EDITORS' COLUMN

Modulation—the dynamic process through which theory shapes practice and practice refines theory—is a constant preoccupation in composition at every level from the global to the individual classroom. In *The Testing Trap: How State Writing Assessments Control Learning* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2002), George Hillocks carefully situates his critical study in the theories of writing implicit in these mandated assessments. Hillocks states: "The research and theory suggest that when teachers adopt a rhetorical stance, they also commit to a theory of knowledge and to the theory of teaching implied in its assumption." (21). Hillocks is explicitly following James Berlin, who in "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories" (*College English* 44: 765-77), writes: "The test of one's competence as a composition instructor . . . resides in being able to recognize and justify the version of the process being taught, complete with all its significance to the student."

Writing teachers rarely work in isolation; even in the absence of legislative mandates, we usually work in the context of an official "version of the process." The formal statements that writing programs compose and publish about themselves, therefore, are potentially powerful documents. This is true when the audience is external, but perhaps even more important when it is internal—when faculty define what is to be learned and how and why, to their students and to themselves. The cluster of articles that opens this issue, on Guidelines and Goals for Basic Writing programs, continues a discussion begun as a panel at the CCCC in Chicago in March of 2002. Sallyanne Fitgerald, Tom Reynolds and Patti Fillipi, and Karen Uehling describe the process of constructing, or reconstructing, such documents at their respective institutions—a California community college, an alternative college program of a mid-western state university, and a six-year western state university. In each piece the authors situate their work in multiple contexts—the mission statement governing their institution, the characteristics of the student population, and the theory influencing their pedagogy. The authors have appended samples of their documents.

The present moment seems to be a particularly critical time for this discussion about constructing collective versions of the process of teaching writing. The theory informing basic writing programs, although widely shared, is surely not uncontested. At the same time, documents elucidating goals and basic assumptions need to address site specific student populations and institutional characteristics and conditions. Many institutions are seeing changes in their traditional student populations, while something of a generation shift is occurring among the faculty. The three examples printed here reflect some

DOI: 10.37514/JBW-J.2003.22.1.01

of those issues and also reflect varying political stances.

The perspective narrows somewhat in two articles on "mechanics," specifically grammar and error. These are two of the particulars most problematic in attempts to explain composition theory to external audiences; however, they account for substantial disagreement within the profession, as well. In "A Developmental Perspective on the Relationship between Grammar and Text," James Kenkel and Robert Yates propose an approach to addressing specific constructions in student writing not as simple surface errors but as "innovative and purposeful attempts" by student writers to meet readers' needs for topic management, reference, or information-sequencing. The authors argue for assignments that generate these needs by requiring students to shift topics or focus, and they advocate explicit comparisons between the students' strategies and those used by mature writers.

Loretta S. Gray and Paula Heuser in "Nonacademic Professionals' Perception of Usage Errors" describe a research project that studies whether these perceptions have changed since Maxine Hairston's well-known 1981 study. Gray and Heuser find their readers more tolerant than Hairston's; nevertheless, as in Hairston's study, the errors most troubling to nonacademic readers, and therefore most stigmatizing, were those reflecting features of dialect. Now, as then, the implications remain troublesome: to what extent is it necessary or desirable for students to be able to produce "Edited American English," and if it is deemed necessary or desirable, how is this learning best accomplished?

In the final article in this issue, "Rethinking the Basic Writing Frontier: Native American Students' Challenge to Our Histories," Laura Gray-Rosendale, Loyola K. Bird, and Judith F. Bullock argue on behalf of a particular group of basic writing students. In addition to a vivid, multi-faceted account of what native American students bring to basic writing and to the university and how they respond to what they find there, the authors issue a powerful critique of the standard narratives—the "authorized versions"—of basic writing as a field.

Finally, a flurry of hails and farewells is in order. Rebecca Mlynarczyk joins *JBW* as co-editor with this issue. Having taught basic and ESL writing at the City University of New York since 1974, Rebecca is strongly committed to developmental education as a way of providing opportunities to students whose previous education has not prepared them to succeed in college. Professor of English at Kingsborough Community College, she not only teaches basic reading and writing but also works as a program administrator in these fields. Her research interests include the journal writing of ESL students, teacher research, teachers' professional development, and learning community programs.

With this issue, too, the Editorial Board reflects a number of out-

standing additions, as well as the retirement of some very active members. We express deep gratitude to those who are retiring, whose commitment to the field is equaled only by their thoughtful and generous responses to authors. We welcome the new members with a sense of excitement.

Several new members of the Board bring expertise in English as a Second Language. ESL and BW often overlap or exist in complementary relationships. *JBW* has long acknowledged this fact in its Call for Articles, which invites submissions that address ESL perspectives on basic writing. As we announced in a prior issue, *College ESL*, in a sense a "sister" journal (like *JBW* emanating from and supported by the City University of New York), is about to publish its final issue. *JBW* will provide a venue for some of the work that might have seen print there. We see this as a logical extension rather than a change in emphasis for *JBW.* As Gray-Rosendale, Bird, and Bullock remind us, the modulations of basic writing must continue. *JBW*, which has been the site of so much of the theory and history of the field, will modulate with it.

-- Bonne August *and* **Rebecca Mynarczyk**