

EDITORS' COLUMN

Composition, it seems, is always defining itself. But the field of composition studies, perhaps more than other disciplines, tends to resist all-encompassing definitions. In our lead article for this issue, "Present-Process: The Composition of Change," Jessica Yood calls into question the idea that the "writing process" can truly be called a paradigm. Yood examines the roots of the notion of "process" as paradigm, which she traces to Maxine Hairston's influential 1982 article "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing." Hairston asserted that the process movement, which views the writing process as messy, recursive, and holistic, represented a paradigm shift in the way knowledge is created in composition, which was comparable to the paradigm shifts described by Kuhn in the "hard sciences." Nearly twenty years after Hairston's article appeared, the notion of process as paradigm was problematized in another influential publication, Thomas Kent's 1999 collection *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing-Process Paradigm*.

Yood describes her initial attraction to the idea that composition studies was "post" process. In fact, she argues that viewing process as paradigm—a fixed way of solving problems and generating new knowledge—is particularly unsuited to a field that is constantly changing in response to societal forces, perceived student needs, and institutional priorities. However, in this article she works to rehabilitate process as a useful perspective, if not a definitive paradigm, arguing that "the vocabulary of process is exactly what is useful to us right now, not as a 'Big Theory' of how individuals compose, but as a way to talk about the power of change constructed within literacy programs in our local communities."

If the need for a way of talking about change is important for composition in general, it is especially so for basic writing, which was created in response to changing societal forces, specifically the influx of large numbers of poorly prepared students during the open-admissions era of the 1970s. The other four articles in this issue amply illustrate the types of changes that are currently buffeting basic writing programs and pedagogies. In so doing, they demonstrate the need for Yood's "present-process" concept of composition. In "It's Not Remedial: Re-envisioning Pre-First Year College Writing," Heidi Huse, Jenna Wright, Anna Clark, and Tim Hacker describe how the writing program at the University of Tennessee at Martin has responded in positive ways to a situation that has recently occurred in many parts of the United States—a mandate by the state legislature that "remedial" programs cannot be offered at four-year colleges and universities. The authors explain the process through which they used this "crisis" to develop a pedagogically sound—and credit-bearing—basic

writing program. While it is too early to assess the long-term effects of the new program, initial results are promising.

Another challenge that is forcing change in basic writing is the increasingly diverse demographics of the student population. In "Uses of Background Experience in a Preparatory Reading and Writing Class: An Analysis of Native and Non-native Speakers of English," Diana Becket focuses on the growing number of "generation 1.5 students" in BW classes. This term is used to describe students who immigrated with their families as children or adolescents and were educated in U.S. middle and high schools. Many of these students fail university placement tests in reading and writing and are placed either in regular basic writing classes or in more specialized ESL classes. Regardless of where they are placed, this loosely categorized group of students is causing much consternation among teachers, who feel ill-prepared to meet the special challenges of students who are familiar with U.S. popular culture but unfamiliar with academic discourse. In this article, based on a study of the differences between native speakers and generation 1.5 students placed in the same preparatory course in reading and writing, Becket concludes that where students are born may not be the most important distinction in deciding what they need in the classroom. Rather, she feels that in order to promote student success, teachers need to individualize instruction to meet the specific needs of their students, regardless of where these students were born and educated. Again, the perspective of composition as a "process" seems appropriate in dealing with an ever-changing student population.

In "Represent, Representin', Representation: The Efficacy of Hybrid Texts in the Writing Classroom," Donald McCrary addresses another question facing instructors of basic writing. How can we make our students—as they are—feel that they have a legitimate place in the academy? For students placed in basic writing courses, language, which reflects cultural and social realities, often creates barriers. Too often these students feel that their own language is "broken" and has no place in the academy. To address this problem, McCrary, in his recent teaching at Long Island University in Brooklyn, has assigned examples of hybrid discourse drawing on the resources of black English or other languages and has encouraged students to experiment with using their own hybrid discourses in their writing. Although not all students choose to use hybrid discourse in the literacy autobiography essays they write for the course, some students do so in meaningful and rhetorically effective ways. Excerpts from three student essays are included, demonstrating McCrary's point that legitimizing the use of hybrid discourse can help to "dismantle the barriers" resulting from the dominance of standard English. Arguing forcefully for students' right to their own language, McCrary provides yet another example of a field in process: "If we really believe

in cultural multiplicity, if we're not just making noise but want to bring the noise, then we have to get serious about what we say and do with language in our own classrooms."

Pedagogy is another area in which basic writing is constantly in process. Pedagogical trends come and go, and sensitive teachers and scholars have to make informed decisions about how best to meet the needs of the students in their courses. Service learning has been a significant trend for many years, both in composition and in other disciplines, as a way of engaging students in genuine, meaningful work with visible outcomes. In "Servant Class: Basic Writers and Service Learning," Don J. Kraemer takes a critical look at what happened when he asked his basic writing students to engage in writing-for-the-community service learning projects. Although the students themselves often found these projects rewarding, Kraemer came to feel that the emphasis on producing a slick "product" to help the agency where they were placed robbed the students of something more important—the chance to use writing as a way of reflecting on important problems or questions, the work of more traditional academic writing assignments.

In its own way, each of the articles in this issue resonates with this statement from Jessica Yood's article: "[B]asic writing and open admissions are under attack at most institutions; composition is in the process of distinguishing itself anew from other disciplines and from its own past. No paradigm, no movement, no discipline, in fact, seems immune from sweeping reevaluation." In today's world, as Yood points out, knowledge making is reflexive, recursive, and tied closely to the changing environment in which it occurs. In such a world, it seems important to take another look at the concept of process and what it might offer for thinking about the challenges that composition and, more specifically, basic writing face today.

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