The Best of BothWorlds:
Teaching Basic Writers
in Class and Online

Linda Stine

ABSTRACT*: Basic writing students and online learning are not necessarily an ideal match. In hopes of stimulating more conversation and research on how technology can best advance the basic writing curriculum, this article first classifies the problems students and faculty encounter when a basic writing class moves online and discusses the pedagogical questions these problems raise. It then presents ten categories of arguments for making the move despite the problems involved. The article concludes with a description of how and why a hybrid model, one in which students meet with their instructor in a classroom on campus every other week and work online during the off weeks, provides one means of minimizing potential problems while maximizing learning opportunities for basic writers.*

Computers and Basic Writers: The Issue

In a 1994 ERIC Clearinghouse summary on computer-assisted writing instruction, Marjorie Simic noted, "Writing researchers have long advised that the key to fluent writing is to write as much as possible. The key to exact writing is to revise repeatedly" ("Revising," par. 1). Basic writers, so much in need of increased fluency and exactness, have from the onset seemed ideal candidates for a writing course featuring word processing, precisely because of the computer's promise in these two areas. It is now the rare developmental course that does not, at least minimally, incorporate computer use into its curriculum. In a remarkably short time, the computer has evolved from being a tool with potential to improve student writing to being the tool with which people write, and if Peter Elbow is correct that "the best test of a writing course is whether it makes students more likely to use writing in their lives" (136), then most writing teachers today would

Linda Stine *is a professor in the Master of Human Services Program at Lincoln University (PA), where she has taught computer-mediated writing courses for adult students since 1986. For the past two years, she has been using Web-CT to teach a semi-online basic writing class. She has presented papers on technology and writing instruction at CCCC and NCTE, and has published several articles on this topic. Her most recent publication is* Classroom Resources for Instructors Using Foundations First, *published by Bedford/St. Martin's.*

have to agree that it is hard to justify a basic writing course that does not explore and exploit the advantages of word processing.

Agreement is harder to find, however, on the question of whether *online* instruction is equally justifiable for basic writers. The following article describes a hybrid option, in which students meet on campus every other week and work online during the off weeks, as one possible means of minimizing problems encountered in fully online writing classes while still allowing students to gain access to learning experiences unique to online instruction. This particular hybrid is, to be sure, only one of many possible variations. Richard Straub, considering how faculty can best comment on student papers, once acknowledged that "different teachers, in different settings, with different students, different kinds of writing, different course goals, and alas! with different time constraints may do different things with their comments, and do them well" (2). The same applies to teaching with technology: one size does not fit all. Nevertheless, the more options we consider, the more likely we are to find the match that best fits our students' needs, our institutional resources, and our own individual teaching strengths. And, if we are lucky, that match may turn out to involve neither expensive equipment nor extensive technology skills on the part of teachers and students. In "From Pencils to Pixels," Denis Baron reminds us, "Researchers tend to look at the cutting edge when they examine how technology affects literacy. But technology has a trailing edge. . ." (32). With so many overworked and under-supported basic writing teachers feeling fortunate if they can grab hold of even the trailing edge of technology, it is worth noting that a hybrid course like the one described below can double the number of students who can use a school's scarce computer laboratories and, at the same time, halve these students' commuting costs.

Basic Writers Online: The Problems

A number of arguments can be made to explain why developmental students and online learning might not, in general, make a good match. One group of arguments raises societal issues. There is, for instance, the obvious problem of accessibility. As Charles Moran has stated, "The issue of access is easily and quickly framed: in America wealth is unequally distributed; money buys technology; therefore technology is inequitably distributed" (207). A 2000 report from the United States Commerce Department on Americans' access to technology tools, *Falling through the*

Net: Toward Digital Inclusion, concludes that while people of all ethnic groups and income and educational levels are making gains, noticeable divides still exist between those with different levels of income and education, different racial and ethnic groups, old and young, single and dual-parent families, and those with and without disabilities. Basic writing students, typically older, poorer, less apt to come from stable, highly educated families, and more apt to have learning disabilities, are still less likely than the average student to have easy access to the kind of technology that distance learning requires, both in and out of the classroom. Are we justified in requiring basic writing students to work online, given the hardships that may cause for some?

Also troubling is the homogeneous culture into which our disparate students are asked to fit. As Richard and Cynthia Selfe have warned, "Students who want to use computers are continually confronted with . . . narratives which foreground a value on middle-class, corporate culture: capitalism and the commodification of information; Standard English; and rationalistic ways of representing knowledge" (494). They encourage teachers to recognize, and help their students understand, that the computer interface is "an interested and partial map of our culture and . . . a linguistic contact zone that reveals power differentials" (495). How should our pedagogy reflect this concern? Is it enough just to remind students of the limitations of grammar and spell checkers or do what we can to make sure that the physical layout of our classrooms does not reinforce a hierarchical structure? Or should we, who teach those students most likely to be marginalized, also make technology itself—its potential for liberation as well as oppression—the subject of more discussions and essays? How actively should we be working in our basic writing courses to raise student consciousness about the power of symbols and the politics of the technological contact zone?

A third set of worries for teachers of basic writers is related to technological issues. Distance education requires students to learn writing while often at the same time learning the relatively advanced computer skills required to produce writing online (for a discussion of this problem, see "Issues of Attitude and Access: A Case Study of Basic Writers in a Computer Classroom" by Catherine Matthews Pavia in this issue). Most of the adult students I encounter know how to use their computer for a few clearly defined tasks but have not developed a broad range of technology skills. Stuart Selber argues in a recent *CCC* article that students must be

able to *control* a computer—that is, possess what he calls functional literacy, not just computer literacy—in order to work with it effectively (470-503). If students lack this type of functional literacy, how much does it interfere with an acquisition of writing proficiency? A related problem, which Lauren Yena and Zach Waggoner term "muting," occurs as a result of either an *actual* lack of technological literacy on the student's part or the anxiety that he or she experiences about a *perceived* lack of computer expertise ("Student Muting"). Will efforts to offset this problem double the responsibilities of the teacher, who must provide directions not only for what students are expected to say but also for how to navigate through the technology comfortably enough so that they are able to say it? Another technology-related problem, which applies whether students are writing online or off, is the tendency for developmental writers to put too much faith in the computer's authority. Might an online class tempt students even more to obey without question the dictates of those red and green "squiggly lines" produced by the computer's spelling or grammar checker (Whithaus) or to accept the largesse of their browser's search engines blindly, without the type of useful reflection that leads to linguistic and cognitive growth?

Another set of questions focuses on pedagogical issues. Chris Anson writes of "our basic beliefs about the nature of classroom instruction, in all its communal richness and face-to-face complexity" (263). Does the Internet—though undoubtedly rich and undoubtedly complex—provide such an atmosphere? And what might be the effect of the reduced cues environment in which distance learning functions? Haythornthwaite, Kazmer, Robins, and Shoemaker have characterized this environment as "text without voice, voice without body language, class attendance without seating arrangements." They point out that the very same environment that reduces the fear of *negative* feedback—when writers type something silly or inappropriate online, they cannot see the readers rolling their eyes, so they feel free to keep typing—also reduces *positive* feedback. In such a setting, individuals do not know if they are saying the "right" thing. How much might this add to the writing anxiety basic writing students struggle with in the best of situations?

Additional pedagogical issues of concern grow out of changes that the Internet and widespread computer use are bringing about in composing and reading processes. Leslie C. Perelman, director of the writing-across-the-curriculum program at MIT, describes the difference in the way people com-

pose today by explaining that writers normally think out the entire sentence before they start writing it on paper; otherwise, things get too messy because everything is crossed out. "But on a computer," Perelman explains, "people just start a sentence and then go back and move things around. The computer screen is elastic and therefore the composing process has become very elastic" (qtd. in Leibowitz, A67-68). While such elasticity could prove liberating for basic writers, could it not just as easily reinforce bad habits for students who often lack a sense of the shape or boundary of a sentence or are not sure where they are going with an idea when they start?

A related question can be asked about online reading. According to James Sosnoski (161-78) good hyper-readers possess the following "positive" skills:

- Filtering (selecting out only details of the text that they want to read)
- Skimming (reading less text)
- Pecking (not reading in linear sequence)
- Imposing (constructing meaning by one's self more than from the intent of author)
- Filming (paying more attention to graphical than verbal elements to get meaning)
- Trespassing (plagiarizing code, cutting and pasting and reassembling)
- De-authorization (following links, losing sight of the author)
- Fragmenting (preferring fragmented texts because such texts are easier to reassemble)

Basic writing teachers, who struggle continually with their students' tendency to read selectively and thus miss main arguments, read only parts of a text and not get the underlying meaning, read with a limited range of internalized schema that would help them gather meaning, find only those meanings they want rather than ones that the author presented, and misunderstand the boundary between paraphrasing and plagiarizing, might well question whether requiring basic readers to do much or all of their reading online could inadvertently reinforce poor print reading habits. The hypertext reading "skills" Sosnoski applauds seem remarkably like many reading weaknesses we try to help our students overcome. Similar misgivings emerge because of differences between the writing

conventions appropriate to e-mail, chats, and online discussion postings and those conventions that teachers encourage in the classroom. The different rhetorical situations call for different styles; the writing displayed in a chatroom would not be acceptable in an academic writing assignment. Can we be sure that any increased fluency and confidence students gain by participating in a variety of online writing tasks will prevail over the "bad" habits such online writing might foster?

Yet another set of reasons that developmental writers sometimes fare poorly in online courses involves student-related issues. Online courses require self-direction, but basic writers, while often highly motivated, frequently have not developed the structured study habits and time management essential to success in distance education. When family, work, and other personal problems interfere, students can easily—and invisibly—fade away. Another worry is the possibility of overloading, with time spent on developing necessary technology skills getting in the way of a focus on writing skills. K. Patricia Cross has described what she calls the Chain of Response model of learning. One tenet of this model is that higher order needs for achievement and self-actualization cannot be realized until lower order needs for security and safety are met. If students do not feel safe online, secure in their technical abilities, will they be able to move on to the next writing challenge? An additional student-related problem arises because distance learning, unlike the face-to-face classroom, requires a basic writer to function in what is predominantly a text-based environment, even allowing for the multimedia options that the Internet enables. Will that demand play to the weakness rather than the strength of many developmental students? Furthermore, as Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, and Tinker warn, "Participants in net courses, even those who don't consider themselves new to the digital world, seem to lose their usual set of problem-solving strategies in the new environment. . . . [E]ven when instructions are provided, some participants still need help interpreting the directions to the discussion area or a particular thread" (52). No matter how many hours teachers spend creating detailed step-by-step directions—in words and pictures—to show students how to log on and respond to an online discussion list from home or where to post an essay draft for online review, some students will still call in a panic because the directions "aren't working" and they cannot complete their assignment.

Finally, having to anticipate all the potential problems described above and address those that may materialize later adds to the demands placed on

faculty members who must find the time to create, maintain, and teach an online class. In one of the modules of Teaching Composition, a faculty listserv run by McGraw-Hill, J. Paul Johnson concludes that online writing courses work "only for faculty with expertise and experience." How do we gain this needed expertise and experience when faculty time and institutional budgets are so limited? Teaching online requires more up-front planning, more detailed course design, and often as many, if not more, contact hours with students than traditional classroom-based courses require. Furthermore, teachers have to keep up with the pace of technological change. In a recent *Computers and Composition Online* article, Evan Davis and Sarah Hardy likened faculty using technology to "travelers on sightseeing boats, hugging the coast while priding [themselves] for venturing into the ocean." Writing teachers in general, basic writing teachers in particular, rarely have the time and institutional support to explore the depths of the ocean of technology. Thus, the result Kristine Blair and Elizabeth Monske note: "In the rush to meet institutional pressures and curricular demands to create effective distance learning environments, as teachers we may be the ones who benefit *least* within these new virtual communities" (449).

Basic writing instructors must, at the least, carefully consider how they will address problematic issues accompanying online instruction, both in their pedagogy and with their students, before jumping on the technology bandwagon.

Basic Writers Online: The Potential

All these legitimate cautions and concerns notwithstanding, however, many features of online learning still seem made to order for basic writing students. Advantages of Web-enhanced courses fall into ten general categories. First comes what I think of as the "Can You Hear Me Now?" argument. Unlike class discussions, in which timid voices may go unheard, online learning—at least when using asynchronous features such as discussion lists—greatly extends possible reflection time: it lets students participate at their rate of speed and skill, think through a question, and polish up a response as long as needed before posting it.

Then there is the "Ken Macrorie" argument. In T*wenty Teachers*, Macrorie's book profiling the kind of teachers who enable students to learn, a basic assumption is that students learn by doing something worth doing. Rightly or wrongly, the Internet is considered "worth doing." Even something as mundane as practicing subject/verb agreement—should you

want your students to do that—gains authority simply by being on the Web. Paradoxically, writing done virtually seems more "real."

A third consideration is expressed in the "Only Game in Town" argument. The vast majority of adult basic writers have no option other than online learning if they want to carve a few precious hours out of their busy week to go to school. Many single parents with jobs and families simply cannot get away to attend class, even when classes meet on evenings and weekends. They are also unlikely to be able to spend extended periods of time conducting library research or meeting face to face with other students for group projects, so even if they are able to make it to campus, their participation and, thus, their learning opportunities, are limited.

Related to this issue is the "Time Management" argument. When teaching online, faculty can provide their overworked adult students with a wealth of resources just a mouse click away rather than requiring a long ride to a library or a campus. Using software like *CommonSpace* or Bedford St. Martin's *Comment*, for instance, teachers can link a problematic phrase in a student draft to a rule and examples in an embedded handbook or enable online peer review. They can provide a list of useful URLs through which students can access the riches of all the OWLs (Online Writing Labs) on the Web, or download helpful tools like *ReadPlease*, a simple and free voice recognition program that helps with proofreading by reading students' essays back to them.

A fifth set of reasons focuses on the "Academic Skill-Building" argument. Davis and Hardy, describing their experience teaching with Blackboard course management software, suggest that such software is useful because "students need the skills that it foregrounds: organizing and tracking documents, participating in a community discussion, sharing work with peers, claiming a voice through writing." Basic writers, it can reasonably be argued, need precisely these skills and thus should be exposed, if at all possible, to a learning environment that fosters them.

Less concrete but no less important is the "Virginia Woolf" argument. Paul Puccio, pointing out that "the setting in which we meet with our students is a factor in the composition of student-teacher relationships," compares his feelings about his computer classroom at the University of Massachusetts with Virginia Woolf's desire for a room of her own. His thesis is that teaching writing in a room set up to teach writing, with all the modern amenities, has a positive effect on his students' intellectual work as well as on their sense of community. "Schools," claims Puccio, quoting

nineteenth-century educator F. W. Sanderson, "should be miniature copies of the world we should love to have." I would argue for extending this analogy to the virtual classroom and making even disadvantaged students welcomed guests online, with full run of the house.

Once students have a room of their own, of course, they tend to invite company over. That leads to the "Howard Dean" argument. A February 22, 2004, *New York Times* article about Howard Dean's presidential campaign strategy and the social impact of the Internet quoted Cass Sunstein, author of *Republic.com,* as saying, "If you get like-minded people in constant touch with each other, then they get more energized and more committed, and more outraged and more extreme" ("So What Was *That* All About?" section 4, 3). Though not necessarily wanting outrage and extremism, teachers of basic writers do continually look for ways to energize students and keep them committed to the learning process. Web-based communication has the potential to create some Deaniac-type energy otherwise difficult to engender among socially and geographically isolated basic writing students.

This, in turn, leads to the "John Dewey" argument. Beatrice Quarshy Smith, in a thought-provoking article about what she calls the colonial pattern that permeates our use of technology, points out the fact that her community college students by and large have inadequate access not only to the technologies but also to the literacies of power. Arguing for a *transactional* conception of technologies, Smith writes of John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, "For them knowing was a process of learning though reflection on experience and through the exchange of ideas with others" (5). Developmental writers typically have such sadly limited time and opportunity to participate in person in that sort of reflective conversation that the opportunity the Internet opens for virtual idea exchange, be it through chatrooms, e-mail, blogs, listservs, or simply Googling a concept, is in itself a powerful argument for moving classes online.

For teachers of adult students, the "Nike" argument holds special merit. The most effective learning occurs, experts agree, when students follow Nike's advice and "just do it." Active learning, important for students of all ages, is essential to adults. Arthur Wilson contends that. . . adults no longer learn from experience, they learn in it as they act in situations and are acted upon by situations" (75). Online courses, at least those that are well designed, force students to play an active role in the learning experience—posing questions, voicing opinions, engaging in discussions,

spending as much time as necessary on weak areas, and self-testing their knowledge when and as appropriate.

Finally, and perhaps most generally persuasive, is what might be termed the "Can We Talk?" argument. As Sharan Merriam points out, "Critical reflection and awareness of why we attach the meanings we do to reality . . . may be the most significant distinguishing characteristic of adult learning" (9). The "persistence" of online communication enables and encourages this critical reflection. Thomas Erickson, from IBM's T. J. Watson Research Center, describes "persistence" in the context of online communication as follows:

> Persistence expands conversation beyond those within earshot, rendering it accessible to those in other places and at later times. Thus, digital conversation may be synchronous or asynchronous, and its audience intimate or vast. Its persistence means that it may be far more structured, or far more amorphous, than an oral exchange, and that it may have the formality of published text or the informality of chat. The persistence of such conversations also opens the door to a variety of new uses and practices: persistent conversations may be searched, browsed, replayed, annotated, visualized, restructured, and recontextualized, with what are likely to be profound impacts on personal, social, and institutional practices. (par. 3)

Gaining access to the "persistence" of the communication on the Internet— talk going on 24 hours a day, around the world, accessible at least as long as the web site lasts—can be profoundly important in helping basic writers view themselves as writers and participate in the sort of critical reflection Erickson describes.

We need to help our students become part of that persistent conversation, as skilled listeners and as persuasive speakers, if we are indeed going to help them find, and value, their own voices. Last semester, one of my students who works for campus security at a neighboring university, whose essays generally consisted of short, underdeveloped paragraphs, wrote a lengthy, thoughtful, fully developed response to an online discussion topic. Answering my e-mail complimenting her on both the writing and the content, she replied:

> Message no. 713: Thanks, Professor. This is the first time, in a long time, that I get to express my opinions without being accused of being insubordinate. Having a good old time!

Although I try to make all course work relevant, assigning essays that ask my adult students to explore issues they know and care about in their work and personal lives, this student did not feel comfortable expressing ideas and defending her opinions until she left the classroom environment, where she had defined herself, narrowly, as a student, and moved online, where she was free to redefine herself as a writer.

The Best of Both Worlds: Teaching in a Hybrid Environment

Instructors' assessment of the relative pros and cons of an online basic writing class will differ, of course, depending on their own personal and institutional conditions. The students I teach at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania are predominantly African American (Lincoln is a historically black university), range in age from about 25 to 64, and must be employed full time in a human service agency as a condition for admission. The Pre-master's Program, as this developmental writing course is informally called (the official name is the Pre-graduate Semester in Writing and Critical Thinking Skills) was created to help students improve their basic academic skills so as to be eligible to enter Lincoln's non-traditional Master of Human Services (MHS) Program, a graduate program in which applicants may qualify for admission based on years of work experience in the human service field without having first earned a bachelor's degree. Most applicants, employed in a field in which talking and listening skills learned from life experience are more important than academic writing proficiency, come to the MHS Program with little or no college training; they tend to be uncomfortable communicating in Standard Written English and inexperienced at meeting the demands of academic writing. Depending on their score on the writing portion of the entrance exam, students may be assigned to the Pre-master's Program before entering the MHS Program for a 15-week semester, an accelerated 8-week semester, or a "stretch version," which extends the one semester's work over two semesters. It is this last option, the two-semester program, which we offer in the hybrid form described in this article.[1]

Students in this program are all commuters, some traveling considerably more than 100 miles to attend once-a-week classes, which are held either in the evening or on Saturdays. These students fit neatly into Mina Shaughnessy's description of basic writers as students who tend to produce "small numbers of words with large numbers of errors . . . restricted as writers but not necessarily as speakers, to a very narrow range

of syntactic, semantic and rhetorical options, which forces them into a rudimentary style of discourse that belies their real maturity or a dense and tangled prose with which neither they nor their readers can cope" (179). Hoping to widen the range of options for our adult students as much as possible in as short a time as possible, we chose to design the writing course around computer-mediated teaching and learning. The setting in which classes are taught has evolved steadily since its 1987 beginnings in a basement room equipped with 15 Apple IIs, moving first to faster, stand-alone Windows-based PCs, then to a networked lab, next to a networked lab with Internet access, and finally to a networked lab enhanced with WebCT course management software. In 2002, after weighing the advantages and disadvantages of distance education, we decided to take the next step and add a distance component to the writing program. Students enrolled in the second semester of the two-semester "stretch version" of our basic writing course[2] now have the option of meeting in the campus writing lab only every other week, working from home using WebCT on the off weeks. The class is still evolving, but in general in-class meetings are used to introduce grammar and writing issues and describe assignments; in these sessions students also work in groups for idea generation and take all quizzes and exams. During the online weeks, students practice the grammar and composition issues discussed the previous week, respond to discussion topics, write and revise essays, and participate in online peer review. We initially saw the hybrid version of the course simply as an interim step towards a totally online program, but our experiences with both the difficulties and the successes of online learning over the past two years have led us to believe that it is the hybrid experience itself that offers our particular students the best of both pedagogical worlds.

It has been fifteen years since the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" were first published in the *AAHE Bulletin* as a model for best teaching practices (Chickering and Ehrmann). Although articulated well before the Internet had begun to change the way learning and teaching took place, these seven principles still provide a concise over-view of effective pedagogy. In the final section of this article, with hopes of stimulating further conversation on models that other instructors have found useful and encouraging more research about the ways technology could or should advance the basic writing curriculum, I group the "value added" aspects that I have begun to experience from my hybrid writing class

around these seven principles, describing how a hybrid approach has offered us a means of lessening the negative effects of many of the problems described in the first part of this article while still allowing students to benefit from the advantages listed in the second.

- **Good practice encourages student/faculty contact.** The opportunity for unlimited office hours via e-mail or chatrooms is a clear advantage in online courses, which frequently cater to commuting or geographically distant students. Students get used to sending off an e-mail or setting up an online chatroom meeting when a problem arises rather than letting it go unquestioned. Teachers can provide the needed information promptly, preventing student frustration and lessening the chance for a late or incorrect assignment. A study by Robert Woods and Samuel Ebersole has found instructor immediacy in feedback to be "the strongest predictor of learning—both affective and cognitive learning—among students."

  The benefit that comes from having my online students in my physical classroom as well, on alternate weeks, is that I can follow up on e-mails, deal with new or remaining problems, and give the students a chance to explore their issues in more depth. E-mailed requests and personal conversations seem to be used for different purposes, with e-mails being more task-oriented (asking about assignments, due dates, technical problems, etc.) or else reserved for the kinds of problems students are embarrassed to bring up in person. Face-to-face discussions typically involve working through academic problems thoroughly, as well as following up e-mailed comments on life events as needed. An e-mail can give an answer; a face-to-face meeting can show how the answer was obtained. Students are not forced to rely solely on text-based communication for their questions and answers.

- **Good practice encourages cooperation among students.** Online access to e-mail, discussion lists and chatrooms clearly expands collaborative opportunities exponentially. For one thing, despite the potential harm to our collective egos, writing teachers in this Internet age are, as Gail Hawisher and Cynthia

61

Selfe point out, experiencing Margaret Mead's concept of "pre-figurative cultures," that is, cultures in which the adults are trying to prepare children for experiences the adults themselves have never had. In such a world, students have no alternative but to bond with and learn important lessons from each other (4). This benefits both the teacher and the learner.

What a hybrid class adds is the chance to strengthen the personal ties so important to effective collaboration. Caroline Haythornthwaite, in a paper presented at the Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences, notes that, because of the "reduced cues" environment, online communication is less appropriate or useful for emotionally laden exchanges, for the delivery of complex information, and for creating a sense of "being there." This presents a problem for classes conducted entirely online, since obviously, these factors are essential to an educational setting. She found, however, that strongly tied pairs, with their higher motivation, eagerness to communicate, and desire to include more intimate and varied communications, manage to modify this "lean" environment to support their needs, while weakly tied communicators do not. Maintaining connectivity among both the strongly and weakly tied members of a group, Haythornthwaite argues, requires a means of communication that reaches all group members, yet requires little effort or extra work from them. A schedule that allows students to meet face to face in class every other week satisfies that criterion. If students do nothing more than show up in class, the weak ties required for basic connectivity after they leave the classroom are established. At the same time, the personal bonds which classroom interactions create should encourage the development of stronger ties and therefore lead to more proactive communication outside of class, resulting in less chance of muting and, ideally, better participation and retention of students.

- **Good practice encourages active learning.** Stronger interpersonal ties lead communicators to seek out the means and opportunities for exchanges that support their relationships. This results in a more active learning experience. In online discus-

sion group assignments, for instance, students can satisfy their desire for interaction while at the same time applying the principle of "write to learn/learn to write" (Mayher, Lester, and Pradl).

I had initially planned for discussion to take place solely online until student evaluations after each of the first two semesters consistently requested more time afterwards to explore the issues in the classroom. When students discuss a topic online one week and carry that discussion over into the face-to-face class the next, the best features of both activities apply. Online, the students have time for thoughtful, reflective response; in class, the follow-up discussion allows for the serendipity that perhaps only occurs in the rapid give and take of face-to-face conversation. Additionally, any meaning missed because of the "reduced cues" environment online can be regained in the oral classroom setting.

- **Good practice gives prompt feedback.** In addition to getting prompter teacher responses, students can take quizzes or do practice exercises online and get immediate feedback. Course management tools like WebCT and Blackboard allow teachers to post their own practice quizzes, adding with relative ease personalized explanations for the correct options as well as explanations of what makes the wrong choices incorrect. I have found that students will work much longer at online exercises than they do on the same exercises in their workbooks. The tasks are more visual and more fun. Working online also strengthens students' on-screen proofreading skills and can be done at the point of need, with slower students being required to do more tasks or allowed a longer time to finish an assigned task.

  When a face-to-face meeting follows an online experience, students get the added benefit of going over things together after the fact and hearing others' questions, thus reinforcing what they had learned on their own. Students take charge of their own learning needs, noting the places where they require additional instruction and profiting from the realization that they can sometimes answer questions raised by others.

- **Good practice promotes time on task.** Course management software like Blackboard or WebCT has several features that enable teachers to model ways to structure time effectively. The calendar tool can remind students each week what is due when. The content module feature allows all the materials needed to write a given essay—preliminary reading, planning tools, essay directions, peer review questions—to be assembled in one place, available wherever the student has access to the Internet, eliminating the "I lost the reading assignment" or "I didn't have the essay directions" excuse. Nevertheless, those features and all others work only insofar as a student is motivated to use them; that is where the face-to-face class comes in, students know that they will have to face their instructor's wrath in person if they are not prepared while enjoying positive reinforcement when they are. They can drift away in the anonymity of cyberspace for no more than a week.

- **Good practice communicates high expectations.** Because of the convenience of the Web, students can reasonably be expected to read more, write more, and do more group projects. Even students with limited time can do research through online academic data bases. The "Dean effect"—the motivation engendered by persistent conversation—can also be counted on to improve performance. Moreover, as Alvan Bregman and Caroline Haythornthwaite explain, "When we approach persistent conversation, we are faced with communication that inherits genre from both speech and literary practices. The learning environment inherits the speech genres of the traditional classroom, such as how to participate in class, communicate with an instructor, or carry on a discussion with fellow students, as well as the literary practices of academia, such as how to write a term paper, complete a homework assignment, or present a written argument."

    When students have the opportunity to discuss both online and face to face, to submit an assignment in print form or as an online posting, to argue a point in person or via e-mail, many more of the possible communication modes are used, practiced, reinforced, and made visible. This can help to make up for

any actual or perceived lack of "richness" in the online environment, and enables us in a sense to teach the students a double lesson: how to function effectively as members of two different and equally important academic discourse communities, the virtual and the actual classroom.

- **Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.** One student told me toward the end of last semester that she really likes and uses all the online resources available to her via WebCT. She can do her homework faithfully, do all assigned practice exercises, view explanations in the PowerPoints I have posted, and study the reading selections. But it is not until she comes to class and participates in a discussion reviewing the concepts that it all comes together for her. For many students, directions, demonstrations, and explanations—at least at some point in the learning process, whether as preview or review—need to take a form other than print. Even Murray Goldberg, the "father" of WebCT, acknowledged in a 2001 column for the *Online Teaching and Learning Newsletter* that variety provides the spice of academic life: "We all know by research or intuition that some people simply learn better when they can see a person's face and converse in real time with a peer or instructor. My own research shows that students perform best when they have access to lectures in addition to a web-based course as opposed to the web-based course alone."

When given the opportunity to learn both online and in class, students, whatever their preferred learning style, are affirmed and stretched. They also find skills other than writing—graphical, technological, organizational, group-building—being evaluated and valued, so more opportunities exist to acknowledge strengths instead of simply identifying weaknesses.

Conclusion

It has been my experience that adult basic writers arrive in class with a curious and difficult-to-deal-with mixture of dependence and independence. A number of years ago we tested our students—slightly more than 150 at that time—on the Grasha-Riechmann Student Learning Style Scales,

an instrument developed in the 1970s that categorized student preferences with respect to classroom interactions with peers and teachers along six dimensions: cooperation/competition, participation/avoidance, and independence/dependence. We were not surprised to see how our students fit clearly into the expected profile of adult learners: more *cooperative* than *competitive* and much more *participant* than *avoidant*. What did at first surprise us was that they strayed from the adult norm by emerging as more *dependent* than *independent* in their learning preferences. Further research showed us that this conflict was not unusual. Robert Sommer, for instance, points out that adults returning to school "may regress to the conditioning of early education and past roles of dependence and submission to the authority of teachers and institutions" (9). We realized that a vacillation between independent and dependent learning preferences was to be expected from our student population, whose lack of traditional academic experience created a sense of uncertainty that was at war with their adult sense of independence. Given this ongoing conflict, the current structure of this basic writing course, with one week online and one week face to face in a classroom, seems to offer our students the best of both worlds: the infinite freedom of the Internet enhanced and made manageable by regular classroom interactions.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1. Anyone interested in more specific information about either Lincoln University's Master of Human Services Program or the Pre-master's Program is invited to visit our website at http://www.lincoln.edu/mhs or contact me directly at stine@lu.lincoln.edu.

2. We chose to offer only the second semester in hybrid form, wanting to be sure that all students had a semester of WebCT use in a Web-enhanced face-to-face class so that they could become comfortable with the software. We hoped in this way to prevent technological concerns from distracting from or impeding writing instruction when students moved out of the familiar classroom setting.

Works Cited

Anson, Chris. "Distant Voices: Teaching and Writing in a Culture of Technology." *College English* 61 (1999): 261-80.

Baron, Denis. "From Pencils to Pixels: The Stages of Literacy Technologies." *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies.* Ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 15-34.

Blair, Kristine L., and Elizabeth A. Monske. "Cui Bono?: Revisiting the Promises and Perils of Online Learning." *Computers and Composition* 20 (2003): 441-53.

Bregman, Alvan, and Caroline Haythornthwaite. "Radicals of Presentation in Persistent Conversation." *Proceedings of the Jan. 3 – 6, 2001 Hawai'i International Conference On System Sciences*. 1 Feb. 2004 <csdl.computer.org/comp/proceedings/hicss/2001/0981/04/09814032.pdf>.

Chickering, Arthur W., and Stephen C. Ehrmann. "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever." *AAHE Bulletin* (October 1996): 3-6.

Collison, George, Bonnie Elbaum, Sarah Haavind, and Robert Tinker. *Facilitating Online Learning: Effective Strategies for Moderators*. Madison, WI: Atwood, 2000.

Cross, K. Patricia. *Adults as Learners: Increasing Participation and Facilitating Learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981.

Davis, Evan, and Sarah Hardy. "Teaching Writing in the Space of Blackboard." *Computers & Composition Online* (Spring 2003). 15 Feb. 2004 <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/theory.htm>.

Elbow, Peter. "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues." *College English* 53 (1991): 135-55.

Erickson, Thomas. "Editor's Introduction." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 4.4 (1999). 4 Mar. 2004 <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue4/>.

Goldberg, Murray. "Synchronous vs. Asynchronous: Some Thoughts." *Online Teaching and Learning.* 11 Sept. 2000. 14 Feb. 2004 <http://www.webct.com/service/viewcontentframe?contentID=2339346>.

Hawisher, Gail E., and Cynthia L. Selfe. "The Passions That Mark Us: Teaching, Texts, and Technologies." *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies.* Ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 1-14.

___, eds. *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21ˢᵗ Century Technologies.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999.

Haythornthwaite, Caroline. "Tie Strength and the Impact of New Media."*Proceedings of the Jan. 3 – 6, 2001, Hawai'i International Conference on System Sciences.* 1 Feb. 2004 <http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~haythorn/HICSS01_tiestrength.html>.

___, Michelle M. Kazmer, Jennifer Robins, and Susan Shoemaker. "Community Development Among Distance Learners: Temporal and Technological Dimensions." *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 6.1 (2000). 12 Feb. 2004 <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue1/haythornthwaite.html>.

Johnson, J. Paul. "What Happens When Teaching Writing Online?" 2003. 15 Feb. 2004 <http://ww.mhhe.com/socscience/english/tc/johnson/JPJohnsonModule.htm>.

Leibowitz, Wendy. "Technology Transforms Writing and the Teaching of Writing." *Chronicle of Higher Education* (26 Nov.1999): A67-68.

Macrorie, Ken. *Twenty Teachers.* New York: Oxford UP, 1984.

Mayher, John S., Nancy Lester, and Gordon Pradl. *Learning to Write/Writing to Learn.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1983.

Merriam, Sharan, ed. *An Update on Adult Learning Theory*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993.

Moran, Charles. "Access: The 'A' Word in Technology Studies." *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies.* Ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 205-21.

Puccio, Paul M. "The Computer-networked Writing Lab: One Instructor's View." ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest #80. EDO-CS-93-03. Apr. 1993. 14 Mar. 2004 <http://www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/digests/d80.html>.

Selber, Stuart. "Reimagining the Functional Side of Computer Literacy." *College Composition and Communication,* 55 (2004): 470-504.

Selfe, Cynthia, and Richard Selfe. "The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones." *College Composition and Communication* 45 (1994): 480-504.

Shaughnessy, Mina. "Basic Writing." *Teaching Composition: 10 Bibliographical Essays*. Ed. Gary Tate. Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian UP, 1976. 177-206.

Simic, Marjorie. "Computer-Assisted Writing Instruction." ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication Digest #97.

EDO-CS-94-10. Jun. 1994. 20 Feb. 2004 <http://www.indiana.edu/~reading/ieo/digests/d97.html>.

Smith, Beatrice Quarshy. "Teaching with Technologies: A Reflexive Auto-ethnographic Portrait." *Computers and Composition,* 21.1 (2004): 49-62.

"So What Was *That* All About?" *New York Times* 22 Feb. 2004: section 4, 3.

Sommer, Robert F. *Teaching Writing to Adults: Strategies and Concepts for Improving Learner Performance.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989.

Sosnoski, James. "Hyper-readers and Their Reading Engines." *Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies.* Ed. Gail E. Hawisher and Cynthia L. Selfe. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. 161-78.

Straub, Richard. *A Sourcebook for Responding to Student Writing.* Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 1999.

United States. Department of Commerce. *Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion.* Oct. 2000. 13 Aug. 2004 <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/fttn00/Front00.htm#Mineta>.

Whithaus, Carl. "Think Different/Think Differently: A Tale of Green Squiggly Lines, or Evaluating Student Writing in Computer-mediated Environments." *Kairos* 7 (2002). Mar. 1 2004 <http://wac.colostate.edu/aw/articles/whithaus2002/>.

Wilson, Arthur. "The Promise of Situated Cognition." *An Update on Adult Learning Theory.* Ed. Sharan Merriam. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1993. 71-81.

Woods, Robert, and Samuel Ebersole. "Becoming a 'Communal Architect' in the Online Classroom: Integrating Cognitive and Affective Learning for Maximum Effect in Web-based Learning." *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration,* VI (2003). 20 Feb. 2004 <http://www.westga.edu/%7Edistance/ojdla/spring61/spring61.htm>.

Yena, Lauren, and Zach Waggoner. "One Size Fits All?: Student Perspectives on Face-to-Face and Online Writing Pedagogies." *Computers & Composition Online*, Fall (2003). 30 Jan. 2004 <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/virtualc.htm>.