first step in helping them to think reflectively about their writing process.

Another important step, according to Maxine Hairston (1997), is teaching basic writers strong communication skills. Hairston believes writing is the heart of every college education, and she believes writing is so important because everyone uses writing to learn and think about communication. For Hairston, the way to teach writing skills is to use a process-oriented, low-risk, student-centered classroom where the emphasis is on communicating in writing.

The last 30 years have taught us much about teaching basic writers, and I am quite aware that none of the foregoing is news to this readership. What interests me is that much of it was news to me not so very long ago, and the summary or overview I have just provided was something I could communicate to the basic writers I was teaching in hopes that they would benefit from it. My first step was to take Shaughnessy's advice and make an educator-based change in order to better teach basic writers. I resolved to teach writing as both a process and a product, and especially to model the writing process for my students. I chose Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process model (1981) as a teaching tool because they have given wonderfully simple yet rich expression to the embedded elements of writing (see Appendix A). Flower and Hayes have made changes in their articulation of the writing process since 1981, but I am using this older model because each box in their diagram lists steps needed to help basic writers along in their process. The very notion of the writing process as an orderly progression of steps has its problems (ones Flower and Hayes came to address), but it also has its virtues in this context. I was using the model not as a description of reality but as a teaching tool. And using this model as a teaching tool seemed, by its almost programmatic nature, to keep basic writers from becoming frustrated while it still emphasized revision and recursiveness, content and method. The model also acknowledges that personal writing goals will evolve as the paper is written. My lesson plan included using this model in conjunction with practice writing each day.

Organizational Plan

Learning the reasons behind basic writers' frustrations should be an integral part of becoming a successful instructor. To this end, I investigated my basic writers' composing processes as well as their sense of themselves as writers. Using the findings from my research, I resolved to restructure my classes and create lesson plans which draw

on their sense of self and further their understanding of their personal writing process.

My observations began with the investigation of whether or not the basic writers in my English 1-A class at Sierra Community College think they are good writers as well as how they think about their writing process. My hypothesis was that, like me, they too had never been introduced to a formal writing process model and that introducing them to one would have a positive impact on them as writers and how they thought of themselves as writers.

I introduced my students to Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process model after my first set of interviews in order to get a solid before-and-after sense in each student's case. I sought to find out what my basic writers thought the writing process was (as they experienced it) and then if the Flower and Hayes model helped them to write.

Field Study Findings Report Summary

My research covered a five-week period and included the basic writers in my English 1-A class at Sierra Community College. I began by selecting seven whom I deemed good or typical examples of basic writers based on their disorganized and unacademic writing, lack of basic fluency, and use of dialects and slang in place of Standard Written English. None of these students were former ESL placements according to their interviews. I have changed the students' names to preserve their anonymity.

My preconceived notions of these basic writers regarding their writing ability and sense of self were based on the readings of case studies only. The case studies suggested that basic writers can produce writing based on personal experiences but that they do not use a structured writing process model, practice editing or revision, or feel writing to be important as communication. I imagined that they felt somewhat insecure about themselves as writers, yet were willing to try. My observations and interviews led to some rethinking of my preliminary assumptions.

My survey (see Appendix B) and in-class interviews produced interesting results. My survey prompted students to discuss their writing process or lack thereof. The point of asking my students to describe their writing process was to help me initiate a sequence of instruction which allowed them to put their writing situation into their own terms, then to become part of the learning process and implement positive changes to their own personalized style of writing. Their answers indicated that each did have a writing process, but also that it was not complex or structured. They acknowledged very few steps in a writing process I can describe generally as mostly consisting of picking a topic from the assignment sheet, reading parts of the assigned

homework, and producing some writing on that basis, which might or might not be proofread (much less revised). The answers I received on the first prompt on the survey ("discuss your writing process"), ranged from: "I don't really have a structured process" (Cunn), to "My process changes with every paper" (Thompson), to "My process is fairly loose" (Sarzefhed). Some of the other comments students made in answering the survey included idea generation *after* writing an introductory paragraph, and writing down important points *before* conducting any research.

The students' answers to my initial survey questions led me to more questions instead of the answers I was looking for, so I conducted individual personal student interviews. During the one-on-one interviews, I asked each student to discuss his or her composing process. Most told me that they felt they had nothing to say on an assigned topic and/or that they did not know what they thought on a particular subject and that is why they were having trouble composing. During the personal interviews I also discussed recursive resource viewing, which I defined as rereading the assigned homework, looking over notes, and reviewing outside resources. The general consensus the students expressed was that they rarely looked back over their resources to help themselves write and did not know why – they just never thought about doing so. Very few students mentioned revision, proofreading or editing of any kind, and those that did told me they did little of it because they were under a lot of personal time constraints (everything from work to family issues to other classes' homework); revising seemed to them an inefficient use of time, justified only if something was seriously wrong and needed correcting. I found the personal interviews very helpful; they encouraged me to open class discussion to strategies for idea generation, composition, and revision.

To provide an overview of all three, I presented the class with the Flower and Hayes Cognitive Writing Process model. I chose this particular model because of its easy-to-follow diagram and simple explanations of each recursive step. After giving the diagram to each student, I led a discussion on how my students could better implement such a process in their own writing. After the discussion, my students admitted they had never been taught a writing process before but understood the point of using one. They were also inspired to do an analysis of their personal writing processes. My students realized they were already using a writing process, so implementing a few more steps and a sense of structuring the whole would not be a difficult way to quickly improve their writing. They also recognized that the more steps they used, the easier it would be to propel themselves through the writing of their next essay, on gender roles (see Appendix C). The students seemed interested in the model and unusually interested in participating in the discussion – everyone participated. Group

discussion of a model of the writing process felt helpful and educational for all of us.

This by no means meant that all our problems were solved. Despite all they had just discovered in the class discussion, my students, despite their professed insecurities and uncertainties, were also overly confident when it came to discussing what they thought of themselves as writers. As one (O'Brian) insisted, "I know what works best for me, I just have to do it." Most of my students, when asked to rate themselves (see Appendix D) as writers on a scale of one to ten (with ten on the high end and one on the low end), rated themselves a better-than-average six. The statements they made when asked to justify these positive self-assessments included "I'm a pretty decent writer" (Cunn), "I still need work touching up transitions" (Cortez), "I feel my subject matter is good and my derection [sic] and appion [sic] are clear" (Donnelly), "I feel I have improved greatly" (Thompson), "I'm not excellent and I'm not horrible" (Parson), "My writing varies due mostly to grammar and spelling errors" (Sarzefhed), and "I would rate myself a six... but I will become better and hopefully become a ten in the future" (Barson). These remarks give further insight into the composing processes of each student. There is the sense that not failing is a form of success, that practice makes perfect, that a little more effort and application is all they need. The following gives a further explanation of each student's current life position and academic standing.

Monica Cortez, a 37-year-old single mother of twin eight-year-olds, is a re-entry student. She took English A (required initial placement for weaker writers) as her prerequisite for English 1-A. According to the survey she filled out, Cortez believes her writing process consists of reading the assignment, gathering data, free writing, a day of rest, rough draft, peer review, and final draft. During our interview, she said she makes careless mistakes with her "works cited" page, but other than that, says she knows what she is doing. In the second survey, she rated herself a seven saying she is able to get her point across in a way that is easy to follow. As a reader of that writing, however, I sense she needs help with a much wider range of problems than she acknowledges in her self-assessment: under-developed paragraphs, no conclusions, recurring mistakes (and not just with "works cited"), no introductions to or analysis of quotations, comma issues, no parenthetical citations, contraction issues, and trouble following assignment instructions. Something like Flower and Hayes' model should help her address many of these issues by unpacking what is involved in writing, helping her to be more thoughtful and recursive in her composing as well as to practice editing.

Lily Cunn, a 19-year-old who also took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, said her personal writing process has no structure and that her routine changes with every essay. However, she

promised that, for the next assignment, she would start with reading the assignment, then do some freewriting before a rough draft. After a peer review, she said she would begin her final draft. During our interview, she said she often has trouble starting her papers. A problem she stressed was her sense that each sentence has to be perfect before she moves onto the next. She rated herself a six saying her writing is "pretty decent." But she seems to be one of those writers who has decided, without really testing the assumption, that her writing is as good as it could be if only she tried harder — as if knowing what she should do was tantamount to getting it done. As her teacher, I cannot help but see she does not take care in her reading and does no editing, reviewing, or revising; the result is characterized by misused quotes, no analysis or elaboration of the quotations she used, over-generalizations, a lack of transitions between paragraphs, and no source attribution. Comments focusing on these particulars may well reinforce her sense that she is just not trying hard enough, that more effort and application will make all the difference. If, as she seems to believe, there's a way if only there's the will, the Flower and Hayes model should help her to see that there are more steps along the way than she has taken into account, that conscientious application on her part will require more than just more (and mere) conscientiousness.

Colleen O'Brian, another late teen (in this case, an 18-year-old) who took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, said her personal writing process usually begins with her introductory paragraph, which she writes immediately after class the day the assignment is given. Next, she brainstorms and writes a thesis. Then, she writes down some issues she thinks will make good paragraphs. She said her next "step" is procrastination, leaving her with an introduction and not much more. She rated herself a six saying she knows what works best for her, she just has to do it. My own diagnosis is that her present writing process is not just troubled by a lack of follow-through. She seems to have a sense of process that is not guided by goals for her writing; it is certainly true (and she acknowledges) that she has problems completing assignments as well as citing quotes; she also has subject/verb agreement issues, careless possessive usage, comma splices, and error-filled "works cited" pages. While she seems to have a more structured process (or at least the start of a process) than other students I interviewed, I believe the Flower and Hayes model should also help her, not least of all by helping her to feel more purposive about her writing so that she can forge ahead where she has formerly stalled out.

Derek Barson, an 18-year-old who tested into English 1-A as his prerequisite, said his personal writing process begins by discussing his assignment with others. He then said he draws up an outline from which he eventually (often over a space of some days) types up a rough draft. After running it through a spell-checker, he makes that his final

draft. In our interview, he told me he received straight As in English in high school, yet he rated himself a six because he felt he was only an average writer. My sense is that he has difficulty in mastering a typical college writing assignment because his writing process basically stops with idea generation (though he does write that up); there's a lack of reviewing, evaluating and revising that results in the lack of a thesis, little or no analysis of quotations, lapses in logic, and lapses into slang. For a writer like Barson, the Flower and Hayes model could suggest another path besides the straight and narrow (and short, particularly abridged in the move from rough to final draft), showing him the way to be genuinely recursive, not just coming up with things to say but actually taking a thoughtful second look at what he comes up with, so that he comes to revise as well as practice editing more regularly.

Adam Sarzefhed, a 19-year-old who tested into English 1-A as his prerequisite, said his personal writing process is fairly loose. He starts with an idea or opinion, researches it and then begins writing. He said he generally revises his papers but had not been doing so lately because of his busy schedule. During our interview, he told me he recently started a new job which kept him late, after closing hours, and often made him late to our 6:30 p.m. class. This new job was affecting not only his revision time, but his writing time as well. He also told me he believes a good writing process makes for a more enjoyable paper. He rated himself a six due mostly to grammatical and spelling errors. I had already noted his lack of development, transitions, and revision and guessed the problem was either laziness or time constraints. The Flower and Hayes model would not give a student writer like Sarzefhed more time, but it could help him manage his time more efficiently, structuring his process so that he does not need long stretches of time to do effective writing and revision.

Tyler Thompson, an 18-year-old attending my class directly from high school, did not take prerequisite course but was instead a self-placement, which is allowed at Sierra Community College. Thompson insisted he was capable of handling the course. In our interview, he told me that he earned straight As in high school English. He said his personal writing process began with him thinking about the topic until he came up with some good ideas; he would then write a thesis sentence. Next, he said, he did some research and then carefully organized his paper. He assured me he would reread his paper in its entirety before printing out a final draft, and he also said he prefers to let a day pass before rereading the paper again and turning it in. Though he rated himself a six, he said that he had improved greatly during the semester and learned a lot from the peer reviews. If that sounds a bit odd or contradictory, it is worth noting that he also had difficulty earn-

ing a passing grade. Thompson is a classic case of someone who can talk the talk but not walk the walk: he knows (or can at least rehearse) the steps of a writing process but he does not actually take the steps; his papers typically lack a thesis, sources, quotations and analysis; language and logic are so inconsistent it is hard to believe that he engages in editing, much less revision. I believe the Flower and Hayes model could help someone like him greatly if he could just experience the steps, not just recite them. More than any other, he was a student who made me want to get students not just to describe but to document the writing process they engaged in.

Jennifer Parson, an 18-year-old who took English A as her prerequisite for English 1-A, described her personal writing process as picking a topic, beginning research, creating a brief outline and rough thesis statement. (Like Thompson, who said he came up with good ideas and then a thesis statement, she was one of several students for whom a thesis statement could seem to come after rather than before deciding what to write and how to organize it.) Once she had an outline, she selected quotations to fill in the blanks of her outline. (She was not the only student who, when interviewed, seemed to see writing as an exercise in organizing what other people said more than what she might say.) In our interview, she told me that math and science are her favorite subjects and she hopes to be a marine biologist, but she understands the importance of learning to write well. She rated herself a five saying she is an average writer, not excellent and not horrible. She struck me as a conscientious worker, steady and determined, for whom a model of the writing process might offer a way of taking ownership of her work, making her writing something she did to communicate, not just to demonstrate organizing skills — not least of all because such ownership would probably make her more careful about language issues and genuine analysis.

It is difficult to make generalizations about all basic writers based purely on the aforementioned students. However, I suspect other teachers have some sense that they have met such students before. If it is not possible to define the typical basic writing student, it is certainly possible to see some students and their behaviors as typical of basic writing students. There are recurring patterns and traits. I can say of my basic writing students that they are by turns insecure and overconfident, rather uninterested in writing and inconsistent in how they apply themselves to composing, naive about and also inattentive to the demands of academia (especially issues of language use, citation, and analysis), and see their writing process as having little room for improvement. It is this last trait that especially interests and concerns me. Though my basic writers show significant differences among themselves, they seem to see the process of writing as almost inconsequen-

tial. Writing well, for them, seems a combination of ability and application. You are either good or not, and if you are not good enough, your one hope is to try harder. But they must suspect, as I do, that mere effort will not solve all their problems, will not move them past performance barriers they have hit before. And so they hold back. Really trying hard, really showing interest, would also prove that the ability just was not there, or so they believe. Acting uninterested or uncommitted leaves this unresolved.

Basic writers' general lack of interest in writing has prompted researchers to observe them in great detail. Sally Barr Reagan (1991) is one such researcher interested in the thoughts and actions of basic writers. Her case study of Javier describes a basic writer with low self-esteem, fear of failure, and resentment. His writing process is slow and arduous. He becomes easily discouraged and puts forth little effort if the paper subject is not personally interesting. Javier shares many issues with my basic writers when writing processes are compared. Vivian Zamel (1990) is another researcher whose case studies described basic writing students similar to the students I taught. She finds her students are overconfident but not overly interested. Zamel's students share similar writing process conflicts with my basic writers, mainly in the areas of free writing or idea generation and revision.

Attending to my students, as well as the students of Reagan and Zamel, I can hear the common themes that crystallize the basic writer's uncertainty and frustration with the process of writing each paper. The way these basic writers perceive themselves and their experiences helps to explain their written and verbal comments during both interviews as well as graded assignments. Though the above case studies should not lead to wide-ranging generalizations about basic writing students, they do suggest the need for further examination of basic writers and their writing processes, not least of all the strategy of getting basic writers to examine their own writing processes critically and consider models of more fully developed processes as means of improving.

Field Study Findings Analysis

Findings from case studies such as those just mentioned are not meant to be universal; after all, they are tied to the experiences of individual students in the context of particular instructional settings. At the same time, however, such studies are illuminating because they reveal the way classroom events impact students and shape their experiences. For precisely that reason, students need to explore their beliefs, expectations, and perspectives, and this exploration needs to be structured. When these things are kept in mind, students and teachers are likely to realize the discrepancies between each others' intentions and goals and come to an advantageous middle ground about what

constructive learning consists in.

Learning about basic writers for me began with my experience of teaching English 1-A at Sierra Community College. My students had trouble writing because they had difficulty connecting with the assigned topic; they thought they had nothing to say; they were unaccustomed to expressing their opinions in formal ways or even thinking their opinions important. Small wonder, then, that they became stressed-out when faced with the challenge of writing a paper. Exhorting them simply to try harder would do little more than increase their anxiety, though they also saw trying harder as their one chance of showing improvement.

The hope, for me and my students, lay not in raising the stakes but unpacking the process. My interviews and their self-descriptions revealed two critical and connected facts: my students are inattentive to and uninformed about the writing process, and yet, despite their inattention to the process they use to write, they are using one. They can describe it if pressed and even see it as a process they can enrich or improve with some assistance. Students learn by doing and then extracting principles from their activity. Inexperienced with analysis and critical thinking as well as writing, they needed to apply these cognitive skills to their own development as writers. We know that students will be better able to learn when faced with their own writing, but they need practice in analyzing, generalizing, and abstracting as applied to their own and each other's writing, to discuss, give, and receive constructive criticism as well as revise their ideas and the ideas of others. A part of this is introducing them to the concept of a writing process as something that is both unique to them, variable with each assignment, and yet explicable in general terms, shared by others, existing in richer as well as more impoverished forms. And I found, probably more than they did, that there is a large step between discussion and implementation, especially for those new to the concept (as I myself once was).

Because having a strong writing process is important for basic writers, the need for some sort of structure is often erroneously filled with formulas for writing, such as the five-paragraph format. However, effective structure is also available through the use of a simple writing process, one that provides much more flexibility and room for growth than any formulaic approach. As I said, I came to the conclusion that integrating such a process into teaching could easily begin with the Flower and Hayes flow chart since the Flower and Hayes model was fairly easy for basic writers to follow yet did emphasize recursiveness, giving basic writers more structure but also more complexity, not just in organizing their essay, but in organizing their whole approach to it.

Implications and Suggestions for Teaching

After analyzing my research, I have come to the conclusion that basic writers do not think in fundamentally different ways than advanced writers do. Nor do they simply lack the skills to write. In a sense, what they lack most of all is the experience of a successful composition, not as a paper, but as a process, a collection of strategies that allows them to produce effective writing, the kind that earns high grades and positive reinforcement. Nothing succeeds like success, in other words, but success of this kind is not easy to foster. Encouraging basic writers to learn the skills and strategies that make for a successful composing process as well as a successful composition, instructors themselves need a collection of skills and strategies. Among them should be the assignment of ungraded journals and/or freewrites, the printing or "publishing" of some of their basic writers' writing, and the use of a grading rubric for the writing they do grade so students know the criteria on which each paper will be scored – criteria that suggest successful writing is based on many factors, and is never about the presence or absence of any one thing

Affirming basic writers' skill-building is quite worthwhile, yet even more important, I'm convinced, is instruction in the writing process itself. Too often little attention is given to teaching the actual process of writing (not the model but the actual process, often a secret process) while much attention is given to viewing (and drawing conclusions from) the product of that largely unknown and unexamined process. Given, as readings, nothing but final products, students are expected to produce such things themselves without knowing how such pieces were drafted. As Murray urges, an educator needs to look at his or her instruction as teaching a process not just a product, and ask how attention to the writing process fits within that, what needs to happen so that students will be able to learn how to write more effectively.

That is a real challenge, especially since basic writers lack a due attention to process, their own as well as others', and models of the writing process generally. Instructors should discuss a model of the writing process with their class in order to give students a schematic sense of how to write, and how successful writers write. Models are not the same as reality, which is always messier and more complex, necessarily inferred or guessed at in most instances. But models can encourage students to realize what fosters effective writing so they can come to see their own writing as deliberate and strategic.

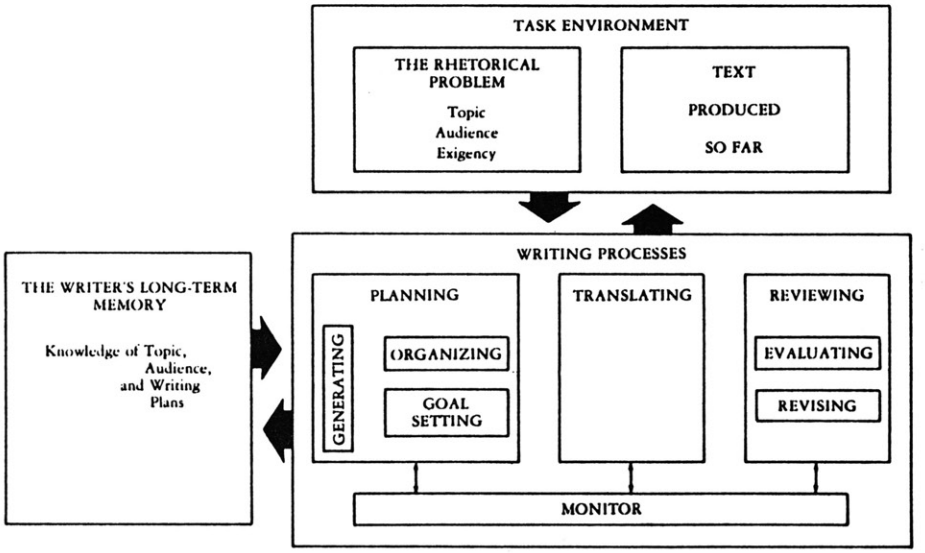
Ultimately, we are speaking not just of the process of writing but

the process of thinking. Basic writers also need to discover what they think about a particular subject before they can begin writing. Finding out what they think can be a difficult task. But it is not an impossible challenge for an individual student nor something the teacher cannot help along. Instructors can assign several types of discovery writing as well as group work to stimulate analytical discussion and encourage students' efforts. Writing, like learning, proceeds from a context and that contributes to the making of meaning.

In the future, I plan to use the skills basic writers already possess and the processes they already use to help students improve their writing process as well as their writing products. A lesson plan that would do this would introduce the Flower and Hayes writing process model early on but would also include class discussion on how the students went about their own writing, and each would write about his or her own writing process. Having the students share their different processes could and should produce an illuminating class discussion. Then I would want to discuss the Flower and Hayes Cognitive Writing Process model in some detail, stressing features, perhaps even expressing reservations, but certainly giving students a copy of the model to review and consider on their own. I would also want to give each student a grading rubric, not just so they know according to what criteria their papers will be scored, but also so they see how these criteria correlate with parts of the process. I would want them to see that writing well is not a blessing or an accident but is also not a matter of following rules or formulas. It is the consequence of both structure and flexibility, instructor's guidance and student's self-responsibility, awareness of models and self-awareness. Modeling the writing process while asking my students to examine (and revise) their own processes allows me this possibility: to guide but not prescribe, to build on what they bring without telling them that the "more" they need to supply is not just more effort.

Appendix A

Flower and Hayes' Cognitive Writing Process Model



Appendix B

Writing Process

1. Discuss <u>your</u> writing process (the who, what, where, when, why, and how of how you write) and why you think you write the way you do (is it helpful, a routine you always follow, a suggestion your dad made?). Incorporate a plan for how you will write essay #5 (explain how you plan to go about writing essay #5).

2. A writing process includes the steps followed to complete a writing assignment. Do you think the act of using a recursive step-by-step writing process would help you to complete a typical paper, why or why not?

Appendix C

Essay #5 Prompt

Choose one and write a well-planned essay in which you:

Discuss nature vs. nurture and how at least two of the authors (Devor, Nelson, Allen, and/or Tocqueville) would respond to gender heredity vs. environmentally dictated gender roles. Then discuss what you think and why.

Discuss whether or not gender roles have changed significantly in the last 50 years. ("Pleasantville" might be a good source!)

Appendix D

Self Evaluation

1. Rate how good of a writer you are on a scale from one to ten, with ten being the best.

2. Give a one or two sentence explanation of why you deserve this rating.

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Trudy Smoke

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF BASIC WRITING?

Writing this at the end of my seventh full "volume year" and for what will be the last issue of *JBW* I edit, I feel as if I am in a different world from the one in 1994 when I went for several interviews to be chosen as co-editor of the journal. Then I was asked by each new interviewer, "What is the future of basic writing?" At that time, I knew of the political turmoil that had created the field, but I had no idea that in the seven years that I would co-edit *JBW*, first with Karen Greenberg and then with George Otte, the entire field would be transformed—in fact, the entire world would be transformed and basic writing would only be one small part of that transformation. Perhaps it is because I am in New York City and have faced the September 11th tragedy head on with students, colleagues, friends, and family, but I feel that I am writing from a totally new perspective, almost with new eyes. What once mattered so much has taken on even greater meaning: the mission of open admissions to extend access to higher education to a broader population in a world of terrorism, war, misunderstanding, and mistrust becomes even more critical. For me and many of my colleagues, during the days that followed September 11th, the college classroom presented a forum for frightened, overwhelmed students and teachers to talk and write about what had happened, what it meant, and how we might or should respond as individuals, as members of a society, and as a country as a whole. The classroom became a site of anger, fear, and ultimately healing, if not always of understanding in a world turned upside down.

The sense of global upheaval has been exacerbated by local changes, above all institutional changes within CUNY that mean open admissions as it was once envisioned is gone. How do I reconcile my belief in the power of education with the realization that the basic writing students with whom I worked for so many years are no longer part of the senior college environment in the CUNY system, the system in which I have spent most of my professional life? This is a difficult task. Preparing to step down from my editing position at *JBW*, I have decided to look at the journal itself to see if it can provide some answers and some hope for me. I thought that I would review the past seven years for you as well, the readers I have always respected and have gotten to know over the years.

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When Karen and I first took over the editorship of *JBW*, we entered with some trepidation and enormous awe of the editors who had come before us. Most recently it had been Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller, and before them Lynn Troyka, Sarah D'Eloia, and Mina Shaughnessy herself. We knew the journal was the major voice for a field of teaching, learning, and scholarship that had only recently gained acceptance in the academic world. We entered into our responsibility with great pride. Our first issue included some of the best known voices in our field at that time: Lynn Z. Bloom, Alan C. Purves, Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau and Gordon Brossell, Joseph Harris, Lee Odell, and J. Milton Clark and Carol Peterson Haviland. The essays discussed the importance of the naming of the journal, tried to define the students we teach, and attempted to establish what the place of basic writing was and should be. In that issue, in what has become a seminal essay, Harris asked a question on which I have been reflecting ever since: "But what if students were viewed ... as dramatizing a problem that all of us face—that of finding a place to speak within a discourse that does not seem to ignore or leave behind the person you are outside of it? If this is so, then the job of a student writer [perhaps also of writing teacher?] is not to leave one discourse in order to enter another, but to take things that are usually kept apart and bring them together, to negotiate the gaps and conflicts between several competing discourses" (31). Although Harris's call to create a space to make conflicts visible has its own power, to me the task of bringing together things that are usually kept apart and negotiating the gaps and conflicts between them seems especially apt and urgent these days.

The third and what regretfully turned out to be last issue that Karen and I edited together dealt primarily with evaluation and assessment, issues that continue to be crucial ones for placement, retention, and mainstreaming of students. In the fall 1996 issue, George Otte and I started to co-edit the journal. Along with his vast knowledge of the field, George brought his energy and vision to begin the transformation of *JBW* into the more theoretical and political journal that it is today. After paying homage to our extraordinary founder with the excerpt from Jane Maher's biography, *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work*, our first issue together featured essays on identity and politics in basic writing. We both participated in the CBW-sponsored workshop on basic writing at the 1997 CCCC in Phoenix entitled "Race, Class, and Culture in the Basic Writing Classroom" and were honored to be able to publish the essays that emerged from that remarkable day. In that Special Issue of the journal, along with Jeanne Gunner (now editor of *College English*) and Gerri McNenny, Gary Tate, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason, and Victor Villanueva, Jr. among others, we published Ira Shor's essay, "Our

Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality," in which Shor wrote about the Twin Towers of tracking and testing, "towers [which] rose from an American foundation of low-spending and hostile-management directed to non-elite students" (97). Shor accused basic writing of undergirding an undemocratic and elitist system as "a containment track below freshman comp, a gate below the gate" (94). That issue also contained the first cumulative index for *JBW* for the full first 15 volumes from 1975 to 1996.

In the next issue, Karen Greenberg and Terence Collins responded to Shor, reminding him that without basic writing, thousands of students would not have been admitted to colleges. Moreover, Collins with some prescience warned that we must "be careful in how we mount educational critique from the left, that in impolitic critique of Basic Writing, we risk crawling into bed with the very elements of right wing elitism which access programs and many Basic Writing programs were founded to counteract" (99).

I remember feeling torn by the powerful discussion that had ensued among these three great thinkers in our field. Strangely, though, I was left thinking, but what about the students? What do they think? How are they affected by this important debate? And then fortuitously, Marilyn Sternglass's remarkable study, *Time to Know Them: A Longitudinal Study of Writing and Learning at the College Level* was published and Sternglass was the keynote speaker at the 1998 CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS) Conference. We immediately approached her to see if she would be willing to revise her keynote speech for publication in the Spring 1999 issue of the journal. She agreed and along with this inspiring essay, we published in the same issue, for the first time in the journal's history, a review of this book (by Daniela Liese). In Sternglass's essay, she tells us about Joan, a student who had entered City College as a basic writer with a visual disability, family problems, and little confidence in herself. We are told that "Joan wrote her papers at a nightstand in her mother's room where the lighting was bad, using a blue ball-point pen.... She used paper with big lines, probably because of her vision problems" (14). We get to know and admire Joan and are delighted to read that after six years Joan graduated and found a job as a full-time counselor in a methadone clinic where she was earning over $25,000 along with benefits. Sternglass brought this student alive and reinforced the life-transforming effect of higher education. After acknowledging the threat that basic writing and open admissions itself were facing, Sternglass asserted that the first year of college "should provide the opportunity for those students who have been inadequately prepared for the college experience to begin to acquire the skills and knowledge they need that will grow as they continue their studies . . . . Time is on the stu-

dents' side but they need to be given the requisite time" (20). Yet we suspected this was the very thing that they would soon be denied. And many of us feared that other students much like Joan would soon be denied admission to senior colleges.

Our next several issues examine what, in the Fall 1998 issue, Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner termed "'The Dilemma that Still Counts': Basic Writing at a Political Crossroads." In that issue, Jeanne Gunner, and Laura Gray-Rosendale as well as Harrington and Adler-Kassner critiqued what has become the iconic discourse of Mina Shaughnessy – the errors and expectations we associate as defining points for our basic writers. We ended that issue by republishing Shaughnessy's seminal essay, "The Miserable Truth," her 1975 commentary on "the growing national indifference to open admissions" (107). That Fall 1998 issue marked the 20th anniversary of Shaughnessy's death, yet the extent to which conditions critiqued in her past writings (and in this piece in particular) mirrored our present seemed uncanny and unsettling.

Extraordinarily, in light of the political moves to eliminate basic writing and therefore basic writers themselves, we continued to receive submissions of essays telling us about basic writing programs that were not just surviving but innovating, programs that introduced technology (Susan Stan and Terence Collins, Spring 1998; Jeffrey T. Grabill, Fall 1998; Sibylle Gruber, Spring 1999; Laurie Grobman, Spring 1999; Judith Mara Kish, Fall 2000; Patricia J. McAlexander, Fall 2000), moved toward more dialogic/collaborative approaches (Pamela Gay, Spring 1998; Laurie Grobman, Fall 1999), brought together high schools and colleges (Mary Kary Crouch and Gerri McNenny, Fall 2000), taught basic writing through literature and through reading (Rosemary Winslow and Monica Mische, Fall 1996; Mary Hurley Moran, Fall 1997; Linda Von Bergen, Spring 2001), and looked at ESL basic writers as they moved through their college courses (Vivian Zamel, Fall 2000).

We published essays that examined basic writing through the perspectives of class (Martha Marina, Fall 1997; Candace Spigelman, Spring 1998), race and ethnicity (Eleanor Agnew and Margaret McLaughlin, Spring 1999; Nathaniel Norment, Jr, Fall 1997; Steve Lamos, Fall 2000, Raul Ybarra, Spring 2001), and gender (Beth Counihan, Spring 1999; Ann Tabachnikov, Spring 2001; Wendy Ryden, Spring 2001). We looked at basic writing from the perspective of those teaching the deaf (Ellen Biser, Linda Rubel, & Rose Marie Toscano, Spring 1998). And all of this rich analysis is now acquiring a dimension of meta-analysis: we have begun to historicize our field (Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner, Fall 1998; Laura Gray-Rosendale, Fall 1998, Fall 1999). These are but a few of the remarkable essays we had had the privilege to publish over the past five years.

George and I had decided that the Spring 2000 issue of *JBW* would have to be a very special one to commemorate the new millennium and the first twenty-five years of our journal. We invited ten of the most important scholars in our field to comment on basic writing at this crucial moment. Not knowing how to order these extraordinary voices, we decided to present them in alphabetical order and so we have: Patricia Bizzell, Terence Collins and Melissa Blum, Keith Gilyard, William DeGenaro and Edward M. White, Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, Susan Miller, Deborah Mutnick, Judith Rodby and Tom Fox, Ira Shor, and Lynn Quitman Troyka. Arbitrarily or not, then, it is Troyka, former editor of *JBW* herself, who has the last word in that issue, and chooses to throw her spotlight on the teachers: "Usually unpublished (who has the time given their teaching loads of four or even five BW and freshman English-classes a semester?), they are ones who, student by student, make life-altering positive differences in the lives of students" (120).

I am reminded of a story about one of those dedicated basic writing teachers. This teacher, Hannah Zilbergeld Gordon, who has taught at Hunter College, Queensborough Community College, and Trouro College (sometimes all in one semester), ran into a former student in a library. The student had a young toddler with her and when Hannah asked the child's name, the former student said, "Hannah. I named her after you—you changed my life." This is a part of what teaching basic writing is about.

At the beginning of the essay, I referred to Joseph Harris's work, and it is probably fitting that I end this essay by circling round to Harris once again. It was what he wrote in that first issue, which I had the privilege to co-edit, that, in fact, inspired this essay: Harris's idea that students dramatize a problem we all face "finding a place to speak within a discourse that does not seem to ignore or leave behind the person you are outside of it." It may be purely serendipitous that in this issue, the last I will co-edit, Harris appears again and that once again what he writes affects me profoundly. This time Harris writes, "... my experience has been that for people to work through their intellectual disagreements in a serious and sustained way, they need to feel at ease with one another—not as members of some abstract, organic, disciplinary community, but simply as interlocutors who have agreed to hear each other out at this time and in this place" (5). He goes on to insist that "our job is not to initiate students into a discrete world we think of ourselves as already inhabiting ... but rather to help them find ways to use texts, practices, and ideas we have to offer in discussing issues that matter to them." And so it is with *JBW*: we offer a forum for ideas and discussion of issues that matter to us and to the future of higher education, and in this journal "we have agreed to hear each other out at this time and in this place." Through our work, we

have committed ourselves to our profession and to our students. I have learned much from the seven years that I have spent as a co-editor with the journal. I thank Karen Greenberg and George Otte for the wonderful experience of working with them. I leave the journal still in George's very able hands and am delighted that he will be co-editing the next issue with Bonne August, a fine scholar and dedicated teacher in our field.

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