EDITORS' COLUMN

Computers have transformed the way we write and the way we teach writing. At first glance, it would seem that computers can solve many of the problems our students face. Word processing programs greatly facilitate drafting and revising and help students to correct many of their grammar and spelling errors. Online courses provide the time and space for busy students to join a community of writers whenever and wherever they log on. Course management software offers a range of convenient features: students can access course syllabi and assignments, click on links to read relevant sources, "voice" their opinons on the class discussion board, and submit their essays at any time of day or night through an electronic drop box. But while we welcome the convenience that computers offer to us and our students, we are also conscious of the possible inequities that come along with them. "The digital divide" is a phrase that resonates especially strongly for teachers of "basic" writing.

The first three articles in this issue remind us that using computers to teach basic or second-langauge writing leads to questions and complexities as well as opportunities. The authors of these articles, each based on classroom research, emphasize the need to consider student differences and institutional contexts in deciding how to use these powerful tools to serve our students most effectively.

In "Issues of Attitude and Access: A Case Study of Basic Writers in a Computer Classroom," Catherine Matthews Pavia argues that providing "access" is much more complex than simply providing machines. In a study conducted in her own basic writing class at a large public university, Pavia set out to learn more about the factors that could complicate basic writers' interactions with technology and inhibit their ability to write with computers. For the two writers discussed in this article, who lacked typing skills and did not have up-to-date computers at home, being in a class where all writing was done on computers placed them at a disadvantage when compared to their more computer-savvy peers. The new understandings gained from this classroom research have caused the author to adapt her pedagogy in ways that acknowledge students' differing familiarity with and reactions to computer technology.

The situation described in the next article, "'Because We Are Shy and Fear Mistaking': Computer Mediated Communication with EFL Writers," could hardly be more different. In this study, conducted in a Japanese university specializing in Computer Science and Computer Engineering, all the students

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are comfortable with computers but uncomfortable with English, and especially with their American professor's workshop approach to teaching writing. Martha Clark Cummings describes how she transformed her EFL (English as a Foreign Langauge) writing course into an online writing workshop and, in the process, helped her students to experience English as a language to use for genuine communication rather than just a required subject on which to be tested.

Both the positive and negative aspects of using computers to teach writing are highlighted in "The Best of Both Worlds: Teaching Basic Writers in Class and Online," which describes a context that is quite different from the previous two. Linda Stine conducted her research in a pre-master's degree program serving mature adults who are comfortable in the workplace—all students must be employed full time in a human service agency to qualify for admission to the program. These same students, however, may not be so comfortable in a course conducted entirely online. In this context, a "hybrid" program that meets in a regular classroom with the instructor one week and online in alternate weeks seems to provide the best solution for the population being served. While these adult basic writers benefit from the convenience of an online course, they also derive important advantages from the personal contact with their teacher and classmates in the face-to-face sessions.

In the final two articles, the concern shifts from *how* we ask students to write—the technology of writing—to *what* we ask them to write about—the content of that writing. Both essays powerfully remind us of what can be gained when students are writing about subjects that are deeply meaningful to them.

In "Building Academic Literacy from Student Strength: An Interdisciplinary Life History Project," Robin Murie, Molly Rojas Collins, and Daniel F. Detzner describe a pilot project in which second-language students researched and wrote a lengthy paper based on interviews they had conducted with an elder from the local community. This semester-long, interdisciplinary project was highly motivating for students and helped them move toward successful academic writing. The authors argue convincingly that when instructors design assignments that build from student interests and strengths, "students can be brought into the real work of the academy—writing to record and make meaning of the information and the stories that are important in our lives."

In the final article, "Toward a Writing and Healing Approach in the Basic Writing Classroom: One Professor's Personal Odyssey," Molly Hurley Moran explains how her own experience of writing about a personal tragedy, the

murder of her sister, gradually led to an evolution in her teaching of basic writing. In this article, she reviews the literature on writing and healing as well as the ongoing debate about personal vs. academic writing and describes how she redesigned her basic writing course to include more emphasis on "private writing." This private writing then became a resource from which students were free to develop their "academic essays." Preliminary results based on the first semester using the new approach suggest that students wrote with greater enthusiasm, were more eager to publish their writing in the class electronic magazine, and gained greater control and a more authentic voice.

With this issue, we would like to acknowledge the contributions of our Editorial Review Board, a group of teachers and scholars who make time in their busy schedules to read and review manuscripts submitted to the *Journal of Basic Writing*. The vast majority of articles that eventually reach the pages of this journal undergo a process of revision and development that is guided by the thoughtful and often extensive feedback provided by the reviewers. The work done by our Editorial Review Board is truly a form of professional service and mentorship. As editors, we offer our heartfelt thanks to the distinguished professors who serve on our board.

In recent months, we have been pleased by the increasing quantity and quality of submissions to the journal, which has led to the need for additional reviewers. With this issue, we welcome seven new members to the *JBW* Editorial Board: Hannah Ashley of West Chester University in Pennsylvania; Susan Naomi Bernstein of the University of Cincinnati; Chitralekha Duttagupta of Arizona State University; Susanmarie Harrington of Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis; Paul Kei Matsuda of the University of New Hampshire; Geraldine McNenny of Chapman University in California; and Thomas Peele of Boise State University.

—**Rebecca Mlynarczyk** *and* **Bonne August**