EDITORS' COLUMN

In its first issues, more than a quarter century ago, *JBW* was organized by theme: "Error" was the very first, followed by "Courses," "Applications," and "Programs," among others. "Uses of Grammar" proved so popular that it sold out, and even our own archive has a gap where that issue belongs. These early issues convey not only the excitement of a new and challenging enterprise offering the compelling possibility of genuine social change, but also a sense of solidity now long gone from most serious work as the field has moved from basic skills through process to post process. For nearly twenty years, *JBW* editors have eschewed pre-determined themes and have instead used this column to trace connections among essays that were randomly submitted and randomly selected.

This enterprise is not entirely haphazard, however, for particular questions, terms, and concepts have currency in the field at any one time. Key authors and writings provide a conceptual framework or set of touchstone references that recur again and again. Although a verifying search has not been conducted, it seems entirely safe to claim that no issue of *JBW* has been without at least one essay that cites Mina Shaughnessy. Indeed, the first issue of *JBW* that fails to have any reference to *Errors and Expectations* or "Diving In" will mark a milestone not only in the history of this journal but in the field of Basic Writing. Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone," a touchstone since it first appeared in *Profession 91* in 1991, continues to speak so tellingly that four of the five articles in this issue cite it. Bartholomae, Bizzell, Bishop, Smitherman, Villanueva, and a list of other familiar—powerful—names provide language, concepts, or images that authors continue to quote, stand on, or contest.

Moreover, submissions to journals are often prompted by questions or concerns that arise contemporaneously across colleges and universities. In rereading the essays to prepare these introductions, we sometimes feel as if we are checking the pulse of the field: Where are the tensions? The complacencies? How have the lines shifted? Writing critically about critical pedagogy, fluid contact zones, and shifting political fortunes, authors sometimes convey the impression that the only certainty in Basic Writing is that everything is at all times contested. A more accurate statement, however, might be that everything will at some time be contested. This interest on the part of authors, who are after all academics, in the evidently problematic—or the about to be problematized—masks the presence of the currently uncontested, the sometimes unacknowledged common ground.

One speaks of common ground only with considerable trepidation, though, lest that bit that currently provides a toehold should suddenly become the field upon which the next contest rages. Still, the interest in cultural contexts of literacy in some way connects all of the articles in this issue, as it continues to be a major preoccupation in the field. So too, whatever their interest in the matters of language, convention, and academic discourse, the authors represented here all clearly fall within the group of compositionists who view writing less as a set of skills than as a critical and communicative act mediated in contexts of cultural complexity.

Both Wendy Ryden and Caleb Corkery focus on the literacy narrative, a current pedagogical staple in many BW classrooms. In "Conflicted Literacy: Frederick Douglass's Critical Model" Ryden challenges readings of Douglass that place his story in the genre of "literacy myth," in which the acquisition of literacy inexorably leads the protagonist to success, respect, and perhaps fame. She argues that a critical reading of this central literacy narrative must consider "the conflicted conditions under which [Douglass's literacy] was acquired." Douglass, argues Ryden, illustrates quite deliberately that "literacy devoid of a critical dimension is insufficient to produce the liberatory effects often attributed to it." Caleb Corkery, in "Literacy Narratives and Confidence Building in the Writing Classroom," reviews the potential pedagogical benefits of reading and writing literacy narratives, but provides a significant caveat about students, especially those from cultures celebrating orality, who may find the literacy narrative alienating both because of the insider status of the narrator and because speech so often is reduced to being merely a springboard for writing.

Jeffrey Maxson also addresses the distance between students and academic discourse and the power dynamics of the classroom in "'Government of Da Peeps, for Da Peeps, and by Da Peeps': Revisiting the Contact Zone." Using assignments requiring translation and parody, Maxson invites students to reposition themselves in relation to the contact zone, academic discourse, and their instructors.

In "Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen: Mapping Change through Studio Work" John Paul Tassoni and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson examine a different set of power relationships, as they recount an attempt to redirect the way that basic writing instruction takes place in a large state university. Struggling to secure a place in the complex and far from transparent structure of writing at their multi-campus institution, Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson are witness to the confusing and even confounding situations experienced by the students they encounter through their studio work, who labor to construe ambiguous assignments, vague or contradictory expectations, and incomprehensible teacher comments.

Mark T. Williams and Gladys Garcia attempt to map a different kind of change in "Crossing Academic Cultures: A Rubric for Students and Teachers." Their project is to move students from unexamined "commonplaces" to increasingly complicated and critical assessments, aided by a rubric that can be used to represent either multiple factors in a single student's performance or a range of possible student positions in the process. At the same time, the rubric traces an arc connecting Basic Writing in its agenda and its methodology to all of the writing that follows it.

That Basic Writing is, in fact, of a piece with the writing to come, rather than its prelude, has been—to borrow a phrase from Williams and Garcia—a "commonplace" since Shaughnessy. It is hardly a matter for complacency, however. So much of the work that we do is laboring to uncover all that is happening when a writer produces a text—the unacknowledged dialogues, the veiled contexts, the protean process(es), the tacit conventions of form and language and logic. And "Error," this journal's first theme, which seemed so solid and clear to *JBW*'s early readers, strikes today's readers (and editors) as perhaps the most contingent and contested ground of all.

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