



Journal of Basic Writing

Critical Pedagogy Is Too Big to Fail

Ira Shor

Measuring Success in Summer Bridge Programs:
Retention Efforts and Basic Writing

Matthew Kilian McCurrie

The Accelerated Learning Program:
Throwing Open the Gates

**Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart,
Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts**

Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing:
Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery

Heather M. Robinson

Standards, Teaching, Learning

Mike Rose

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 15-25 pages, double spaced, on topics related to basic and ESL writing, broadly interpreted. Submissions should follow current MLA guidelines. Manuscripts are refereed anonymously. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and e-mail addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only*. The second page should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of about 150 words, and a list of 4-5 key words. Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain permission for including excerpts from student writing.

We prefer that contributions be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: rebecca.mlynarczyk@gmail.com and hopekcc@aol.com. If electronic submission is not possible, mail five copies of the manuscript and abstract to:

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You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in about sixteen weeks.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic-writing or second-language theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing; social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory; grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in non-technical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.

EDITORS' COLUMN

Many instructors of basic writing these days seem to know what it means to work at cross purposes—with students, sometimes, but more generally with programs, departments, and institutions which operate in an ever-widening, increasingly public field of vision. Certainly it is possible to see the extended base of conversations around basic writing as a good thing—more people bringing the light of ideas to one of the most centrally defining aspects of access and equity in education today. Still, too many classrooms are not yet benefiting from this debate. Instead, many classrooms have become echo chambers for others' voices, including those of policy-makers and standards advocates not present there, who mark what instructors should be teaching, and what students need to learn. Amid the noise, instructors encounter their students—individuals with discursive talents and capacities often not accounted for in standards criteria or program objectives. They come with their own purposes for learning, and notions of success, too. Such capacities are discoverable when students are supported with confidence by teachers whose purposes they understand to be aligned with theirs, and who seek partnership with students in classrooms as shared, democratic spaces.

The Fall 2009 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* enters the debate around standards, equity, and access as it concerns basic writing students and classrooms. Each article shows how the perceived need for standards has impacted basic writing as an endeavor of access on campuses across the nation. Institutions' responses to the trends and pressures to support basic writers, *if they must*, outside of developmental courses and designations, have generated an impressive variety of models to benefit basic writers, while, at the same time, they partially, or wholly, eclipse the term. Thus we find this time of forced innovations is also one of self-scrutiny. Driving teachers' and program directors' reportage on these new programs are renewed reflections of the early days of Open Admissions, including examination of its foundational purposes. Instituting new programs in today's political and educational climate is complicated, as we acknowledge the possibility of narrowing students' learning in trying to balance mandates to remediate in "do more with less" fashion. As Stanford T. Goto pointed out in 2002 in this journal,¹ it is faulty to assume that models of access are always progressive, even when people who have taught basic writing for years have had a

¹ Goto, Stanford T. "Basic Writing and Policy Reform: Why We Keep Talking Past Each Other." *Journal of Basic Writing* 21: 2 (2002): 4-20. Print.

hand in conceiving them. We need to recognize when our schemes for success duplicate old problems of limited thinking, and strive for wider, more expansive, conceptualizations of student progress.

In the lead article, “Critical Pedagogy Is Too Big to Fail,” Ira Shor demonstrates that classrooms are zones of standards reform which teachers impact in ways that both mirror and precede others’ imposition of standards upon them. An eminent voice on the politics of the classroom, Shor responds to “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching” by Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow.² Shor presents his own approach to classroom negotiation and contract grading as a means for resisting the terms and relationships of a market economy wherein students become consumers, and teachers become suppliers of isolatable, knowledge-based, commodities. Traversing the borders of means and metaphor, contracts do more than clarify the rules for grading in order to ease students’ dismay and confusion; they also function emblematically to redefine student agency: Who gets to determine the modes of evaluation? To what extent are the modes and criteria of grading negotiable? What mechanisms exist, if any, to urge improvements to the current system? When conceived democratically, contracts speak to matters of standards at the site of students’ most immediate experience of access—the classroom—while at the same time constituting the classroom as a space of collaborative, critical engagement. Locating questions of standards at the base most commonly associated with teacher control, Shor proves that no measure of standards reform, when borne out in classrooms, is ever fully politically contained there.

The next article likewise leads us to consider standards beyond the classroom, with attention to the dominant terms used to speak about student progress and “success.” In “Measuring Success in Summer Bridge Programs: Retention Efforts and Basic Writing,” Matthew Kilian McCurrie goes beyond the usual reportage of numbers detailing this or that increase, slight or significant, in raising standards or retention rates. In the case of a summer bridge experience for students of low-income, non-majority, backgrounds at private, four-year, Columbia College Chicago, McCurrie shows that the terms left out of standards debates are often teachers’ and students’ ideas about success. On its first run, Columbia College Chicago’s Summer Bridge Program emphasized many of the features typically included in transitional programs in developmental English. There was plenty of opportunity for students to explore affective issues related to their new academic course of

² *College Composition and Communication* 61.2 (2009): 244-68. Print.

travel and to experience some reading and writing in personally relevant ways. But upon reflection, teachers felt that the program adhered too strictly to institutional emphasis on “making it” to first-year English, with pass rates for that course (roughly 50%) duly noted. Real innovation emerged as teachers considered the actual rigors of first-year English and writing in the other subject areas. The idea of transition, they believed, needed to include the understanding that students had not yet fully committed to college and were owed a clearer sense of what college demanded of them before they could make a true choice. Redefining success, teachers reconsidered students as agents, not enrollment numbers. Students too, when asked, defined success in holistic, life-relevant terms.

“The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates” details another innovative program (this one at the Community College of Baltimore County) meant to transition basic writers into the mainstream. Authors Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts straddle the complexities of standards-sensitive innovation, while staying critical of measures that may negatively impact students’ agency and integration in a community of learners. Employing the metaphor of the pipeline, with its negative connotations of “leakage” and unilateral transport (for a critique of this metaphor, see Goto [2002]), they problematize easy ways of measuring the effectiveness of basic writing programs by pass rates in first-year English. Upon examining the “pretty good” pass rate of basic writing students who later took first-year composition (81%), one of the authors, Adams, decided that there might be more to this story of student “progress.” Following students from 1988 to 1992, he found that the pass rate did not account for the many students who passed basic writing but never attempted first-year composition. This in fact raised the total number of students who did not pass the course to two-thirds of the original BW cohort. On the heels of this discovery, faculty and administrators developed and piloted the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), in which BW students could opt to enroll directly in first-year composition (ENGL 101) if they agreed to also enroll in basic writing (ENGL 052) in the same semester. This was not, however, just another form of moving students through the pipeline. The ENGL 052 groups are taught by the same instructor that students have for composition; these groups are limited to only eight students, all of whom are taking the same section of ENGL 101. ENGL 052 sessions meet directly after ENGL 101 sessions, and focus largely on students’ concerns with the required work in that credited course. Students also gain a place of welcome in the college community, sitting beside non-ENGL 052-enrolled students in their ENGL 101 classes.

The results of this program so far are most promising. As it continues to run and inspire basic writing innovation across the country, we see that ALP is not the business of standards reform as usual.

Next, in “Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery,” Heather M. Robinson weighs in on how the end of remediation at four-year colleges of the City University of New York in 1999 impacts students at four-year York College/CUNY. As faculty director of the York College Writing Center, Robinson experiences the daily fallout of students looking for writing support as they voluntarily seek tutoring. And just as McCurrie and Adams and his co-authors complicate the apparent positives of the innovations they write about, so does Robinson: while students may be said to seek tutoring help voluntarily, many are chiefly responding to teachers’ expectations for a standardized mode of expression, and/or have internalized such expectations from previous experiences of assessment. Questions around student motivation, whether external or intrinsic, become central in this article on the role of writing centers in the post-remediation age. Does the present moment occlude writing centers’ more traditionally expansive mission to teach the student, not the writing, or are writing centers also capable of supporting students’ efforts to define their own goals and expectations for learning? Robinson opens such questions by way of investigating students’ stated purposes for coming to the writing center. She finds that, while students initially state they want help with grammar and sentence-level issues, their self-perceptions as writers mature the more often they visit. Help with grammar is the introduction to more meaningful moments as students define their own priorities for writing.

Finally, we come to Mike Rose’s piece, “Standards, Teaching, Learning” as both a closing and an opening. One of today’s most prominent and articulate advocates of broad educational opportunity, Rose marks the difference between *teaching* that is motivated chiefly by standards imposed by policy makers who seek, first and foremost, *excellence*, and the rich and problem-posing *learning* that happens when students’ interests and talents are recognized, and *their* purposes for learning are taken into account. Rose’s words perfectly capture the spirit of much of this Fall 2009 issue. As instructors, program directors, and basic writing spokespersons, our authors strive to re-engender Open Admissions’ promise of access; this is evident not only in the programs and practices described here, but in the clarity these authors bring to assessing their results. Clearly, Rose is a partner to each of the authors in this issue, reminding them and us that the best innovation

will situate its gains in light of the meaning of education in a democratic society. Such a point makes it possible for the title of Rose's new book, from which "Standards, Teaching, Learning" is borrowed, to resonate: *Why School?* Rose's message is that it is time to recognize all learners as heirs to the promise of education in a great and expansive nation.

With this issue, we welcome Corey Frost to our editorial assistant team. Corey is a Ph.D. candidate in English at the Graduate Center, CUNY, and is currently a coordinator of the Brooklyn College Writing Across the Curriculum Program. We are grateful to have him aboard.

—**Hope Parisi** and **Rebecca Mlynarczyk**

Critical Pedagogy Is Too Big to Fail

Ira Shor

ABSTRACT: This essay responds to Jane Danielewicz's and Peter Elbow's recent piece on contract grading in College Composition and Communication (December 2009). I discuss the similarities of their approach to my own contract process, finding that we share a quantitative/performative method for grading. I also explore our differences. While they guarantee students a B grade for meeting quantitative minimums and do not judge writing quality unless it is "better than B," I grade writing along the full spectrum A-F. I also negotiate the syllabus and grading system instead of announcing it unilaterally, so as to position students as stakeholders who co-author the terms of the contract. Finally, I argue the value of negotiated contracts in light of the neo-liberal capture of school and society.

KEYWORDS: contract grading; critical pedagogy; negotiating the syllabus; democratic education; public spheres; social class; market discipline; neo-liberalism

"Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students."

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53

"We are always writing the history of the same war, even when we are writing the history of peace and its institutions."

—Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, 16

"What lies at the root of what I am calling *everyday discursive practices* is a fundamental belief that the language, literacy, and cognitive functioning of working-class students of color are simply inferior. . . . I am not interested in proving my and my students' literacy and intelligence but in examining the political dynamics that deny it."

—carmen kynard, "New Life in This Dormant Creature," *ALT/DIS*, 32, 33

It's easy to be a bad teacher but hard to be a good one, no matter what kind of pedagogy we use. Good teaching is labor-intensive and immensely rewarding when it "works." Of course, no pedagogy works all the time, and

Ira Shor founded, in 1993, the Composition/Rhetoric area group in the English Ph.D. program at the City University of New York Graduate Center, where he offers seminars and directs dissertations. He also teaches comp at CUNY's College of Staten Island. Shor has known Peter Elbow since 1974, when Elbow evaluated the experimental writing program at Staten Island, giving it a strong review, which helped Shor and others defend the project during the Open Admissions wars of that time.

all face student resistances of one kind or another. But with many classes over-enrolled and many students needing deep attention to literate skills, providing good writing instruction can be daunting. What can make the task more productive? One tool I use, grading contracts, is also employed by two esteemed colleagues, Jane Danielewicz and Peter Elbow. They report that contracting enhances their classes, in “A Unilateral Grading Contract to Improve Learning and Teaching” in the December 2009 issue of *College Composition and Communication*.

Their thoughtful essay accurately describes grading contracts as a “subterranean presence in our field” (245), on which they shine needed light. Teachers experimenting with contracts sometimes e-mail me, and I encourage all to write about it, but few do. So, Danielewicz and Elbow perform a service by putting this method prominently on the table. I admire their plain English and the transparency of their grading policies. I thank them for generously citing my *When Students Have Power* (1996) as well as the work of critical teachers William Thelin and Isabel Moreno-Lopez. Below, I address similarities of their practice to my own along with two main differences: (1) I grade the *quality* of student writing broadly A-F while they do so only if “better than B”; and (2) I negotiate grading contracts with students to construct the classroom as a public sphere for democratic arts. Lastly, I discuss a common misperception in Danielewicz’s and Elbow’s essay regarding polemics in critical pedagogy.

Danielewicz and Elbow use grading contracts to improve teacher-student relations and to strengthen student writing. Given that Paulo Freire (53, 56, 60-61) described teacher-student alienation as the first problem of pedagogy, this is a consequential item. Their contracts encourage reconciliation by making the teacher’s expectations clear and hospitable. To frame the problem of reconciliation, they quote Robert Brooke’s notion of student “underlife” (unauthorized student behaviors while the teacher enacts her lesson plan). Danielewicz and Elbow suggest that much “underlife” relates to the mystifying vagaries of grading. Students often whisper among themselves, typically asking nearby peers about the teacher’s remarks, “What does she want us to write?” “What did she say we should do?” “Is she collecting this?” “Does this count?”

These generic utterances and other signs of underlife preoccupied me as well in *When Students Have Power*, where I humorously named it “the Siberian Syndrome.” The Siberian metaphor expresses how detached the official syllabus can be from student interests, exiling them to underlife in the far corners of the classroom. The phenomenon of underlife—where unofficial

discourses parallel official talk by the teacher—has also been studied by ethnographer James Scott, who saw in unequal social relations (Pratt's asymmetric "contact zones") an ensemble of furtive discourses enacted "offstage" by the subordinate. Scott called this suite of fugitive behaviors "the hidden transcript" (124-28). The three metaphors—underlife, the hidden transcript, Siberia—represent conflicted relations partly due to grading standards that puzzle and threaten students, who perceive each new teacher as a new discourse of expectations, according to Lucille McCarthy (1987), provoking students to buzz among themselves until they decipher the standards, a distracting anxiety, Danielewicz and Elbow correctly assert.

To calm this situation, their grading system is simple and lucid, but also *quantitative and performative*. Students in their courses are guaranteed a B for minimum performances such as missing no more than a week's worth of classes, meeting due dates and guidelines for assignments, editing final drafts into SWE (standard written English), attending conferences, submitting final portfolios, etc. (245-46). Guaranteed Bs and a transparent presentation of teacher standards take suspense out of grading and allow the teacher's substantive comments on student papers to compete for attention against the anxious buzz of underlife, they report.

Like them, I too center contract grading on performance minimums. I also propose minimum work levels for a grade, like one absence for A and two for B, like different lengths of papers for A-level versus B- and C-levels, like more class participation for A, less for B and C, like no late papers for A, one for B, two for C, etc. (See Appendix for details.) Mostly, I give one of three grades on written work—A, B, or C—earned first by meeting quantitative minimums for each grade and second by my judgment of *quality in the writing*. I also use the grade R for "Rewrite Required, No Credit" when a paper is poorly written (what I judge as D or F). I offer students feedback and tutoring to encourage rewriting. If *no* revision is handed in, the R grade turns to D or F.

While I grade quality of student writing from A to F, Danielewicz and Elbow guarantee a B for doing the specified requirements for each assignment irrespective of quality; they install the teacher as a judge of writing quality in only a single instance—work that is "*better than B*." Where they teach, B is an honors grade, they report, so it has distinction. They add, "We don't distinguish among grades higher than B until the end of the semester when we have student portfolios in hand" (246), though Danielewicz does respond privately if students ask how they are doing (253). Except for my judgment of quality at all levels, our grading systems are similarly quantitative and

performative, it seems to me; their grades—better than B and less than B—are roughly comparable to my A (“excellent”), which means “better than B,” and my C (“average”), which means “less than B.” In addition, we both use low-stakes writing activities and multiple revisions of longer compositions.

However, two significant differences separate our practices. First, as I mentioned above, I judge *writing quality* at all levels, not only “better than B.” Second, rather than publishing a unilateral protocol for grading, I hand out during the first class a *teacher’s proposed plan* for earning A, B, and C grades, and invite students to negotiate both the grading proposals and the larger syllabus (see the Appendix for a sample proposal sheet).

To begin with my grading from A-F: I grade quality of writing along this range in response to local conditions. I teach in a non-selective, mostly-white, working-class college with no endowment subsidizing teaching or research. At this public campus, I meet smart, complex students who bring to college non-academic cultures and non-standard literacies. Patricia Bizzell reported a similar situation when she taught at a state university: “I had plenty of students who had trouble with Standard English and academic argument but they did not seem impaired in any way at all. . . . They struck me as extremely bright. . . . They just had trouble doing college writing” (176). Intelligent students who have trouble writing are common enough across academe, but the “B-quality” skills that Danielewicz and Elbow can count on are not common at non-selective campuses, which poses special teaching problems.

The lack of B-minimum skills among my first-year comp students primarily results from their social class identity. About social class producing unequal educational outcomes, the late progressive reformer Ted Sizer declared, “Tell me about the incomes of your students’ families and I’ll describe to you your school” (6). Working-class students from under-funded, over-regulated schools develop lesser-valued cultural capital and little control of high-status linguistic practices (what Pierre Bourdieu called “legitimate culture and legitimate language” in *Distinction*). Non-elite speech, knowledge, and “know-how” (called “bricolage” or “making do” by Michel de Certeau) are invalidated in K-12 and in college, where middle-class usage and high culture rule. It’s easy for working-class students to feel that education is at war with them, and many go to war with it.

Danielewicz and Elbow guarantee students a B “just for showing up,” as they put it (260), though their high expectations are indeed rigorous. At my working-class site, situated as it is in an ongoing class war (and race war for those students of color), announcing a guaranteed B “just for showing

up” is risky, because student writing skills are all over the map, from A to F, and because student commitment to college is erratic.

In my comp classes, the majority who write poorly often hand in work with little punctuation, capitalization, or paragraphing—deviations they do not use for stylish effect. Grammar drills can’t develop them into competent writers. So, I count on compelling generative themes and vital reading matter close to the students’ interests to spur intensive writing and revision, discussion and inquiry. But some eighteen-year-olds just out of high school think the first “marking period” doesn’t count so they don’t hand in writing until the fifth week. Sitting next to them are forty-year-olds who dash in from work and would rather die than miss assignments; some who dash in are adult women returning to college after dropping out before and are now raising kids. In addition, some students in the room are immigrants whose first language is not English while others are in class because entitlement programs require attendance. Few in night classes have eaten supper after a day at work (I bring cookies to every session); few read newspapers in print or online. These built-in disparities make guaranteeing a B “just for showing up” difficult.

Secondly, in colloquial parlance where I teach, the phrase “just showing up” means “blowing off” the activity at hand, in this instance, “blowing off” the unpopular comp requirement as well as the enforcer of this requirement, the comp teacher. This kind of “just showing up” is practiced by about a third of the students in my large comp classes. Here is what their blowing off can look like: students sleeping in class, or texting, or cell-phoning, or playing iPod games, or listening to music via earplugs, or engaged in whispered conversations, or applying makeup, or reading a book due for another class, or doing homework while my class is in session (sometimes furtively at the back, sometimes brazenly in front, until I approach and stop it). Such student habits are learned before they reach my class, of course.

The phenomenon of “blowing off” the class affects my teaching and my relations with a sizable number of students, but some of those students may be good writers who simply can’t stand writing, or can’t stand English classes, or can’t stand schooling (working-class life is generally over-disciplined). Vocationally-oriented by class identity (the prime necessity to earn a living), they know their future jobs will require little reading and writing, and not much in the way of fine literature. Those few undergraduates en route to graduate or professional schools do need SWE, research writing, and exposure to belles-lettres so they can read closely as well as display the

cultural capital required to circulate among professionals. But this is not the life path of the majority of students at my college. As Mike Rose wrote, “It is hard work to teach creatively in the intersection of the academic and the vocational. . . . It means developing classroom activities that authentically represent the intellectual demands of the workplace, and, conversely, bringing academic content to life through occupational tasks and simulations” (*Mind at Work* 191, 192). Rose specifically addressed vocational schools here, but the vocational orientations of my undergraduates make his observations relevant.

My college students, like the vocational students Rose observed, have little access to privileged discourses, so their weak writing skills are obviously social products. Where all students arrive with at least B-level skills and academic commitments, teachers can start like Danielewicz and Elbow do, taking B as a default and robustly moving students from B to A: “Experience with contracts led Jane to articulate specific features of writing as a way to handle grades higher than B. . . . [S]he publishes a list of features with examples drawn from common readings. On these lists appear qualitative criteria such as ‘richness of detail’ and ‘voice’ ” (264). Where few students present B-level competence, teachers must address, I think, the wide spectrum of abilities in each class as well as the cultural clash of working-class student identity with middle-class academic culture. For sure, good teaching is labor-intensive everywhere, but teaching and learning are always situated *somewhere*.

Danielewicz and Elbow are sanguine about widely situating their grading plan elsewhere. In fact, they specifically identify “basic writers” as a particularly useful population for their approach because letter-grading is typically set aside in BW in favor of pass/fail:

Contracts are promising here because basic writing courses so often stress quantity of work, fluency, and a supportive climate. Teachers of basic writing are usually not preoccupied with fine-grained distinctions between degrees of excellence or poorness in texts but instead focus on issues such as generating and developing text. For just this reason, many basic writing courses already use pass/fail grading. In fact, pass/fail systems usually boil down to a tacit contract—but one that lacks specificity and rests on unarticulated assumptions. A pass/fail system would benefit greatly from the explicitness and teeth of a contract. (259)

I agree that pass/fail BW can benefit from the transparency Danielewicz and Elbow bring to contracting. Pass/fail did reduce student fixation on grading in my fifteen years of teaching basic writing, where I emphasized fluency thanks to Elbow's "freewriting" methods. However, a big problem I had in BW teaching is common enough and complicates contracting between teacher and students. My judgment and practice were over-ruled by a bogus exit exam imposed top down university-wide. I preferred student-centered methods that did not "teach to the test" (see my *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life* for details). But the exit exam (imposed after 1978) loomed large all term. As end-term approached, anxiety consumed students, and me. I found myself suspending the "critical literacy" syllabus we evolved in favor of a three-week non-stop crash drill in test prep. At the end, I chose to pass some marginal students who failed the exit exam, but they could not legitimately enroll in regular comp, because the institution stopped it, not because I judged them unprepared. Invasive instruments, like centralized entry and exit exams, undermine writing teachers' authority.

Such complications do in fact come to Danieliewicz's and Elbow's attention. In the following excerpt, they recognize the limits which variant conditions can impose on their B-based contract grading:

We developed our contracts while working at strong public universities. But we don't believe our good results depend on institutions like ours. Shor and his colleagues used their grading contracts with working-class students at urban, commuter colleges. Contract grading lends itself to variation. Teachers or programs can easily customize their contracts to fit their particular goals, priorities, and situations. . . . (It would take experimenting to see if contracts would work for ten-week terms or short intensive courses or for open admissions first-year writing courses or first-year calculus or chemistry.) . . . In our contracts, we've tried to work within two demanding but exciting constraints: first, the B should be available to *every* student—that is, not dependent on skill or prior training. (We couldn't retain this claim if some of our students were radically unable to handle written English.) Second, all decisions about what is acceptable for the B must be made without regard to writing quality. (257, 250, 258)

The issues in parentheses above (appearing in the original) address how teaching and learning are situated activities, what I call *the impact of place*

on practice, which is the first big difference between their method and mine, insofar as my work site led me to grade writing quality along a wide spectrum of student abilities, A-F.

A second major divergence between our contract methods is my choice of power-sharing. I initiate at the first class meeting a “constitutional assembly” through which the students and I negotiate grading and the syllabus. Danielewicz and Elbow informally “use class discussions to explore the student’s notions about what constitutes ‘exceptionally high quality’ writing and . . . can often derive our criteria from students’ comments” (246). They add, “We try to make these criteria as public and concrete as possible. . . . But we don’t profess to give students any power over these high-grade decisions” (246). Thoughtful, they bring love of learning, curiosity about language, and student-centered approaches to class. Yet, can a process be called a *contract* if it is *unilateral*? And, is anything valuable lost by foregoing negotiation with students?

A “contract” requires “a meeting of the minds,” that is, a covenant of explicit understandings between all parties affected by the terms. In this construction, no contract exists if one party unilaterally obliges another to abide by terms to which the second party did not formally consent. Perhaps because this understanding of a “contract” is common, Danielewicz and Elbow themselves note their peculiar use of the term: “In one sense, the word ‘contract’ doesn’t fit something we impose so unilaterally on students. But in another sense the word is right: we want to give students written evidence that we *contract* ourselves to keep this unusual promise to award a B for doing things rather than for writing quality. And the term ‘contract’ aptly describes the type of written document that spells out as explicitly as possible the rights and obligations of all the parties—a document that tries to eliminate ambiguity rather than relying on ‘good faith’ and ‘what’s implicitly understood’ ” (247). This is good practice, to encourage “doing things” and to eliminate squishy reliance on “good faith” in teacherly judgement, certainly better than my first efforts to explain to students how I judge A, B, and C quality in writing, which Danielewicz and Elbow rightly drew attention to from *When Students Have Power*. But can we call *obligation without negotiation* a contractual relationship? Negotiation counts because it involves the *co-authoring of mutual obligations*; I claim here that co-authoring underlies a “meeting of the minds” and is not expendable because it is a civic foundation of strong democracy.

If a teacher announces rules and expectations which students must follow, then the rhetorical setting is not contractual but non-negotiable.

Only one person is authorized to enunciate the terms of encounter: the teacher. A teacher's presentation of non-negotiable rules can be congenially delivered as a pledge—if students do what the teacher requires, then she will give students the promised grades. But genial delivery does not reinvent the rhetorical wheel; a *contract* still must answer to a “meeting of the minds,” which means that more than one rhetorical agent constructs the terms. When students deliberate on the protocol, there is a bona fide contractual discourse. However, without deliberation there can still be *friendly* social relations (the teacher is a good person who means well), or *bureaucratic* relations (the teacher is a collegiate official who certifies student work to award credits), or *master-apprentice* relations (the teacher is an elder/expert mentoring neophytes), or *faux domestic* relations (the teacher is a surrogate parent who holds students accountable for displaying good middle-class manners and linguistic habits, as Lynn Bloom and John Trimbur separately argued).

In advocating co-authorship as a standard for the “meeting of the minds,” I’m claiming a “strong” notion of *the contract*, which requires mutual negotiation and public deliberation to position students as rhetorical agents, that is, as enfranchised constituents of a democratic public sphere (the classroom). While I claim that unilateral protocols cannot qualify as “strong contracts,” I do see a “weak” version worth examining. This weak version of contractual relations emanates from neo-liberal politics. Neo-liberalism, the dominant ethos of both major parties, has a number of familiar markers: consolidation of enterprises into massive multi-nationals (“corporate conglomeration,” “globalization”); outsourcing of work to cheap labor sites anywhere in the world (“race to the bottom”); conversion of work from full-time to contingent and part-time staffing (adjunct abuse in English especially); defunding “public goods” like parks, public schools and public higher education, public housing, and public hospitals, in favor of “private goods” like fees for park use, health clubs and luxury spas, managed health care, vouchers and charters in K-12, condos and gated communities, and subsidized development (“privatization”); increasing inequality as wealth transfers from the public sector to the corporate one and from the bottom 60% of families to the top echelons (“end of the American Dream,” “death of the middle class”). These directions are far along in New York City, where CUNY urban scholar Michael Sorkin said, “There is this accelerating notion that not just parks but many aspects of the public realm have to be self-financing” (Cardwell NJ12). Education, like public parks, has been overtaken by market forces, transforming schooling from a social good into a consumer good (Giroux; Giroux and Giroux). The neo-liberal market agenda is distinctly transforming CUNY,

my university, which is rapidly re-branding itself upscale as an elite place of celebrity faculty and star students, including a privately-financed Macaulay Honors College with lavish benefits denied other faculty and undergraduates, distancing CUNY finally from its historic public mission as the tuition-free “working-class Harvard” and Open Admissions frontier.

Higher education in neo-liberal logic must function as a business in the *consumer marketplace*; colleges and universities are in the business of human capital development (credentialing) with universities producing intellectual property for sale as well. Colleges and universities market degrees and knowledge, which are sold at varying prices depending on the reputation of the institution marketing them (thus, as CUNY re-brands upwards, it can rationalize the upward march of its tuition while approaching corporate sponsors to underwrite some of its graduate students doing research). In modern markets, all exchanges are *monetized*, that is, everything has a price, everything is a commodity or service whose price varies according to the distinction or rarity of the brand. In neo-liberal terms, then, Danielewicz’s and Elbow’s unilateral grading plan might be framed as a seller’s warranty to customers, that is, a “producer contract” or “provider contract” or “supplier contract” to consumers in the market for a college writing course. This warranty metaphor from market relations informed Stanley Fish’s polemic against civic/moral advocacy in teaching, *Save the World on Your Own Time* (2008):

Teachers can, by virtue of their training and expertise, present complex materials in ways that make them accessible to novices. Teachers can also put students in possession of the analytical tools employed by up-to-date researchers in the field. But teachers cannot, except for a serendipity that by definition cannot be counted on, fashion moral character, or inculcate respect for others, or produce citizens of a certain temper. Or, rather, they cannot do these things unless they abandon the responsibilities that belong to them *by contract* in order to take up responsibilities that belong properly to others. But if they do that, they will be practicing *without a license*. . . . When that happens—and unfortunately it does happen—everyone loses. The students lose because they’re not getting *what they paid for*. . . . (14, italics added)

Here, Fish’s metaphors reformulate the banking model in market terms, that is, exemplary customer service means teachers living up to their end of the deal by transferring promised bodies-of-knowledge to students. Fish

of course raises serious questions about education's role in moral or civic development, what is sometimes referred to as the social construction of the self or the social formation of human subjects, as argued by John Dewey and a long line of scholars since (see Patricia Bizzell's rejoinder to Fish in "Composition Studies Saves the World!" and Donald Lazere's "Stanley Fish's Tightrope Act"). For now, I won't address Fish's arguments against advocacy or against democratic education, but will focus simply on the *syllabus* as a contractual relation.

In colleges, a course syllabus authored solely by the teacher and distributed by her on the first day of class is often a requirement posted in faculty handbooks. The well-developed syllabus stands traditionally as good professional practice. It is also an archived document perused by outside accreditors and by inside promotion committees. Between teacher and student, then, in terms following Fish, the syllabus is understood as a contractual guarantee for the professional services the teacher will render in exchange for the tuition that students are paying to the college for the course. The unilateral syllabus and grading contract are thus paper representations or bills of lading specifying goods and services guaranteed to buyers. In such market activity, sellers (teachers) are the sole rhetors enunciating to customers (students) the terms of exchange. As customers, students can exercise consumer agency: they can drop a class if disappointed and apply for a refund. Truly savvy consumers will size up the situation and simply not buy in the first place (not register for the class), taking their business elsewhere (a different class or instructor), shopping around for a better deal. The problem is that market relations such as these tilt the field to sellers. Customers, especially the working-class majority in college, cannot nimbly shop around for a better syllabus, a better grading plan, a better teacher, or even a better college. The cultural, economic, and social capitals needed to be effective consumers in higher education are accumulated mostly by students from affluent homes and affluent school districts. On the whole, then, the neo-liberal turn in American school and society privileges only the strongest consumers, the already-privileged, further empowering the already-powerful. As such, a market is a poor substitute for a constitutional democracy.

Neo-liberalism (the supremacy of market relations, the transfer of wealth from public to private sectors, the displacement of democratic spheres and social services by commercial relations and private contractors) is **not** the logic Danielewicz and Elbow propose for classrooms. They are humanists who address students as whole people, not as market ciphers. Jane

Danielewicz is especially cognizant of the value of public spheres which she highlights in a remarkable essay, "Personal Genres, Public Voices":

. . . through writing personal stories, many public issues have surfaced organically. . . —homophobia, religious fervor, parental divorce, racism, inequalities in education for athletes, interracial dating, immigrant labor conditions, and working mothers, to name a few. . . . [These issues] constitute public discourse because they are told by writers who in using "I" have agency and speak with authority. . . . *Their* stories have revealed, more effectively than any book they might read, the truth of the hard, theoretical claim that identity is constructed by institutions, groups, and other social forces, and that individuals, even in America, are not free to choose or determine their own destinies. (443)

She and Elbow teach for reflective human development. Why, then, bring up neo-liberal logic as one way to understand "weak" contracting that does not negotiate with students? Why should the march of neo-liberalism concern them or us or draw anyone to rethink democratic practice in grading contracts?

I describe the neo-liberal capture of school and society to emphasize why *strong contract relations*, strong democratic practices in classrooms, especially matter now. Market forces are undermining constitutional rights and public spheres of deliberation, information, cooperation, and education. When teachers choose unilateral contracts, we forfeit an opportunity for students to deliberate cooperatively on the terms of their experience, to develop democratic agency, which I claim is foundational for their ability to build a free and just society. Democratic deliberation in classrooms is counter-hegemonic, against the dominant market forces directing society. Negotiating the terms of grading and learning calls out complex civic behaviors. But the negotiating teacher does not stop being a teacher of writing when she becomes an agent of democratic arts. She also must be expert in advancing literate abilities from the cultural capital students bring to class. The challenge of critical-democratic teaching, then, is to advance knowledge, literacy, and civic arts in the same syllabus.

For democratic arts in the classroom, I offer formal mechanisms, including tools for students to contest my grading of the quality of their writing. One tool I announce on the first day is "protest rights," which authorizes students to contest their grades with me. Another mechanism is a

rewrite provision where students can revise any piece as often as they like for a higher grade. A third mechanism is the A-B-C grading proposal sheet (see Appendix), handed out on day one for discussion and negotiation. A fourth tool of power-sharing is what I call the “After-Class Group.” Described extensively in *When Students Have Power*, the ACG is comprised of student volunteers who sit with me immediately after each class to evaluate the session just ended. This provides immediate feedback on my teaching and holds me, the institutional authority, accountable to students every week. It is a democratic sphere within a democratic sphere insofar as it is embedded in and parallel to the whole class process; it is also a site for composing a stakeholder rhetoric, the most intensive discourse for student co-governing of the syllabus. Each ACG member at each meeting reports on the successes and failures of the session just ended, as well as anonymously on other students’ unpublished feelings about the level of work, the course contents, the assignments, and my grading practices. Any change approved in the ACG is presented to the whole class for voting up or down.

Democracy, John Dewey said in *Experience and Education* (1938), is “more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living” (67), that is, a whole way of life. In *Democracy and Education* (1916), he characterized our society as “autocratically managed,” where “it is often a conscious object to prevent the development of freedom and responsibility; a few do the planning and ordering, the others follow directions and are deliberately confined to narrow and prescribed channels” (310). Instead of authority narrowly held by a few, he proposed widely-practiced decision-making in all corners of society, with people framing purposes/policies/plans, then acting on their articulated thoughts, then jointly reflecting on the outcomes of their actions, and then constructing new plans for action based on observed results from prior activities. For Dewey, participatory deliberation was central to both democracy and education:

There is, I think, no point in the philosophy of progressive education which is sounder than its emphasis upon the importance of the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process, just as there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (*Experience* 67)

Dewey hoped democratic education would propel robust democracy in society at large, “a society in which every person shall be occupied in something which makes the lives of others better worth living” (*Democracy* 316). In our field, fortunately, such civic concerns refuse to go away.

Models for *civic and democratizing* practice come to us from colleagues who show what can be done even in the worst of times: Linda Flower’s extraordinary neighborhood project reported in *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement* (2008); Paula Mathieu’s long-term public writing with homeless groups detailed in *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* (2005) and in an essay with Diana George (2009); Jennifer Beech’s superb critical teaching about White identity at a Southern college, “Redneck and Hillbilly Discourses in the Writing Classroom” (2004); Linda Christensen’s inventive social justice curricula in *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* (2000); Mike Rose’s long advocacy for working-class intelligence from *Lives on the Boundary* to *The Mind at Work*, and his recent essay “Writing for the Public” (2010); Donald Lazere’s brilliant text, *Reading and Writing for Civic Literacy* (2005); the ingenious activism of Eileen Schell, Stephen Parks, Harriet Malinowitz, Marc Bousquet, and William Macauley in professional and community contexts; the modeling of how rhetoricians can serve as agents of change, by Ellen Cushman, Susan Wells, and Nancy Welch; the incomparable example of carmen kynard in developing alternative discourse for writing and for teaching. Referring to the emergence of alternative discourse, Patricia Bizzell (2009) summarized the democratizing interest in our field:

Teachers and students alike found that what was needed was not a one-way acculturation process, but a two-way, indeed a multidirectional, process of collaboration and change whereby new forms of discourse were incorporated into academic ways of doing things, and new types of intellectual work were thereby enabled. (178)

Co-authorship in the classroom is an alt/dis for the downward distribution of authority in a time when power and wealth are rushing to the top.

Strong democratic practice, then, through negotiated contracts, is action against the market discipline invading education. But such practice is not a call for polemics in the classroom. In this regard, Danielewicz and Elbow say about me and critical pedagogy colleagues that “They make it clear to students that they are using the classroom to help resist capitalism. They see the classroom as a political arena where differences of power

should be highlighted and negotiated. As they describe their teaching, there are overtones of unrelenting struggle and a sense that conflict is both inevitable and appropriate” (248). Danielewicz and Elbow offer their own brief on capitalism, writing that “Capitalism (in our culture anyway) helps induce citizen compliance by obscuring the unfairness in how institutional power and authority determine success and failure. Whether winner or loser in this so-called meritocracy, you are supposed to accept the outcome as what you “earned”—your just desert” (248). From this critical start, they go on to explain:

While our contracts don’t directly counter the social injustices existing outside the classroom, they do resist the capitalism that seems to permeate the classroom air that students breathe. . . . In short, about behaviors, we take the gloves off; about quality of writing, we give students the power to decide (again up to the grade of B). Thus we see ourselves working very much alongside Shor and his colleagues in fighting a large, societal, and culturally enshrined system that looks fair when it is not.

We acknowledge the ideological dimensions in all pedagogical choices, but we don’t choose to foreground for discussion all the ideological implications in contracts. Our main goal is a system that can help teachers and students of all ideological stripes who want grading to be easier and fairer—who want to think more about writing and less about grades. (249)

Their decency and good sense make me eager to walk alongside them “in fighting a large, culturally-enshrined system that looks fair when it is not.”

Alongside, I’d like to propose one reservation. When Danielewicz and Elbow say that teachers using critical pedagogy “foreground for discussion all the ideological implications in contracts” and make clear to students that we are using the classroom “to help resist capitalism,” they misunderstand my practice. At conferences, workshops, and talks, I address class, race, gender, and homophobia, and do so in published writings. But my discourse among colleagues or in published work is not my discourse in the classroom. I don’t lecture students (except for the rare practice of “the dialogic lecture,” which I described in *Empowering Education*, 1992). I don’t address students about the need to resist capitalism, which would be an abuse of my position. Lecturing or sermonizing students will silence many and encourage others to mimic

the teacher's bombast to win. As for being so "bright." Here is how I put it in *Empowering Education*:

Cultural action in a classroom is not like political action in an organization or a movement. A classroom in a school or college is rarely a self-selected group seeking social change. The mainstream classroom is a *mélange* of students with various motives in an institution structured against their empowerment. Most often, students do not come to class with a transformative agenda. Few are looking for empowering education. Some welcome a challenging democratic process while others resent it; some welcome an unsettling critical dialogue while others reject it. . . . Teachers who treat the classroom as a political meeting can expect stiffened resistance from students as well as more vigilant policing from administrators. . . . Dialogic, democratic teaching rejects sectarian posturing. Students cannot be commanded to take action and cannot be graded on their consciousness. (196-97)

A critical teacher earns the right to propose only if students exercise the right to dispose.

In sum, then, grading is a social practice in a public place, the classroom. Grading is one practice which forms us into the people we become. Because formative practices are also power relations, I would judge all teaching and learning as already-embedded in "unrelenting struggle," while Danielewicz and Elbow see "unrelenting struggle" as the signature of critical pedagogy. I propose, instead, that conflict is the signature of our way of life from which all classrooms emerge and into which they all feed. Critical teachers explicitly question these conflicts in their practice.

Writing in the cold winter of 2010, I learned that 16,500 New York City children are homeless (Brosnahan; Bosman), and food-banks are running low. Not far from shelters packed with children, the biggest investment bank on Wall Street, Goldman Sachs, gave out \$16.2 billion in end-year compensation (Story and Dash; Dash; Bowley). Billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg imposed budget cuts on schools but handed over \$1-billion-plus in subsidies for new stadiums, one for the Yankees, the richest sports franchise in the world (Dwyer). The U.S. Supreme Court just ruled that corporations like the Yankees can spend unlimited funds to influence elections (Liptak; Kirkpatrick; "The Court's Blow to Democracy"). I suggest again, therefore, that unrelenting conflict is the signature of our lifeworld to which critical

pedagogy responds. Somewhere, all children sleep well-fed in their own warm beds, and unrelenting struggle falls happily asleep beside them. I am looking for that place.

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Appendix

Proposed Grading Plans from the Teacher

Please read and suggest any changes you think are needed:

PROPOSED PLAN FOR an A (Excellent) GRADE:

- I. **ONE absence okay** but NOT when main essays due or conference scheduled with teacher. 2nd absence: Grade drops to B+; 3rd: C+; 4th: F. ***If absent, fax or e-mail HW due next day.***
2. ONE lateness okay (6:40 is late).
3. Stay to end of every class except for emergency. If leaving early, tell teacher.
4. All HW handed in when due; all reading done in time for class.
5. A-level quality on all written assignments.
6. A-level word count on HW. (HW will have different word minimums for each grade plan.)
7. A-level participation in classwork and every class discussion (but don't interrupt people or insult anyone).
8. Give useful feedback to other students in editing groups.

PROPOSED PLAN FOR a B (Very Good) GRADE:

- I. **TWO absences okay** but NOT when main essays due or conference scheduled, and **NOT 2 weeks in a row**. 3rd absence: Grade drops to C; 4th: F. ***If absent, fax HW next day as above.***
2. TWO latenesses okay (6:40 is late).
3. Stay to end of every class except for emergency. If leaving early, tell teacher.
4. One HW can be handed in a week late.
5. B-level quality on all written assignments.
6. B-level word count on HW.
7. B-level participation: do all classwork, join in most discussions (but don't interrupt or insult anyone).
8. Give useful feedback to other students in editing groups.

PROPOSED PLAN FOR a C (Average) GRADE:

1. **THREE absences okay but NOT 2 or 3 weeks in a row.** 4th absence: Grade drops to F. When absent, bring HW due to next class.
2. TWO latenesses okay (6:40 is late).
3. Stay to end of every class except for emergency. If leaving early, tell teacher.
4. One HW can be handed in a week late.
5. C-level quality and word count on written assignments.
6. C-level participation: do all classwork; no participation required in class discussion.
7. Give useful feedback to other students in editing groups.

GENERAL ITEMS:

1. **E-Mail teacher for HW when absent: professorshor@comcast.net.**
2. HW done on time can be rewritten for higher grade if re-done in a week.
3. Plus and minus grading used.
4. For all HW: type, proofread, correct errors, put page numbers on all pages, indicate number of words, separate sheets if you use a cut-sheet printer.
5. A-plan students can volunteer for the AFTER-CLASS GROUP which meets after each class for 20-30 minutes. ACG members get a pass on 1 weekly HW.
6. Class rules: no side talking; respect for all; don't leave room during class but wait for 15-minute break; turn off phones/beepers; food/drink okay if you clean up.

Measuring Success in Summer Bridge Programs: Retention Efforts and Basic Writing

Matthew Kilian McCurrie

ABSTRACT: The current economic and political environment has increased the pressure on higher education to deliver education that is cost-effective, standardized, and accessible. Summer bridge programs have traditionally been one of the economical ways to increase the access and retention of non-traditional, first-generation, or at-risk students. Retention efforts like summer bridge programs often require the collaboration of administrators and basic writing instructors who each may possess a different set of values and priorities. This article examines how administrators, basic writing instructors, and students define a successful summer bridge experience and how varying definitions of success influence programmatic revision.

KEYWORDS: retention; summer bridge; basic writing curriculum; student success

Retention experts have developed summer bridge programs as one tool to strengthen students academically and socially in preparation for the challenges of the first year of college. A summer bridge program is a short, intense introduction to college designed to assist underprepared first-year students. Incoming students may be required to successfully complete a summer bridge program as a condition of their being admitted. Or participation in such a program may be recommended to incoming students who show potential but are judged to lack academic or social readiness. Many two-year and four-year colleges as well as universities with a variety of missions offer bridge programs in an attempt to connect students' educational experiences with institutional expectations. The "bridge" may consist of both academic and social components, often with emphases that reflect the overall mission of the institution. Since many programs focus on academic content such as composition, part-time instructors of basic writing often provide valuable help developing and staffing these programs. The reading and writing that students do in summer bridge initiate them into the discourse practices of higher education, and therefore teachers of basic writing should help ensure that bridge programs do not lose sight of the most important aspects of teach-

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ing and learning. The basic writing teacher's role as an advocate for student learning has become especially important as retention policies and practices have been influenced in recent years by politically interested reform efforts that are at odds with the values and priorities of basic writing instructors. President Obama's recent proposal to spend twelve billion dollars to address remedial education demonstrates the values and priorities of policy makers and politicians. Ashley C. Killough reports that much of the money will be directed at new facilities, online education and assessment tools, and the development of standardized national curriculum. Killough represents the predominant attitude of lawmakers towards remedial education by quoting Julie Davis Bell, education program director for the National Council of State Legislators. Bell characterizes remedial education as a "drain" on the state budget, wasting taxpayers' dollars by re-teaching skills and content (Killough). For basic writing teachers this proposal and the attitude it reveals ignores meaningful investments in teaching and learning.

By examining one institution's revision of a summer bridge program and the role of basic writing instructors in this revision, I hope to show how varying notions of success impact programmatic reform. Understanding what success means from various perspectives—administrators in Admissions and Student Affairs concerned with retention and costs; basic writing teachers committed to student learning; and students themselves—will demonstrate how truly complex retention efforts are. The striking differences in the ways administrators, teachers, and especially students define success should be a starting point for efforts to revise any developmental program. By investigating stakeholders' changing notions of success, I also hope to initiate a broader discussion of how educators can energize and promote student learning throughout the curriculum.

SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAMS AND HIGHER ED REFORM

While summer bridge programs have been one popular element in institutional efforts to improve access, retention, and student learning, the 2006 Spellings Commission Report has prompted institutions to re-examine the effectiveness of programs designed to increase access and retention. The underlying theme of the report is that higher education must refocus its energies on meeting the needs of the nation for the twenty-first century. Key findings in the report include higher education's failure to increase the enrollment and retention of minorities and first-generation college students in postsecondary institutions and a low completion rate for those minorities

who do enroll. The report is also critical of the failure of administrators to align high school graduation and college admission and placement requirements.

Summer bridge programs were designed to address some of these concerns, but the criticisms of higher education have cast doubt on the effectiveness of retention programs like the summer bridge. Since the report was published in 2006, many groups like the American Diploma Project (ADP) have expanded their membership. The ADP is a joint effort of Achieve (a partnership between government and business executives), the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (whose mission is promoting school choice), and The Education Trust, which believes “all children will learn at high levels when they are taught to high levels” (“About The Education Trust”). I think there is little doubt that these sponsors bring an agenda to efforts to improve access and retention: the first group’s primary aim appears to be to create workers for the corporate world, the second’s to dismantle traditional public education funding, and the third group believes more rigorous standards (whatever this may mean) will lead to greater access and retention. Through the ADP network “governors, state education officials, postsecondary leaders and business executives work together to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, graduation requirements and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers” (“About Achieve”). In fact, the Common Core Standards agreement promising one set of national education standards for K-12 education is being modeled after the ADP standards with little input from professional organizations like NCTE (the National Council of Teachers of English).

Recent discussions in the press and academe (like those prompted by the Spellings report and ADP) have linked access and retention to standards and the economy. More and more business models applying cost-benefit analyses to value-added products are replacing discussions of students, curriculum, and learning. As a result of these critiques, summer bridge programs have found themselves trying to demonstrate that they are an educationally sound and economical way to help students bridge the gap between high school and college.

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO SUMMER BRIDGE PROGRAM

Enrolling approximately 12,000 students, Columbia College is an urban, four-year college emphasizing the arts and media. With twenty-two buildings spread throughout Chicago’s South Loop, Columbia College

shares its home with the Chicago Symphony, the Art Institute, the Museum Campus, as well as nine independent film festivals, 200 theater groups and venues, thirty-five radio stations, and twenty-five magazines and newspapers. The city inspires and instructs students as they pursue degrees in film, theater, music, and other fields related to the media and arts. As a tuition-driven institution, Columbia College Chicago (CC) has historically focused on issues relating to recruitment, retention, and graduation as measures of its success. According to the Columbia College website, “The Bridge Program provides the opportunity for selected students who have struggled academically to demonstrate they are prepared for college and committed to their own *success* Bridge provides a unique opportunity for students to *succeed* through refining their academic skills, gaining a better understanding of the rigors of college life through academic coursework in reading, writing, and mathematics. Bridge students also learn about the latest research Columbia College faculty are working on and get an early opportunity to experience CC’s campus.” Students who are required to attend The Bridge Program must “*successfully* complete it for admission to Columbia College” (“Summer Bridge,” author’s emphasis). The term “success” appears frequently in our Bridge literature just as it does in the discourses of access and retention, but the definition of success is not always clear. Basic writing teachers need to understand how these varied definitions of success influence student access and retention.

Success as Defined by Administrators in Student Affairs and Financial Services

From the perspective of those who work in student affairs, bridge programs like Columbia College’s succeed when their at-risk students are “made acceptable” to the institution by meeting admissions requirements for basic academic standards. Administrators create statistical models representing students likely to succeed and fail in order to accurately predict retention and graduation rates. The statistical model is then used to identify students who need the support of a summer bridge program. At the end of Columbia College’s four-week bridge program, students should have made visible their academic readiness through their reading and writing as well as their habits and dispositions. Many scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition have looked at the models used by student affairs and asked why, for example, issues of race, class, and gender are never critically examined. A generous admissions policy like Columbia College’s offers some level of

access to higher education to underprepared students, but bridge programs, basic writing programs, and first-year writing have all also been implicated in numerous critiques for obscuring the power of race, class, and gender to affect access and retention. Minority students and first-generation college students are often penalized for not meeting higher education's culturally determined norms for academic success. While administrators in the office of student affairs see themselves as advocates for expanding access and improving retention, the "fix-it" approach they often take in creating many student supports like bridge, writing centers, and disability services leaves unexamined important questions about how race, class, and gender influence teaching and learning.

The retention literature that most influences administrators emphasizes the need for starting at-risk students in motivating and supportive environments as a way to improve what Vincent Tinto calls students' "academic and social integration" (16). Other scholars from various fields argue that Tinto's notion of integration asks minority students to sacrifice their cultural identity for the culture of the academy. Many alternatives to Tinto's theory have been studied, but the findings and conclusions do not present a clear course of action. Some research studying individual program effectiveness, like that of Patrick Velasquez at the University of California San Diego, has shown how an individual bridge program aimed at addressing academic and social/cultural issues can consistently influence retention and student success (3). Kevin Carey's research into graduation rates for African American students led him to Florida State University, where 72% of African American students graduated within five years. Carey found that the high graduation rate was related to the university's CARE program. CARE offers more generous admissions standards for low-income, first-generation students who agree to participate in a comprehensive support program that begins with a summer bridge program where students have time to adjust to college-level course work while living on campus. Less encouraging is Patricia Gandara's meta-research on several studies of individual bridge programs, which found that while overall programs made an impact, bridge students never measured up to better prepared students in either grades or graduation rates (97). In a recent report on the role of state policy in improving student success, Michael Lawrence Collins concludes, among other things, that "summer bridge and other intensive academic readiness programs designed to accelerate progress through developmental education warrant further policy support to test their effectiveness and scalability . . . at eliminating deficiencies in particular subject areas" (13). For example, Texas's

2006 education reform law has provided funds for high school and summer bridge programs, and while “the evidence is not definitive,” Collins argues that these are the types of institutional innovations that states should be supporting (13). The efforts Collins describes are not as comprehensive as the CARE program and his support of these programs seems based solely on their promise to “fix” students quickly and reduce the length of time and money spent in developmental courses. When programs like the ones Collins supports are driven by simplistic assumptions about students’ academic deficiency, the danger is that the academic elements of these programs, like composition courses, are often represented as something that must be quickly and painlessly delivered to students.

Over the past ten years, administrators in Student Affairs and Admissions at Columbia College have also supported the Summer Bridge program as a quick and efficient way to open access and aid in retention. The program was initially a collaboration between Student Affairs, English, and Math. As with other bridge programs, Columbia College’s data show that students who successfully complete Summer Bridge are retained in greater numbers than at-risk students who did not attend Summer Bridge, but as these students move beyond their first semester, retention diminishes and GPAs are lower than non-bridged peers. Data show that Columbia College’s Summer Bridge students do not match the retention rate of non-Bridged students from first semester to second semester, but their 61% retention rate is above the national average for open admissions institutions (“Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates”). Examining the data further, however, reveals that, in fact, the withdrawal rate for Summer Bridge students is significantly higher than non-Bridged peers in the second and third years. Since 2005, 602 students have successfully completed Summer Bridge, but less than 15% remain enrolled in classes at Columbia College beyond their first year. Our institution’s data on the retention and progress of Summer Bridge students echoes the longitudinal research on basic writers conducted by Genevieve Patthey-Chavez and her colleagues in several California community colleges. Their research also found that while some students who started at basic levels in the course work progressed to college-level coursework, many never progressed past the basic course, and those that did never performed as well as other students in their college-level course work (275). Retention scholars acknowledge the difficulty of conducting meaningful assessments when programs for at-risk students are multifaceted with assistance spread throughout the curriculum, but these research findings along with other shifts in Columbia College’s institutional culture and within higher educa-

tion in general have led administrators at Columbia College to question the success of the program.

Even with low retention, administrators had been satisfied and felt successful because the institution maintained an open admissions policy and provided many supports like Summer Bridge to help students at risk for failure or withdrawal, but new realities have challenged this model. Part of this new reality results from a changing financial environment. Since the Summer Bridge program was initiated almost ten years ago, Columbia College's tuition has risen considerably as the options and opportunities for government assistance have been scaled back dramatically. As administrators try to both account for the large increases in tuition and locate more money for needy students, access for students narrows. In researching the problem of student debt, institutional research discovered a link between bad debt and at-risk students. Administrators' concerns over credit card debt, exorbitant interest rates for private loans, and default rates were colliding with the commitment to open access and support programs like Summer Bridge. An honest cost-benefit analysis would have to answer if it were, in fact, ethical to allow students to incur this kind of debt when data showed that they had little chance of remaining in school or completing a degree in five years.

Administrators concluded that a successful Summer Bridge program would not only help students adjust socially and prepare them academically, but it would also provide guidance in applying for financial aid, grants, and scholarships. The tough financial times would also lead administrators to demand a revision of the curriculum to reflect higher standards so that students who do not demonstrate academic or social readiness can be spared from going into debt. Their efforts to make the program more accountable for the students it serves and the resources it consumes may also have sacrificed the college's commitment to open access for all. As vexing as this story is, it is not unusual. Mainstream news outlets as well as sources like *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed* have been reporting and analyzing the debates over access, standards, and retention ever since work began on the renewal of the Higher Education Act in 2003. A reoccurring theme in all these debates has been academic and financial accountability. Margaret Spellings' report in 2006 encouraged many reformers to push for greater fiscal and academic accountability through a common set of high standards and meaningful assessments with more transparency in the ways colleges report their findings.

Large-scale assessments of college students may help legislators and policymakers to more accurately assess student success and failure as they

make funding decisions. As Tom Fox has argued, however, the mastery of new, institutionalized literacy standards may promise students access to college and higher education, but these standards do not make assessing learning any easier. While Columbia College's provost has been advocating greater "rigor," faculty have only a fuzzy sense of what this means in terms of our standards. Instructors for the Summer Bridge program create its rigor through locally developed curriculum, pedagogy, standards, and assessments, but administrators funding bridge programs often favor the presumed rigor found in large-scale, standardized curriculum and assessments. Many advocates of increased access and support for at-risk students argue that institutionalized standards articulated from the top down often fail students. Too often these standards resemble a kind of conveyor-belt-to-success or one-size-fits-all model of standards and success. Avoiding the conveyor belt means administrators must collaborate with program directors, teachers, and students to contextualize and frame standards.

In "Class Dismissed," Mary Soliday supports Tom Fox's critique of standards by describing her efforts at CUNY to advance a more accessible basic writing curriculum. Her experiences show that collaborating with administrators and teachers to expand ideas of access and learning beyond notions of the quick fix demands effort and attention, not just to teaching, but also to context (783). Even private institutions like Columbia College, which feel political pressures less directly, have narrowed the path for first-generation, working class, and minority students. By not offering the necessary financial assistance and by uncritically following calls for standardization, private colleges like Columbia risk straying from their mission to educate the widest spectrum of students. The work of teachers/scholars like Soliday and Fox shows that reformers must prioritize understanding their context, especially shifts in administrative attitudes and priorities that inevitably also affect teachers, students, and learning. At Columbia College administrators in Admissions, Student Affairs, and Financial Services wanted a Summer Bridge program that was more "cost effective" in order to quickly and cheaply "remediate students." They concluded that students who could not succeed in Summer Bridge were not academically ready for college or prepared to take on the financial responsibility this entails.

Success as Defined by Basic Writing Teachers

As the picture of access and retention becomes more complex, teachers may be tempted to think their role in promoting student success is mini-

mal, but opening access and improving retention ultimately depends on their efforts. For the basic writing instructors charged with developing and maintaining the English curriculum for Columbia College's Summer Bridge program, the goal had always been to assist students in developing academic literacy while also using this literacy to enrich the students' cultural experiences. Achieving these goals, however, has meant understanding the changing, larger context for teaching and learning at Columbia College. Since over half of the Bridge students are minorities and many come from a troubled, urban public school system, Bridge teachers use students' experiences as opportunities for reading and writing in personally meaningful ways. The changing demographics of Columbia College's typical first-year student, however, brought into stronger relief the academic and social otherness of students enrolled in Bridge. The general profile of the first-year student has become more traditional: a white, eighteen-year-old from a middle-class suburban high school living in campus housing. These students are more academically prepared and significantly more skilled in navigating the culture of school than Bridge students. Surveys of students and parents show that one of the reasons that students select Columbia College is because it offers an urban, multicultural environment. But less prepared, less affluent, minority students are paradoxically becoming more invisible on campus. Increased changes in the first-year demographic prompted some Summer Bridge instructors to begin rethinking what they were helping students transition into and what kind of reading and writing would be best to construct a bridge between mostly urban, minority students and the more middle-class, white first-year students.

Almost ten years ago Columbia College's English curriculum for Bridge had been influenced by scholarship in retention and developmental education. The course goals for summer 2000 encouraged teachers to "use reading and writing to generate interest in and motivation for college learning," and "create a community of matriculating students to ease the transition from high school to college." As these goals suggest, the course was designed with attention to the many nonacademic problems students face when they enter college. In an attempt to develop the whole student, the Bridge English course put more stress on affective issues related to motivation than a typical first-year writing course would in the hopes of retaining students. As Patricia Smittle explains in "Principles of Effective Teaching," many college teachers, especially those with "graduate school mentalities," fail to acknowledge their role in motivating students, but in developmental education this element is crucial to student success (4). In order to motivate students, the Bridge

English course might, for example, have included reading *Finding Fish* (Fisher and Rivas) or *Stand and Deliver* (Edwards) and writing a series of short reflections that allowed students to think about and make use of their background knowledge. Since the Bridge English course was not credit bearing or connected to the first-year curriculum, students were not expected to write for other genres or audiences, and homework was never assigned. Basic writing instructors believed students benefited because they had a fairly quick and easy experience of success in school by connecting their own experiences to their reading and sharing these reflections with their classmates. Teachers felt the reflective writing enabled students to see the relevance of what they were studying and how the course could connect to their personal learning goals. In "Classrooms as Communities: Exploring the Educational Character of Student Persistence," Vincent Tinto concludes that feelings of belonging and classroom connection are significant factors in retaining students, but these experiences are not present in most content-based courses (620). This developmental approach, with its emphasis on helping students feel successful and connected to a community, also assumed that more motivated students would behave more independently with increased self-regulation. Instructors felt that by learning more about the lives and circumstances of the students they taught, they also benefited. Knowledge of students' backgrounds was critical for instructors as they helped students build a bridge from their home cultures to academic culture.

While the Bridge English course was also constructed to introduce students to college level reading and writing, the way the course had been constructed by individual teachers and experienced by the students did not reflect Columbia College's reading and writing goals. For example, because the course had evolved to emphasize a more general, developmental education perspective, it did not include learning about or practicing strategies for reading critically or writing that included workshops for drafting and revising. Those teaching in the program thought that the curriculum would motivate students, increase their confidence, and prepare them academically for the first year of college. This curriculum was successful to the extent that students did gain some confidence and opportunities to read and write. Our data indicate that over half of the Summer Bridge students who enrolled in the college were able to pass their first-semester writing course. This represented one measure of success. However, in a survey of Bridge English instructors conducted in 2005, many expressed the belief that the curriculum did offer students beneficial reading and writing experiences, but in other significant ways the overall curriculum was not giving students

the information and experiences they needed to make wise choices beyond their Summer Bridge experience. This survey was given to twelve Bridge English instructors with at least five years of experience teaching Bridge English. They were asked to write a brief response to two questions: What are the most effective elements of the Bridge curriculum and what revisions would improve the curriculum? Of the ten teachers who responded, each praised some element of the curriculum that helped students find personal connections to the reading and writing activities. Four teachers responded that reading *Finding Fish* and watching the film helped students discuss the obstacles and challenges they must overcome. Three teachers felt that in-class freewriting activities helped students develop confidence and fluency. Three teachers recalled students reading their poems at the closing ceremony as the strongest element of the curriculum.

Despite the great strides students had made, teachers in the survey also concluded that the Bridge English course did not sufficiently introduce students to the kinds of reading and writing expected in college. Of the ten teachers responding, all called for revisions to the curriculum that tied it more closely to the curriculum in first-year writing. Five instructors suggested including reading and writing workshops. Three others called for student work to be collected and graded through the creation of a portfolio, and two instructors suggested integrating more technology into the curriculum. Generally, instructors reasoned that if the challenges of entering college were never realistically addressed, students could not make informed decisions about whether to enroll and commit themselves to college. As student populations and campuses change, the curriculum for a program like Summer Bridge also needs to be revised to provide students with opportunities for both social and academic integration.

In 2005 and 2006, a small group of Bridge English instructors began to revise elements of the course, piloting some of these ideas in their own classes. In the spring of 2006, instructors and administrators at Columbia College came together to create a new vision and curriculum for Summer Bridge. The most significant change was to envision Bridge English as part of the first-year writing curriculum. The new course goals reflect a deeper understanding of the program's connection to the first-year writing curriculum. According to the revised statement of goals and outcomes, by the end of the four-week Summer Bridge Program, students who successfully complete the English segment should be able to:

Measuring Success in Summer Bridge Programs

1. Become fully engaged with the college experience at CC, connecting the academic, social, and artistic aspects of critical and cultural inquiry with their own personal scholastic and career goals.
2. Use multiple strategies to read and comprehend substantial texts.
3. Use multiple strategies to produce substantial written texts.

As these goals suggest, Bridge English was no longer constructed as supplemental to the first-year curriculum or as narrowly focused on affect and motivation. The new curriculum was designed to be an introduction to college, not a make-up for a bad or disappointing high school experience. Each class of twelve students had a lead teacher, co-teacher, and writing center consultant. For each 90-minute class, students worked to accomplish these goals through reading and writing workshops, individual conferences, and the creation of a class blog to question, extend, and connect the other aspects of Summer Bridge. In a typical class, students might begin by working in reading groups organized along the lines of Harvey Daniels' reading circles. Divided into three groups based on their selections, students might be reading Chuck Palahniuk's *Stranger Than Fiction*; Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*; or Jon Krakauer's *Into the Wild*. To connect students' reading experiences and provide a different context for writing, students might then move into writing on the class blog. Each student takes a turn working with the teacher or co-teacher to develop two questions for the class blog. These questions ask students to think about the larger, more global issues or themes in their reading. For example, students might respond to a question about the importance of place for each author, or they might respond to a question about the writer's attitude towards authority. Even though students are only reading one text, through the blog they are able to learn about the ideas and experiences of other students. For the remainder of the class, students might work in their writers' workshop, which is introduced to students using the ideas of Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* as modeled by the teacher and co-teacher. For homework, students might be asked to compose responses to their gallery visits, lectures, or reading. In regular mini-conferences with the writing center consultant and teachers, students develop ideas for a five-page essay that they workshop in class.

To successfully complete Bridge English, students must submit their polished essay along with their drafting materials. The essay and other student work including blog posts, responses, and written elements of peer

reviews and reading groups form the basis of evaluation. Students' classroom engagement is also evaluated in weekly progress reports. In order to pass and be allowed to register for fall classes, students must demonstrate multiple strategies for drafting and revising as well as sustained effort in other elements of the class.

Summer Bridge meets Monday through Friday, and each day, in addition to the 90-minute English class, students also have a 90-minute math class. Each afternoon students may attend a lecture, visit a museum, gallery or other cultural venue, and participate in small-group discussions of these experiences led by the co-teacher. The lectures are a way to provide Summer Bridge students with an introduction to Columbia College faculty and their research/teaching interests and to present material that instructors could incorporate into the English and math classes. Every week students also visit one of the galleries on campus or one of the city's cultural venues. Co-teachers lead these tours, which are structured to ensure that each visit is focused and related to the curriculum.

The revised Summer Bridge curriculum is engaging and challenging. Students who participate in this program come to understand what the demands of college reading and writing will be and the kinds of support they will need to be successful. Anyone familiar with the work of scholars like Patricia Bizzell can see that the theoretical grounding for this course goes back to the 1980s. Bizzell argued against pedagogical models that ignored the political dimension of the basic writing classroom and blamed students for their deficiencies. Instead, she asserted that basic writing teachers must "not prejudge those unequally prepared" but work to ensure students' full participation in their education and the life of the university (112). Her argument is still relevant today because this vision for basic writing continues to be controversial for higher education and the general public. This model did not emerge from the "one-stop-fix-it" approach that focuses on models of student deficiency. With this curriculum, basic writing teachers have tried to create an idealized, full-immersion into college writing: as tough, challenging, and rewarding a four-week curriculum as could be provided. Mike Rose has captured the aspirations of the teachers who created this curriculum when he says "successful remedial programs set high standards, are focused on inquiry and problem-solving in a substantial curriculum, use pedagogy that is supportive and interactive, draw on a variety of techniques and approaches, [and] are in line with students' goals" ("College Needs to Re-Mediate Remediation"). As Rose and many others committed to basic writing have observed, the opportunity we offer these students says something

important about our idea of education and learning: people can change, grow, transform, and do not need to be constantly labeled and re-labeled based on past experiences or missed opportunities.

The revised curriculum for Bridge English reflects a new awareness among teachers and administrators that all of the program's energy cannot be devoted to simply getting students through the program and admitted to the college. In the past, Summer Bridge teachers have felt that they might have relied too much on the college's first-year basic writing course and other supports to help a Bridge student who seemed to be borderline. Now, because of reduced financial aid and changing social and academic expectations, the program and its teachers think about access differently. We must question the generosity of our impulse to give students the benefit of the doubt when assessing their readiness, and instead we must consider the potential financial and personal damage to students who are not likely to succeed at the college. The re-design has also given teachers the opportunity to think critically about what they considered a vibrant college writing course, one that connects the arts and academic literacy. Teachers re-designing the curriculum believed that it would not be successful if it merely gave students opportunities to connect these elements: they had to create a curriculum that energized this exchange. Lectures, museum visits, and a discussion group were added to the schedule to create opportunities for students and teachers to practice the wide range of creative and critical skills needed for success in college while making them more comfortable with the social aspects of college. All of these experiences were integrated into the composition class through reading, writing, speaking, and listening activities that connected our students' lives with the academic skills of formulating ideas and developing them for academic audiences.

Instructors expressed their enthusiasm for the new curriculum during weekly faculty meetings held during the 2006 Summer Bridge session. The only difficulties they experienced with the new curriculum were related to using the reading groups and class blog, but those issues were addressed by offering instructors more pedagogical support. A more descriptive measure of the success of this revised program can be seen in the 2006 and 2007 Bridge Survey results. In 2006, the Summer Bridge program enrolled 84 students. About 70%, or 59 students, responded to the survey. In 2007, the Summer Bridge program enrolled 90 students. About 83%, or 75 students, responded to the surveys. These data suggest the positive influence the revised curriculum is having on students' experiences.

| | 2006 (N=59) | | 2007 (N=75) | |
|--|-------------------------|-------------|------------------------|-------------|
| English Composition | Mean¹ | Dev. | Mean | Dev. |
| Books/Materials Helped Me Learn | 3.83 | 0.94 | 4.53 | 0.72 |
| Forums Interesting/Good Use of Time | 4.10 | 0.99 | 4.11 | 0.62 |
| Writing Helped Prepare Me for College | 4.43 | 0.60 | 4.61 | 0.85 |
| Reading Helped Prepare Me for College | 4.04 | 0.82 | 4.25 | 0.92 |
| Mathematical Explorations | | | | |
| Materials Helped Me Learn | 3.32 | 1.04 | 3.48 | 1.05 |
| In-Class Activities Good Use of Time | 2.91 | 1.03 | 4.13 | 1.23 |
| Homework/Quizzes Helped Prepare Me for College | 3.29 | 1.19 | 4.15 | 1.14 |
| Other Bridge Activities | | | | |
| Lectures Interesting/Good Use of Time | 3.26 | 1.04 | 3.37 | 0.78 |
| Post-Lecture Activities Interesting/Good Use of Time | 3.71 | 1.19 | 4.23 | 0.77 |
| Museum Visits Interesting/Good Use of Time | 4.16 | 0.83 | 4.48 | 0.69 |
| Salons Interesting/Good Use of Time | 3.72 | 1.11 | 4.05 | 0.88 |
| Program Summary: The Bridge Program... | | | | |
| Improved My Writing | 4.21 | 0.73 | 4.60 | 0.92 |
| Improved My Reading | 3.48 | 1.19 | 4.00 | 0.96 |
| Improved My Understanding of Mathematics | 3.05 | 1.15 | 3.47 | 0.65 |
| Increased My Understanding of College-level Expectations | 4.25 | 0.81 | 4.41 | 0.76 |
| Improved My Understanding of Columbia College | 4.30 | 0.80 | 4.51 | 0.86 |
| Improved My Understanding of the South Loop (region of the city) | 3.84 | 1.08 | 4.04 | 0.79 |
| Was a Positive Experience for Me | 4.39 | 0.68 | 4.69 | 0.68 |

¹5-Point Likert Scale: 5 = Agree Strongly; 4 = Agree; 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Disagree Strongly

The mostly positive response of students at the end of Bridge suggests that some of the goals of the program are being met. In the survey items included under English Composition, the highest scoring were those that asked students to rank how the course prepared them for college reading and writing. The mean for both of these items was over 4.0 with a low standard deviation, indicating that data points were very close to the same value and not widely dispersed. These data suggest that students felt they had been challenged in Bridge English and felt prepared to begin a college writing course. Student responses were less definitive when ranking specific elements in the curriculum. In evaluating their reading selection and use of online forums, students were approaching agreement that it helped their learning, but the mean in the 2006 survey was below 4.0 and the standard deviation was somewhat higher. These data may reflect the text students selected to read. The choices included *Into the Wild* (Krakauer), *Stranger Than Fiction: True Stories* (Palahniuk), or *The Freedom Writers Diary* (Gruwell and the Freedom Writers). Some students and teachers reported difficulty navigating between the narrow focus of the reading groups and the more global focus found in the online forum, but the 2007 survey indicates that students agreed the books and materials were helpful. The generally higher rankings for items in the 2007 survey indicate instructors' efforts to revise and improve elements like the reading groups.

The summary findings also showed that students felt prepared for college writing, but the highest rated items in the summary sections may also be the most significant: increased understanding of college-level expectations and an overall positive experience. Past program evaluations of Summer Bridge suggested that while most students reported a positive experience, they were less confident in their readiness to do college-level work. Focus groups of Bridge students interviewed in 2005 repeatedly referred to the work they did in their English course as "review," or a "refresher." When asked what they expected their college writing course to be like, most students responded that they expected it to be more difficult with longer assignments. The data from the 2006 and 2007 surveys suggest that more explicit goals and challenging standards for Summer Bridge influence students' perceptions of their own learning and their overall confidence. The revised Summer Bridge program also resulted in more students not completing or failing the program so that while the overall experience for students improved, a growing attrition rate during the program leaves unresolved questions about access and gate-keeping. The college's commitment to offering students access to higher education exists in tension with the reality that some students

will not be ready for college, even after a bridge program. To simply admit students who are not prepared may lead to expensive failures with lasting negative consequences.

In the revised Summer Bridge program, we do not subject students to the overly general, de-contextualized standards that basic writing scholars have objected to, but we are concerned that our four-week bridge program may be too short to adequately determine a student's readiness for college. Since the stakes are high, teachers and students can feel intense pressure, but Bridge English instructors know that they may encounter these students in their basic writing classes in the fall so being realistic in assessing them during Summer Bridge is a crucial first step in retention. The overall retention rate of first-year students at Columbia College from the fall to spring semester has been consistent the last two years at about 84%. The retention rate for Summer Bridge students has improved from 61% in 2004 and 2005 but is still lower at 68% than overall first-year retention. Given the complexities of studying retention, it is difficult to claim one program causes an increase in student retention, but summer bridge programs can play an important role in improving the learning experiences of at-risk students when they give prospective students a challenging college experience that prepares them for real college-level work and thus builds confidence.

Success as Defined by Students

The most significant and perhaps perplexing part of revising this curriculum has been trying to understand what success means for students. Usually, student success is defined by teachers or administrators. In a Bridge English course I taught in 2006, a student came up to me after class and said that the biggest difference Bridge made was introducing her to teachers who were hard but believed she could be successful. Those two qualities: challenging and optimistic, have remained in my thoughts as I have seen them often echoed in the student evaluations that I have reviewed over the past four years. Many of the young people who enter Summer Bridge report that being treated like a student, like a reader and writer, was a first step for them in defining success and an important aspect of the Summer Bridge program. Part of the value in the Bridge program has always seemed to be its ability to draw in students who felt alienated or silenced in high school or in their lives generally and give them a space to re-position themselves as successful students. Students felt successful in the revised Bridge curriculum when they were able to use their own language, select their own texts, and pursue

their own interests. Students also identified success with writing and thinking that considered multiple perspectives like those found in writing and reading workshops. In summing up what I learned from reading responses to our course evaluations, I think these students see the college, especially one so committed to the arts, as a resource to help them build fulfilling lives. Our Summer Bridge students don't think about Columbia College as a place where they come to be made acceptable to institutionalized notions of literacy or to interrogate their race, class, or gender from the perspective of the teacher. They never mastered the culture of schooling and have little interest in doing so unless they see it as a skill or disposition with currency outside the college class. In 2006 some students reported suffering through some lectures, for example, because they weren't compelling or current enough to appeal to their interests. Teachers' first impulse when they saw students dozing off, talking, texting, and slipping out the back door was to confront them with their bad behavior. While teachers were explicit with students about the ways successful students engage with lectures, I wondered how willing we teachers were to re-think some of the key expectations of schooling and success, like sitting still through a class or lecture.

In research conducted with adult learners, Joseph Donaldson and his co-authors found that students made clear distinctions between success in college and success in learning ("Adult Undergraduate Students: How Do They Define Success?"). Students equated success in college with earning high grades, but they described successful learning as a feeling of owning the knowledge in a way that is personally relevant. In another study conducted by Anne M. Dean and William G. Camp, undergraduate students also tended to define success less in academic terms and more in terms of general life satisfaction ("Defining and Achieving Student Success: University Faculty and Students' Perspectives"). The students in this study believed happiness and satisfaction were the true measures of success, and academic achievement was less significant in defining a successful college career. These studies highlight the differences that can exist between teachers, students, and administrators when they define success. These differing perceptions account for some of the difficulty we experience in retention efforts like summer bridge programs. The plans, programs, and goals of teachers and administrators may only coincidentally intersect with what students want. Administrators feel successful when their programs advance the school's mission and use resources responsibly. Teachers feel successful when students enter the academic discourse community. According to the research, however, students are interested in personal and professional fulfillment.

Programming and academic discourse may only represent a means to an end for some students, and for basic writers the means often seem disconnected from their desired goal.

Over the last two years I have tried to keep in contact with the Bridge students I taught, and one of them, Brian, was good enough to reply to an e-mail I sent him. I asked for his reflections about Bridge from his perspective now as a successful student looking to graduate in a year. Brian replied:

Bridge was successful for me mostly because it helped me see that college could keep me close to what I love—music. After touring with my band for over a year, I knew I needed to try a different path. The classes really aren't that hard once you make that decision. (Smith)

Another student, Monica, who did not make it past her first semester, replied to my e-mail:

Bridge was hard, but it was good. You made us read *Into the Wild* and I really hated that guy, but I couldn't stop thinking about him. I loved writing and talking about why with you and the other students. Once I started classes though, all I saw was the hard, N. Stuff piled up and I got sick of it. . . . I still feel that I succeeded in Bridge. I remember the *Into the Wild*, the Lagston Hughes poem about his first day in college and our blog. I feel like some day I will go to college and get my degree but right now its not for me. (Jones)

Both Brian and Monica suggest that success cannot be limited to institutional goals for retention and graduation. As worthy as those goals are, students like Brian and Monica are not unlike the students in Dean and Camp's study or Donaldson's research. Brian and Monica see success related to living a life they deem fulfilling. For Brian, performing music and learning about the music business has been a good fit. For Monica, finding that "hard but good" fit she experienced in Summer Bridge has been more difficult, but her e-mail suggests she still considers herself successful. She's been able to identify for herself what she expects from school, and someday she believes she will find the right fit for her.

Teachers of basic writing will not be surprised by the reactions of Monica or Brian. However, the voices of students and basic writing instructors provide an important perspective, one that is often lost or ignored by

policy makers, politicians, and administrators. By using the advice and feedback offered by instructors and students, the revised Bridge course better reflects the goals of our curriculum. As a result, students, teachers, and administrators feel that the Summer Bridge program more fully represents the Columbia College experience.

CONCLUSION

These changing definitions of success developed by administrators, instructors, and students can intersect, overlap, and oppose one another. As a professional working both in Composition Studies and English Education, I can see the importance of understanding the discourse on retention at my institution since it can directly affect curriculum, but the changing discourse on retention affects the future of the whole English department: its courses and programs; its teachers and students. If we, teachers and administrators, want students to view success differently, we may need to re-examine the value premises of our own arguments for academic literacy and be willing to involve ourselves in the places where success gets defined for young people, like K-12 schooling, churches, clubs, jobs, and the many other places where young people form their attitudes about success. Waiting until young people like Brian and Monica get to our bridge programs may be too little, too late for some. Realizing that some students will continue to withdraw or leave college regardless of the programs we create is humbling. This fact should, however, prompt us to consider how the courses we teach serve all the students: the ones who stay and graduate and the ones who leave. Recently, our professional conversations have been full of talk about transferability: how the skills we teach and the experiences we provide in our writing course transfer to other courses in the curriculum. If we allow that transferability must also include how our courses can transfer skills and experiences beyond the academy to the lives our students live, we can begin to develop a more comprehensive definition of success. The efficacy of open access programs like Summer Bridge demands that our teaching and learning be opened to the larger community to encourage the broadest possible participation in our efforts to pursue success.

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The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates

Peter Adams, Sarah Gearhart, Robert Miller,
and Anne Roberts

ABSTRACT: This article reports on the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), a new model of basic writing that has produced dramatic successes for the basic writing program at the Community College of Baltimore County. Borrowing from mainstreaming programs, studio courses, fast track programs, and learning communities, ALP, for four consecutive semesters, has doubled the number of basic writers who succeed in passing first-year composition, has cut the attrition rate for these students in half, has allowed them to accomplish this in half the time, and has done it all at slightly less cost per successful student than traditional basic writing courses.

KEYWORDS: acceleration; basic writing; mainstreaming; developmental writing; developmental education

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2001, Mary Soliday, then at CUNY's City College, observed that in the early days of open admissions at the City University of New York, two groups favored basic writing courses for quite different reasons. The first group saw such courses as paths to success, courses that would help students who were weak in writing to conform to the conventions of the academy. The second group supported basic writing for quite a different reason, seeing it as a gate to keep unqualified students out of college-level courses and, thereby, maintain standards in those courses ("Ideologies" 57-58). Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu have referred to these odd bedfellows as "the binary of political activism and academic excellence" (*Representing* 14).

Peter Adams, Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County, has taught developmental writing there for more than thirty years. But for his involvement in the Accelerated Learning Program, he would have retired several years ago. He is former chair of the Conference on Basic Writing and has published three writing texts. **Sarah Gearhart** is an Instructor in the English Department at CCBC Essex. In her previous lives, she has been a ghostwriter, bookseller, and editor. **Robert Miller** is an Assistant Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County. He has taught at City College of San Francisco, Arizona State University, and several other schools. He has also taught overseas, in the former Yugoslavia, as a Fulbright Lecturer. **Anne Loomis Roberts** is an Assistant Professor of English at Community College of Baltimore County. She has taught writing and classical languages for the past fifteen years, spanning nearly all the grades from elementary school to college.

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In the 1990s, at what was then Essex Community College and is now the Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC), Peter Adams, then coordinator of the writing program, worried about the program. He recognized that an effective basic writing program might serve as a gate for students until they were ready to succeed in first-year composition and a path to college success as soon as they were ready. But he wanted to make sure that these developmental courses were more path than gate, leading students to success rather than barring them from it.

In Adams's first attempt to evaluate the program, he used data he had been compiling on an Apple IIe computer for four years. He had entered the placement results and grades in every writing course for students assessed since Fall of 1988. Using the 863 students who took the upper-level developmental writing course, ENGL 052, in academic year 1988-1989 as the cohort he would study, Adams calculated the pass rate for ENGL 052 as well as the pass rate for students who passed that course and took first-year composition (ENGL 101) within four years. Charts 1 and 2 display these data.

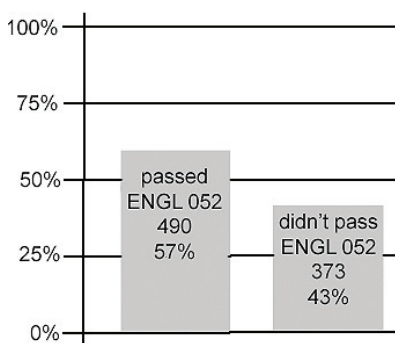


Chart 1. Success Rates for Students Who Took ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

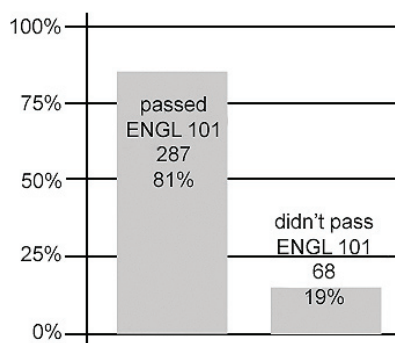


Chart 2. Success Rates for Students Who Took ENGL 101 after Passing ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

The pass rate of 57% in the developmental course didn't look too bad, and the whopping 81% pass rate in ENGL 101 was even higher than the rate for students placed directly into the college-level course. At first glance, it appeared that our basic writing course was doing a good job. In fact, developmental programs in writing, reading, and math have often pointed to such data as evidence that traditional approaches are working. As reassuring as these data looked, however, Adams worried that somehow they didn't tell the whole story, and when he undertook a more detailed, longitudinal study, he learned that his worry was justified.

Looking at success rates for one course at a time masks the true picture. When Adams looked at the longitudinal experience of students who attempted ENGL 052 and ENGL 101, he discovered an alarming situation. Two-thirds of the students who attempted ENGL 052 never passed ENGL 101. The problem was not that basic writers were attempting first-year composition and failing; the problem was that they were giving up before they ever reached that course, a fact hidden when he had simply looked at the pass rates for the small number of students who did make it into regular composition.

Chart 3 presents the number and percentage of students who passed each milestone during the four years from 1988 to 1992.

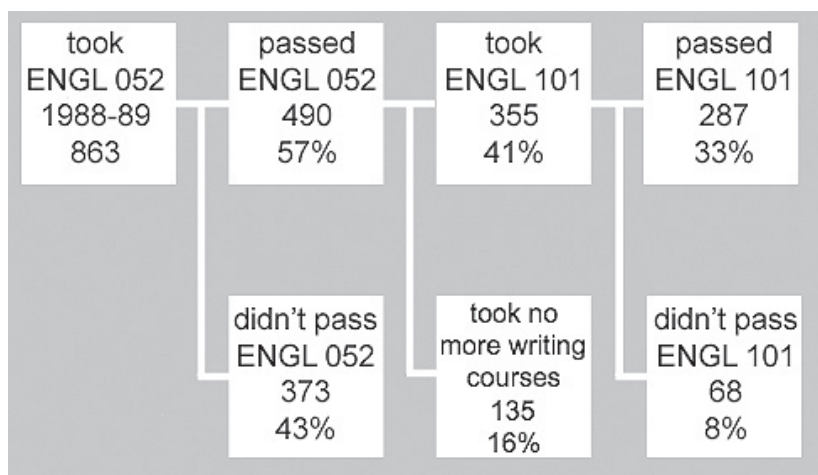


Chart 3. Longitudinal Data on Students Who Took ENGL 052 in 1988-1989

The students represented in Chart 3, like those in Charts 1 and 2, were followed for four years. When we say 57% passed ENGL 052, we mean they passed within four years, not necessarily the first time they attempted the course. A significant number took the course more than once before passing. When we say 43% didn't pass ENGL 052, we mean they didn't pass within four years; many of them attempted the course more than once.

As Chart 3 reveals, instead of the 81% success rate that we saw in Chart 2, only about a third of students who began in ENGL 052 succeeded in passing ENGL 101. Our basic writing course was a path to success for only one-third of the students enrolled; for the other two-thirds, it appears to have been a locked gate.

We have come to conceptualize the situation represented in this chart as a pipeline that students must pass through to succeed. And we have concluded that the longer the pipeline, the more likely there will be “leakage” from it—in other words, the more likely students will drop out before passing first-year composition. Because the data base we compiled in the early 1990s included data only for writing courses, we had no way of knowing whether these students dropped out of the college altogether, but we did know when they stopped taking writing courses. Further, since they could not achieve any degree or certificate at the college without passing ENGL 101, we knew that they didn’t achieve any credential. Although our original intention in collecting these statistics was to help us enforce our placement system, we soon learned that it also helped us evaluate our writing program by allowing us to calculate the percentage of students who succeeded in passing each milestone in the program.

Then, in Fall of 1992, it became useful in another way. At that time, Peter Adams was chairing the Conference on Basic Writing (CBW), which led to his organizing the fourth national conference on basic writing, to be held at the University of Maryland in October of 1992. Things were moving along smoothly; David Bartholomae had agreed to give the keynote address, registrations were rolling in, and it looked like our carefully crafted budget was going to be adequate. And then, several weeks before the conference, Adams realized that he had a serious problem. Although the conference officially began on Friday morning, the organizers had planned an optional dinner on Thursday evening for those who arrived early . . . and more than a hundred people had signed up for that dinner. But we had not arranged nor budgeted for a dinner speaker.

Having already committed every cent in the budget, Adams realized that he would have to speak at the dinner since he couldn’t afford to pay an outside speaker. He decided to report on the data his college had been collecting and analyzing on its basic writing students. The only problem was that the data were so discouraging that it hardly seemed appropriate for the opening session at a national basic writing conference.

For several days, Adams tried to think of a positive spin he could put on these data . . . without success. Finally, he fixed on the idea of suggesting some positive action basic writing instructors could take in response to the discouraging implications of the data. What would happen, Adams asked, if instead of isolating basic writers in developmental courses, we could mainstream them directly into first-year composition, while also providing appropriate support to help them succeed?

Most of Adams's talk that Thursday night was about how using a database to evaluate his college's writing program had revealed quite low success rates for the developmental program; only the last ten minutes or so were devoted to his very tentative idea that the success rate for basic writers might improve if they were "mainstreamed" into first-year composition. The lengthy and heated discussion that followed this talk was completely focused on the "mainstreaming" idea. Finally, with most of the audience still suffering from jet lag, the conference participants more or less agreed to disagree, and adjourned for the evening.

Adams knew the title of David Bartholomae's keynote address scheduled for the next morning, "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum," but he had no idea what Bartholomae was actually going to talk about. As he sat in the audience listening, an odd feeling crept over him. He heard Bartholomae suggest that

... in the name of sympathy and empowerment, we have once again produced the "other" who is the incomplete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow, way back then in the 1970s. ("Tidy House" 18)

David Bartholomae, starting from a very different place, was arriving at a conclusion similar to the one suggested by Adams the evening before. At that point, Bartholomae and Adams were probably the only two people in the room who didn't think this coincidence had been carefully planned. The fact that articles representing their two talks ended up next to each other in the Spring 1993 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (Bartholomae, "Tidy House"; Adams, "Basic Writing Reconsidered") only heightened everyone's assumption that they had conspired to question the essential nature of basic writing at a conference on basic writing. They hadn't, as they both insist to this day, despite the fact that few have ever believed them.

In the years since that 1992 conference, a number of institutions have adopted various versions of the mainstreaming approach that was suggested at the conference. Arizona State University, with leadership from Greg Glau, developed the well-known "stretch" model, which allows developmental students to be mainstreamed directly into first-year composition, but into a version that is "stretched out" over two semesters ("*Stretch* at 10"). Quinnipiac University pioneered the "intensive" model, which has basic writers take a version of first-year composition that meets five hours a week instead of three

(Segall 38-47) A few years later, Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson devised the “studio” approach at the University of South Carolina. In this model, students in first-year composition and sometimes other writing courses can also sign up for a one-hour-per-week studio section. There they meet with students from other classes to talk about “essays in progress” (6-14).

Many other schools developed variations on these approaches in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Our college was not one of these. Instead we endured a turbulent dozen or so years as three independent colleges were merged into one mega-college: the Community College of Baltimore County. In the process, fierce battles were fought, one chancellor received a vote of no confidence, tenure was abolished, and many faculty members devoted much of their energy to “aligning” the programs, courses, and policies of the three schools that had merged. By 2005, the worst of these struggles were over, and faculty were ready to return to more productive work. In the Fall of 2006, the English Department of the newly merged Community College of Baltimore County turned to the question of the low success rates in our basic writing courses.

In the meantime, many others were noticing the very low success rates for developmental programs nationwide. In a national study, Tom Bailey of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University, found similarly alarming leakage in all developmental courses, including reading and math:

How many students complete the sequences of developmental courses to which they are referred? The first conclusion to note is that many simply never enroll in developmental classes in the first place. In the Achieving the Dream sample, 21 percent of all students referred to developmental math education and 33 percent of students referred to developmental reading do not enroll in any developmental course within three years.

Of those students referred to remediation, how many actually complete their full developmental sequences? Within three years of their initial assessment, about 42 percent of those referred to developmental reading in the Achieving the Dream sample complete their full sequence, but this accounts for two-thirds of those who actually *enroll* in at least one developmental reading course. These numbers are worse for math—only 31 percent of those referred to developmental math complete their sequence. (4-5)

In “Outcomes of Remediation,” Hunter Boylan and Patrick Saxon have observed that “[a]n unknown number but perhaps as many as 40% of those taking remedial courses do not complete the courses, and consequently, do not complete remediation within one year.” Reviewing large-scale studies from Minnesota, Maryland, and Texas, Boylan and Saxon conclude that “[t]he results of all these studies were fairly consistent. In summary, about 80% of those who completed remediation with a C or better passed their first college-level course in English or mathematics.” Just as we at Essex Community College discovered when we began to look at longitudinal data, success rates for individual courses conceal a serious problem, for “[i]t should be noted . . . that not all of those who pass remedial courses actually took college-level courses in comparable subject areas. An Illinois study, for instance, reported that only 64% of those who completed remedial English and reading in the Fall of 1996 actually completed their first college-level courses in those subjects within a year.”

So the problem we had discovered on the local level in 1992 appears to mirror similar problems nationally: too many students simply leak out of the pipeline of the required writing sequence.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACCELERATED LEARNING PROGRAM

At an English Department meeting in January of 2007, several CCBC faculty members proposed that we pilot some form of mainstreaming to see if we could improve the success rates of our basic writing students. After considering several different models, we settled on what we now call the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) as having the greatest potential. While we were not among the pioneering schools that developed mainstreaming approaches in the 1990s, we have benefited greatly from those programs. ALP has borrowed the best features of existing mainstreaming approaches, added some features from studios and learning communities, and developed several new features of our own.

Of course, the program we eventually developed reflected the realities of our existing approach to teaching writing. The writing sequence at CCBC includes two levels of basic writing and two levels of college composition. To graduate, students must pass any required basic writing courses and then pass two semesters of college composition, both of which are writing courses. Only the higher-level college composition course satisfies the composition graduation requirement when students transfer to most four-year schools.

Here's how ALP works. The program is available, on a voluntary basis, to all students whose placement indicates they need our upper-level basic writing course. Placement is determined at CCBC by the Accuplacer exam. Students may retest once and may also appeal by a writing sample. In addition, all sections of writing courses require students to write a diagnostic essay the first week of classes; when this essay indicates students should be in a different level course, they are advised, but not required, to move to that course.

A developmental student who volunteers for ALP registers directly for a designated section of ENGL 101, where he or she joins seven other developmental students and twelve students whose placement is ENGL 101. Apart from the inclusion of the eight ALP students, this is a regular, three-credit section of ENGL 101, meeting three hours a week for one semester. We think the fact that the basic writers are in a class with twelve students who are stronger writers, and perhaps more accomplished students, is an important feature of ALP because these 101-level students frequently serve as role models for the basic writers.

Equally important, we avoid the sometimes stigmatizing and often demoralizing effects of segregating basic writers into sections designated as just for them by fully integrating them into a college-level course and then providing additional support in the form of a second course. The eight developmental students in every ALP section of ENGL 101 also take what we call a companion course with the same instructor who teaches them in ENGL 101. In Maryland, state regulations bar the awarding of credit toward graduation for "remedial" courses; since this companion course is currently conceived of as a basic writing course (remedial, by the state's terminology), students may not receive credit for it. The companion course meets for three hours a week for one semester. In this class, which meets immediately after the 101 section, the instructor provides additional support to help the students succeed in composition. The class may begin with questions that arose in the earlier class. Other typical activities include brainstorming for the next essay in 101, reviewing drafts of a paper, or discussing common problems in finding a topic to write about. Frequently, instructors ask students to write short papers that will serve as scaffolding for the next essay or work with them on grammar or punctuation problems common to the group.

Gaining Administrative Support

After the English Department agreed it wanted to pilot ALP, meetings were set up with the Dean of Developmental Education and the Vice President

for Instruction. At first, the Vice President declared the college simply could not afford to fund classes with only eight students, but a last-minute compromise was suggested: faculty could teach the companion course that met three hours a week with only eight students for two credits of load instead of three. The Vice President agreed, reluctantly. But would the faculty?

As it turns out, they did. After all, the companion course would have only eight students, and, while it would meet three hours a week, it would not really require a separate preparation. It's more like a workshop for the ENGL 101 class. Most importantly, as faculty began teaching the course, they found that ALP was often the most rewarding teaching they had ever done. As Sandra Grady, one of the earliest ALP instructors declared at the end of the first semester, "That was the best teaching experience I've ever had," and Professor Grady has been teaching more than thirty years. All of us who have taught ALP courses have found having a class small enough so that we can get to know each student and pay attention to their individual needs provides a kind of satisfaction that is rarely possible with classes of twenty or more. Peter Adams, Robert Miller, and Anne Roberts, co-authors of this article, began teaching in that first semester, and Sarah Gearhart joined us in the second semester.

RESULTS

As of the summer of 2009, the Community College of Baltimore County has offered thirty sections of ALP over two years to almost 240 students. The results, while preliminary, are extremely encouraging.

Chart 4 displays the results for a comparison group of students who took the *traditional* upper-level basic writing course in Fall of 2007. The data represent the results at the end of the Spring semester of 2009, so all of these students have had four semesters to pass their writing courses. Note that 21% of the original group have never passed ENGL 052. While it looks as though this group of students "failed" the course, in fact, many of them didn't actually "fail." For a variety of reasons, they simply gave up and stopped coming to class. Some became discouraged; others became overwhelmed. For some, events outside school demanded too much of them; for others, their personal lives required their attention. For these reasons, it would not be accurate to say that 21% failed. In addition, the 19% who passed ENGL 052 but didn't attempt ENGL 101 have clearly dropped out. This attrition rate of 40% is of great concern, as it was when we studied developmental students back in 1992.

The Accelerated Learning Program: Throwing Open the Gates

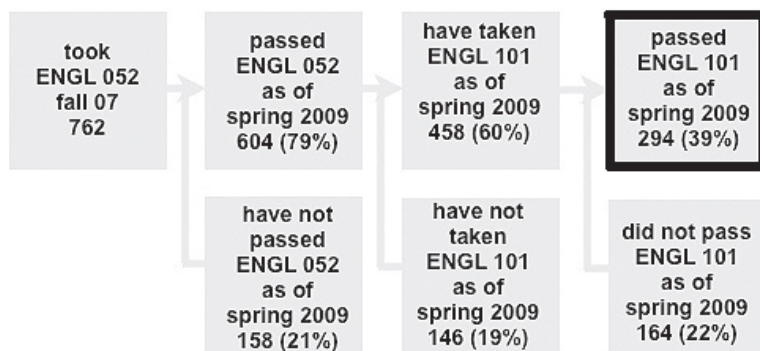


Chart 4: Success Rates of Students Who Took Traditional ENGL052 in Fall 2007

Chart 5 presents the results for all the students who have taken ALP since the program began in Fall 2007, up to and including the Spring semester of 2009. While the first semester's cohort of 40 students has had four semesters to complete their writing courses, the remaining students have had fewer semesters. The most recent group, approximately 80 students who took ALP in Spring of 2009, has had only one semester. Despite this shorter time for most of the students, the ALP success rates are significantly higher and the drop-out rates significantly lower than for the comparison group. The boxes outlined in black in Charts 4 and 5 show the success rates for the two groups.

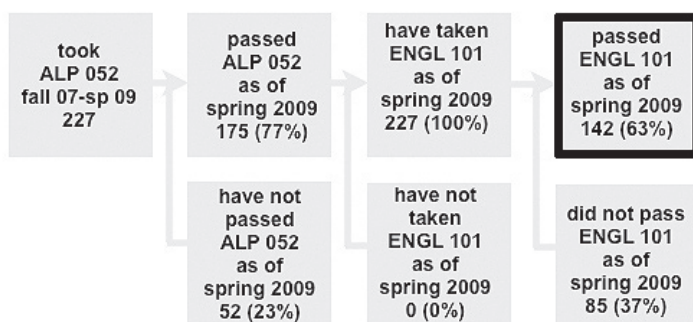


Chart 5: Success Rates of Students Who Took ALP052 from Fall 2007 to Spring 2008

WHY ALP WORKS

As we came to realize that ALP was producing striking improvement in student success, we began to speculate about why. What was it about ALP

that contributed to those successes? We have identified eight features of ALP that we think are responsible for most of the gains in retention and success. Half of these are features we borrowed from earlier innovative programs.

Mainstreaming

Over the past fifteen years, a number of schools like Arizona State University, SUNY New Paltz, and City College (CUNY) have adopted models that mainstream basic writers into credit-bearing writing classes (see Glau; Rigolino and Freely; Soliday and Gleason). We think mainstreaming has a powerful psychological effect for basic writers. When students placed into basic writing are allowed to go immediately into first-year composition, their sense that they are excluded from the real college, that they are stigmatized as weak writers, and that they may not be “college material” is greatly reduced.

Cohort Learning

Each ALP student takes two courses, ENGL 101 and its companion course, in a cohort with seven other basic writers and the same instructor, an arrangement that owes much to the concept of learning communities. Vincent Tinto has argued that leaving college often “arises from isolation, specifically from the absence of sufficient contact between the individual [student] and other members of the social and academic communities of the college.” He adds the observation that “membership in at least one supportive community, whatever its relationship to the center, may be sufficient to insure continued persistence” (55-61). As Faith Gabelnick and her co-authors have reported, learning communities, in which students take two or more courses with the same cohort of students, provide just such a community: “Learning community students value knowing other students in classes and realize an immediate sense of belonging” (67). Rebecca Mlynarczyk and Marcia Babbitt have observed similar results at Kingsborough Community College (71-89). In the ALP program, among the eight basic writers who spend six hours a week together in a cohort with the same instructor, we are finding similar increases in bonding and attachment to the college. The students begin to look out for each other in a variety of ways—calling to check on students who miss class, offering each other rides to campus, and, most importantly, helping each other to understand difficult concepts

they encounter in their academic work.

Small Class Size

We have found the small class size of the companion course, only eight students, to be an essential feature of ALP. We arrived at the conclusion that the sections would have to be small by reading the work of Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson, who developed the concept of studios, “where a small group of students . . . meet frequently and regularly . . . to bring to the table the assignments they are working on for a writing course” (7). We knew we wanted the ALP students to comprise less than half the students in the 101 sections, where class size at our school is twenty, so we proposed a class size of eight for the companion course. We have concluded that many of the benefits of ALP derive from this small class size. Students are less prone to behavior problems when they are in a small group. The bonding mentioned earlier is more likely to occur. And the conversation can be focused on each individual’s questions much more easily.

Contextual Learning

Both learning communities and studio courses credit some of their success to the fact that students are learning about writing in a meaningful context. Grego and Thompson point out that the conversations in studio sessions often explore the context for a writing assignment or for a teacher’s comments on a student’s essay (140-42). Similarly, learning communities, especially those that match a writing course with a “content course” such as history or psychology, tap into the advantages of contextual learning. The writing instruction seems more meaningful to the students because it is immediately applicable in the content course. In ALP, the ENGL 101 class provides a meaningful context for the work students do in the companion course. In more traditional basic writing classes, instructors frequently find themselves saying, “Now pay attention. This will be very helpful when you get to first-year composition.” We don’t have to say this in the ALP classes; our students are already in first-year composition. What we do in the companion course is immediately useful in the essays the students are writing in ENGL 101.

Acceleration

In the longitudinal studies we conducted, we discovered that many students never completed the sequence of required writing courses because they gave up at some point in the process. And the longer the course sequence, the more opportunities there are for such “giving up.” Most startling to us was the nearly 20% of our students who actually passed the traditional basic writing course, but then gave up without ever even attempting ENGL 101. We have concluded that the longer the “pipeline” through which our basic writers must move before completing their writing sequence, the greater the chances they will give up and “leak” out of the pipeline. ALP shortens the pipeline for basic writers by allowing them to take their developmental writing and first-year composition courses in the same semester. This acceleration is one of the features we developed at the Community College of Baltimore County.

Heterogeneous Grouping

Another feature of ALP that was developed by CCBC is heterogeneous grouping. In most of the earlier mainstreaming models, basic writers were placed in first-year composition, but in sections populated only by other basic writers. Each group of eight ALP students takes ENGL 101 in a section with twelve 101-level writers who can serve as role models both for writing and for successful student behavior. We also find that the stigmatizing and demoralizing effects of placement in a course designed just for basic writers are greatly reduced by this feature.

Attention to Behavioral Issues

A third locally developed feature of ALP is our conscious and deliberate attention to behavioral issues. We believe that not understanding the kinds of behavior that lead to success in college is a major factor in some basic writers’ lack of success. We work hard to help our students understand the type of behavior that will maximize their chances for success in college. For example, many of our basic writers have taken on more responsibilities than they can possibly fulfill. We ask students to create a timeline that accounts for everything they must do in a given week, an exercise that sometimes leads them to make changes in their lives to increase their chances for success. Some students discover they need to cut back on their hours at work; others realize that they have registered for too many courses.

Behavioral problems often result from attitudinal problems. In class we talk about what we call the “high school attitude” toward education: the attitude that it isn’t “cool” to appear interested in class, to be seen taking notes or raising one’s hand to answer a question. Using humor and sometimes even a little mockery, we lead students to realize that the “high school attitude” toward “coolness” isn’t “cool” in college.

And then there are the recurring problems with cell phones and Facebook, with arriving late or falling asleep, with not buying the required text or not completing the required assignment. ALP instructors are aware that these kinds of issues will need more conscious attention, and the small class size makes such attention possible.

Attention to Life Problems

A fourth feature of ALP we developed at CCBC is to encourage instructors to pay deliberate attention to problems in the students’ lives outside of school. Many students who give up on our courses do so, not because of any difficulty with the material in the course but, primarily, because of circumstances in their lives outside of college. They are evicted from their apartment, their children become ill, their boss insists they work more hours, they find themselves in abusive relationships, or they experience some other overwhelming life problem. ALP faculty recognize the need to address these life issues. They find time to ask students how their lives are going. They frequently refer students to sources of outside support for such concerns as financial aid, health issues, family problems, and legal problems. When several students in the same class have a similar problem, instead of sending them to see an advisor, we have the advisor visit the class. We have assembled a roster of resource people who are willing to visit our classes and work with students on life problems.

COSTS

Regardless of its success rates, ALP may appear to be prohibitively expensive, as our Vice President for Instruction had initially thought. But careful analysis reveals that ALP actually costs less per *successful student* than more traditional approaches.

To see how this could be the case, consider a hypothetical group of 1,000 students who show up in September needing developmental writing. Under the traditional model, we would need to run 50 sections of basic writing to accommodate them (our class size for writing courses is 20). Since the actual

cost of these 50 sections would vary depending on the salary levels of the instructors, we'll make this calculation in terms of faculty credit hours (FCHs). Since faculty are compensated with 3 FCHs for teaching our upper-level basic writing course, the cost for those 1,000 students would be 150 FCHs.

Because only 60% of students taking our traditional upper-level basic writing course ever take ENGL 101, we would need to accommodate just 600 students in ENGL 101, which would require 30 sections. At 3 FCHs per section, the ENGL 101 costs for 1,000 students would be 90 FCHs, and the total for ENGL 052 and 101 would be 240 FCHs.

To accommodate those same 1,000 students in an ALP program would require 125 sections (class size for the ALP classes is 8). Because of the small class size and because the companion course is not really a separate preparation, faculty receive 2, not 3, FCHs for a section of the companion course. The 125 sections would, therefore, cost the college 250 FCHs.

Since all 1,000 students would take ENGL 101, we would need 50 sections to accommodate all 1,000 students. At 3 FCHs per section, the 101 portion of the ALP program would cost 150 FCHs, and so the total cost for the ALP model would be 400 FCHs.

Before deciding which model is more expensive, however, it is not enough to consider just the costs; it is also necessary to consider the outcomes. Under the traditional model, 39%, or 390 students, will pass ENGL 101. Under ALP, 63%, or 630 students, will pass ENGL 101. As a result, the cost *per successful student* for the traditional model (390 students divided by 240 FCHs) would be 1.625 FCHs. For the ALP model, the cost (630 students divided by 400 FCHs) would be 1.575 FCHs per successful student. ALP actually costs less per successful student than the traditional model.

In sum, for basic writers, ALP doubles the success rate, halves the attrition rate, does it in half the time (one semester instead of two), and costs slightly less per successful student. When these data are presented to administrators, the case for adopting the ALP model is compelling.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

ALP has produced very promising results. For each of the past four semesters, it has resulted in success rates at least double those for our traditional basic writing course. Having achieved these preliminary successes, our plans for the future include continued and expanded study of the program, improvements in the program to make it even more effective, scaling up of

ALP at CCBC to 40 sections per semester in Fall 2010 and to approximately 70 sections per semester in Fall 2011, and dissemination of ALP to other colleges.

First, we want to insure the validity of our preliminary data, which has indicated such dramatic improvement in success rates for ALP students over students in the traditional program. We are concerned about two possible threats to the validity of that data: the possibility that students who volunteer for ALP are not representative of developmental writing students at CCBC, and the possibility of instructor bias in grading the ALP students in ENGL 101.

To address the possibility that students who volunteer for ALP are not a representative sample, we have formed a partnership with the Community College Research Center at Columbia University. CCRC is conducting multivariate analyses of the effects of participating in ALP on student pass rates in English 101 as well as on other measures, including rates of persistence and passing college-level courses in subjects other than English. This study will make use of “matched pairs,” selecting a student who has taken the traditional ENGL 052 to be matched with an ALP student on eleven variables: race, gender, age, financial aid status, full- or part-time status, prior college credits, grades in prior college courses, placement scores, program, high school attended, and high school diploma status.

We are also concerned about the possibility of unconscious instructor bias in favor of the ALP students. The English Department has developed rubrics that describe a passing essay for the basic writing course and for ENGL 101. However, considering the close relationships that naturally develop between ALP faculty and the eight ALP students with whom they meet for six hours a week, it is possible that occasionally instructors unconsciously pass an ALP student in ENGL 101 whose performance was slightly below passing level. To investigate this possible bias, we will be following the ALP students into ENGL 102, the next course in the writing sequence, comparing their performance there with that of students who took traditional ENGL 052. ENGL 102 instructors will not have formed any kind of bond with the students and, in fact, will not even know that they were in ALP.

Also, we will be conducting a blind, holistic scoring of essays from ENGL 101 classes to compare the quality of the writing of ALP students who passed the course with the quality of the writing of 101-level students. If we determine through this study that some ALP students are being passed in ENGL 101 even though their performance is below the passing level, we will

investigate other ways of making the pass/fail decision for these sections. We may, for example, decide to have final portfolios graded by someone other than the student's own instructor.

In addition to investigating any threats to the validity of our data on success rates of ALP students in ENGL 101, we will be investigating whether higher percentages of ALP students, compared to students who take the traditional basic writing course, continue to reach various milestones such as accumulating 15, 30, and 45 credits, one-year persistence, completion of certificate and degree programs, and successful transfer to four-year institutions.

Finally, we want to attempt to understand exactly what it is about ALP that leads to its successes and which features contribute most to the improved performance of ALP students. Using pre- and post-semester surveys, focus groups, and faculty reports, we will attempt to determine which of the eight features of ALP contribute most to student success.

We are fairly confident ALP works well in our context, so we look forward to learning if it works as well in at other colleges. To this end, we organized a conference on acceleration in June of 2009. Forty-one faculty from twenty-one different schools attended. After a spirited two-day conversation with lots of give and take and very good questions from participants, four schools agreed to pilot ALP on their campuses in the coming year: CUNY's Kingsborough Community College (New York), El Paso Community College (Texas), Patrick Henry Community College (Virginia), and Gateway Technical and Community College (Kentucky). We eagerly await their results. In addition, we are hopeful that other schools will adopt the ALP model in coming years. On June 23-25, 2010, we will be holding an expanded version of the Conference on Acceleration at CCBC (see the News and Announcements section in this issue for details).

ALP has benefited greatly from the work our colleagues at other institutions have done since that Conference on Basic Writing back in 1992. We have developed a model for developmental writing that shows great promise, and we are certain that others will improve on our model in coming years.

We are also convinced that this work is extremely important given the present climate for higher education. The country has begun to pay attention to basic writing and developmental education more broadly in ways both negative and positive. There is a growing realization that the programs we began so hopefully during those early days of open admissions have not performed nearly as well as we had hoped. Some would conclude from these low success rates that our budgets should be reduced or even that our programs

should be eliminated. Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner observe that we are working in “an educational environment in which basic writing and remedial programs are under attack” (8). Mary Soliday points out that “Outside the academy, critics of remediation waved the red flag of declining standards and literacy crisis to justify the need to downsize, privatize, and effectively restratify higher education. By blaming remedial programs for a constellation of educational woes, from budget crisis to low retention rates and falling standards, the critics of remediation practiced an effective politics of agency.” That is, they attributed the blame for these growing problems to the developmental students and “the ‘expensive’ programs designed to meet their ‘special’ needs” (*Politics of Remediation* 106). In 2005, Bridget Terry Long, writing in *National CrossTalk*, observed that “this debate about the merits of investing in remediation, which has an estimated annual cost in the billions, has intensified in recent years. There are many questions about whether remediation should be offered in colleges at all.” Long goes on to take a close look at how we determine the success of “remedial” programs and to demonstrate that with appropriate measures—comparing students with similar economic and educational backgrounds—remedial programs do indeed seem to help students do better in college.

Despite the positive implications of more nuanced research such as that conducted by Long, the criticism of basic writing programs is not likely to diminish in the near future. And in the field of basic writing itself the realization that many basic writing programs are falling short of the kind of results we had hoped for in the early days—a realization that first surfaced at the basic writing conference in Baltimore in 1992—is leading to the development of improved and innovative programs. In “Challenge and Opportunity: Rethinking the Role and Function of Developmental Education in the Community College,” Tom Bailey notes that there has been “a dramatic expansion in experimentation with new approaches.” Major funding agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, are beginning to see developmental education as an area of interest. However, if we are not able to improve our success rates, if we continue to serve as a gate, barring large numbers of students from receiving a college education, those who argue for a reduction or elimination of basic writing could prevail. That is why it is so important at this crucial time that we look for ways to make basic writing more effective. The very survival of our programs could be at stake. But there is an even more important reason for continuing to improve our effectiveness: the success of our programs is of life-changing importance to our students.

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Writing Center Philosophy and the End of Basic Writing: Motivation at the Site of Remediation and Discovery

Heather M. Robinson

ABSTRACT: At York College, many of the students fit the linguistic and educational profile of basic writers, and yet there is no remediation built into the curriculum. It falls to the writing center, then, to provide our students with the academic support that they need in order to move beyond being classified as developmental writers. In this article, I examine how our students are using the York College Writing Center, with a view to determining how a lower level of academic preparedness influences the kind of services that students seek and the kind of academic trajectory they follow. I suggest that the progress that we see these students making over the course of the semester can be best understood as a move from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation, rather than from lower- to higher-order concerns that is the professed goal of writing center philosophy. This article has implications for how writing centers can best serve less prepared students, especially in light of the national movement to end remediation, as well as for the ways in which we measure student success.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; writing centers; motivation; remediation; standards; measuring student success

Discussions of writing center philosophy and practice often focus on how writing centers are best positioned in a college community, on finding a balance between serving students and faculty effectively while maintaining an independent pedagogical mission, and on tutoring pedagogy and tutor roles. Additionally, the field includes discussions of how tutors and writing centers may best serve non-traditional student populations on campus: for example, effective strategies for working with graduate students (Shamoon and Burns); the needs of students in disciplinary courses (Kiedaisch and Dinitz); and tutoring for students who speak English as a second language (Bruce and Rafoth). But there are still few discussions of how basic writers use writing centers, and how writing centers may best serve basic writers, despite

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the continuing visibility of this group since the days of Open Admissions (Shaughnessy, *Errors*; Lu; Soliday). Therefore, my central questions are the following: How do basic writers, and by extension, ESL and international students, use writing centers? What can a writing center do to initiate these students into, and prepare them for, the culture of college level writing? The core tension I identify resides in the potential conflict between having writing centers be the one place on campus where we do remediation head-on, and current writing center philosophy, which encourages us to focus primarily on “higher-order” concerns (North; Lunsford).

The challenge for any writing center—as for any classroom teacher—is to help students move beyond surface concerns, and beyond satisfying the instructor’s explicitly stated demands, to an understanding of the content and the student’s own relationship to it. Writing centers are also charged with helping students to see writing as a process, and to see themselves as members of discourse communities (North; Pemberton). There is a general resistance, on the other hand, to working with students at the sentence-level: such issues are classified as “lower-order concerns,” and they are understood to contravene what has become the writing center manifesto, which says that we work with the writer, not the writing, and that non-directive tutoring is essential for a successful tutoring session (North; Brooks; but see Carino, “Power,” and Shamoon and Burns for critiques of this position). I propose that the bifurcation that prevails in writing instruction between sentence-level work and knowledge-making, or lower-order and higher-order concerns, limits the ways in which we engage with basic writers, because it separates out language and content. Rather, our goal in writing centers instead could be to move students towards being more intrinsically motivated (Deci and Ryan; Ryan and Deci); to have them write and make knowledge through their writing however they can, in order to achieve this intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation, as defined by Ryan and Deci, concerns the reasons why an individual chooses to engage in a particular behavior. The more associated with the individual’s sense of self the behavior is, or the higher the level of inherent pleasure an individual takes in the behavior, the higher the level of intrinsic motivation. Focusing on increasing intrinsic motivation in the writing center, then, helps students across the board, whether they are labeled remedial or not, and does not inherently require us to focus on any one type of writing activity over any other. I suggest that looking at students’ development along an extrinsic-to-intrinsic motivation continuum is a better way to measure achievement in the work of basic writers because it allows us to keep working on language issues throughout a semester, rather than

trying to steer students away from them in our quest to drive them towards higher-order writing activities.

The students at York College, one of the senior colleges of the City University of New York, and where I serve as faculty director of the writing center, have many of the characteristics of basic writers, despite the fact that there are no remedial or developmental classes in the curriculum since the end of remediation at CUNY in 1999. At York, then, it falls to agencies outside the curriculum to provide support for these students. The findings that I present suggest that our writing center does real work as a site of remediation. This in itself is unsurprising, given that many writing centers were founded specifically to provide support for the students who were admitted to college under Open Admissions programs in the 1960s (Carino, "Open Admissions"; Grimm; Soliday). However, if remediation *only* occurs in the writing center, the center's usefulness is limited to those students who seek out assistance there. The good news, as my data will show, is that our writing center's biggest attraction—help with grammar, spelling, and punctuation—seems to be getting the students not only to come to the writing center in the first place, but it also entices them back, at which point they begin to move from a simple focus on these elements into a more holistic approach to the writing process, thus moving them from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. While these students are as much at risk as any other student of becoming dependent on their tutors, my data suggest that, rather than fostering dependency, these students' work at the writing center helps them move towards independence as writers within the scope of the semester.¹ We see that while there is definitely a tension in the status of the writing center as a site of both discovery and remediation, we can sometimes use the latter to get to the former. The writing center thus provides us with important insights into the effects of the end of remediation on basic writers.

BASIC WRITERS AT THE WRITING CENTER

Since the term "basic writer" was introduced into the composition literature in the 1970s, there has been a real difficulty in defining which students fit into the category. Paul Kei Matsuda cites Lynn Quitman Troyka's, and Linda Adler-Kassner and Gregory Glau's work on articulating the issues behind these difficulties, showing that the very diversity of the population to whom the label has been applied has made settling on a definition problematic (67). Authors such as Mina Shaughnessy (*Errors*) and David Bartholomae treat basic writing as being at heart a language issue: basic

writers write in a language that is *an* English, but is not the English of the academy. Remediation for basic writing thus often focuses on the sentence level, shaping the sentences that the students use to express their ideas into something that looks more like the language that the students' instructors expect. Of course, basic writing is not only a language issue: as Min-Zhan Lu and others after her have shown, being a basic writer is also about identity, and feeling marginal in the academic culture. Basic writers have to struggle with the consequences of working to adopt a new language, which, as Lu suggests, forces them into a position where they run the risk of becoming disconnected from their home cultures.

One key point of agreement seems to be that as well as referring to students who are native speakers of non-standard varieties of English, the term should include students with different language backgrounds, whom I will refer to as ESL and international students. Patricia Friedrich has discussed extensively the relationships and disconnects between monolingual basic writers and two groups that she calls resident ESL and international ESL writers, providing an overview of the work of several other authors in her article "Assessing the Needs of Linguistically-Diverse First-Year Students." In particular, she shows that while both of these groups of writers are comfortable using spoken English in everyday contexts, they have difficulties with knowing when to shift from an oral to a written register, and are unfamiliar with the discourse about grammar and language which students in non-remedial courses might know. Additionally, these students often have weaker study skills, or are less familiar with heuristics and strategies that contribute to successful writing, and may have struggled to progress through the educational system (Friedrich 119). What emerges, then, as the unifying characteristic of students who might fit the "basic writer" description is that all of these students have had a non-traditional preparation for college, either through a high school education in the U.S. that was not sufficient for college-level work, through a pre-college education in a different language and educational system, or through a hiatus between the time that the students finished their secondary education and when they started college. A functional definition of basic writer, especially for this article, is one that says that at the core of being a basic writer lies a difference in the student's cultural, linguistic and/or educational background (Matsuda 68) which makes it difficult for that student to enter into the mainstream academic discourse.

From a writing center perspective, both the language and identity facets of being classified as a basic writer are important. Writing centers have long been spaces of negotiating identities, of tutors helping students to shape

the voice they want to adopt in a paper, and reconciling that voice with their “real” or “authentic” voice (Shafer; Boquet). But I suggest this is not only an issue for basic writers: even the strongest writers coming to the writing center have to do some negotiating of the boundaries between their academic voice and their “authentic” voice. Furthermore, ESL and international student writers are well known to struggle with reconciling the stylistic demands of American academic prose with cultural values belonging to their home countries (Ramanathan and Atkinson). These struggles belong, to some extent, to all student populations: being a student means participating in such negotiations. Writing centers provide a venue to see these negotiations in action, more so than the classroom because of the one-on-one interactions that they afford. In their writing center sessions, students can express their reservations about their assignments, and express doubts and frustrations as well as enthusiasm about what they are asked to do, to someone who, while still employed by the college and part of the formal educational loop, can give sympathy and one-on-one attention. What students express in this environment, where they can be comparatively candid about their own skill levels and their attitudes to the work that they have been assigned, can tell us a lot about where they see themselves on the academic totem pole.

However, the possibility of the writing center is often at odds with the reality. Students are often directed to the writing center by their instructor to attend to their writing problems. As Nancy Grimm shows, a tendency to rely on the writing center for help with language issues is complicated in terms of writing center philosophy: writing centers over the past forty years have struggled to get beyond being identified on campus—by students and faculty—as places where students should go to be cured of their linguistic deficiencies. From this perspective, being sent to the writing center can seem like punishment for not yet knowing how to “do college.” Such an environment is not often one where students who are already academically vulnerable will move from remediation to knowledge-making easily. At its best, a writing center “provides an academic setting that equalizes opportunity and eliminates the stigma of labeling students” (Mohr 1). However, often the reality is that the only reason that students come to writing centers is because of a label that they have been assigned by a teacher. What the York College Writing Center shows us is how students use the writing center to respond to this labeling, even when the institution itself does not recognize its students as needing remedial support. It is to an examination of this dichotomy that we turn now.

BASIC WRITING AND THE YORK COLLEGE WRITING CENTER

The York College Writing Center was established first as a Writing Lab intended specifically to serve those students in English department and composition courses. Open Admissions at the senior colleges of the City University ended in 1999, at which time it was decided that all students who needed remediation were to attend a community college until they reached the “freshman” level of skills (see Soliday for a detailed discussion of the end of remediation at the City University of New York). With the establishment of the University’s Writing Across the Curriculum program in 1999, which coincided—though not at all by coincidence—with the end of remediation, York’s Writing Lab was expanded into a full-service writing center, intended to serve students in writing-intensive courses across the disciplines as well as those in composition courses. However, it is almost just as well known that, while remediation formally ended at that time, students who would be considered basic writers in the old system did not disappear, even when the courses which had previously been offered to compensate for their lack of preparation did. Now, ten years after the end of remediation, only about half of the students who use the writing center come for help with work in their composition classes. In Spring 2009, about 20% of the students were in freshman composition and 26% in our junior-level research writing course; the rest were in courses across the disciplines. Indeed, the number of students who come to the writing center from classes in the disciplines has been steadily rising: data showing all academic sessions (including summer and winter sessions) indicate a modest increase in the number of WAC-focused tutoring sessions offered. In general, too, we see a gradual increase from year to year in the number of students seeking help at the writing center, which we might attribute to a growing recognition, among students, of the need for extra-curricular writing support. We can thus see that the writing center serves the population that it was expanded to serve: the students in writing-intensive classes who are not necessarily receiving any formalized writing instruction in those classrooms, remedial or otherwise.

The York College Writing Center, like writing centers across the country post-remediation, is therefore a busy place. We provide tutoring in almost two thousand sessions a semester, and between four- and five-hundred individual students visit the center over the course of a semester. Students can attend one scheduled fifty-minute session per week, as well one twenty-five-to thirty-minute drop-in session. The center is staffed by fifteen to eighteen tutors in any given year; these are mostly students or former students of the

college. The staff comes from a variety of linguistic and ethnic backgrounds: they are the children of immigrants from the English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, as well as native New Yorkers who have spoken English all their lives. In other words, the staff looks and sounds like York's students, whom I will describe more fully in the next paragraph. What differentiates the tutors is that they have all proven themselves to be successful students according to the metrics of language and academic culture. Elizabeth Boquet describes writing center tutors as often being exemplars of academic culture, students who have "internalized the ideology of the institution" (124). As problematic as this may be—and these problems have been discussed at length by Lu, Boquet, and Soliday—many of the students who come to the writing center are interested in becoming like their tutors, in that they want to internalize the discourse of this academic culture, to no longer be "other."

Many of York College's students are classic examples of students who would be classified as basic writers: they are linguistically diverse, and they are less academically well prepared than other college students. A few statistics about the students enrolled in Fall 2008 give an idea of their linguistic diversity. From the *York College Fact Book*, we see that just under 54% of students enrolled in Fall 2008 identify as native speakers of English, with over thirty-one other languages spoken at the college. Furthermore, almost 24.7% of students identify one of the former British colonies as their country of birth, and are thus likely to be native speakers of a non-American variety of English. So, almost half of the students who identify themselves as native speakers of English are not necessarily speaking the language of the American academic system. Add to these statistics the facts that 86.2% of our students are New York City residents (for purposes of tuition) and 71.6% of our students live in either Brooklyn or Queens, and we are looking at a population that largely speaks as their first language either a language other than English, or an English that would not be considered standard "school" English because it is an English dialect from one of the former British colonies of the Caribbean, Africa, or South Asia, or, indeed, from New York City's outer boroughs, whose dialects often carry a stigma. York's students also enter college with lower scores on standardized tests than their peers, even those at other CUNY senior colleges: York College's Admissions website gives the *mean* SAT score for entering freshmen as 904 out of 1600 in 2008, 947 in 2009. A brief web search shows, in comparison, a *minimum* SAT score range of 940 to 1200 is required at CUNY's other senior colleges. We know from the CCCC's "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and subsequent texts that the language and economics of standardized testing favors students from white, middle-class

backgrounds; however, the figures strongly imply that our students fit into the category of basic writers based on their preparedness. These lower levels of academic preparedness have real implications for writing centers and the support that can be offered to these students there.

INTRINSIC MOTIVATION, LOCUS OF CONTROL, AND BASIC WRITERS IN THE WRITING CENTER

One of the questions with which this article began concerns how writing centers might best help basic writers enter into the discourse community of college. I suggested in the introductory section that, rather than separating sentence-level concerns and knowledge-making, tutors and teachers of basic writers might serve their students better in reaching this goal by helping them navigate a trajectory from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. These ideas can help us understand the kinds of assistance that York's students seek from the tutors at the writing center. I will use Rotter's locus of control (LOC) metric and the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan; Ryan and Deci) in this analysis. Locus of control, as Ed Jones expresses it in "Predicting Performance in First Semester College Basic Writers," is "where the individual attributes control for outcomes of her or his efforts" (211). Intrinsic motivation is part of Ryan and Deci's *self-determination theory*, which looks at the reasons why an individual chooses to undertake various tasks; that is, whether an individual undertakes a task for the inherent satisfaction it accords (intrinsic motivation), or in order to attain an external reward (extrinsic motivation). Ryan and Deci show that the source of motivation for a behavior can lie on a scale between fully intrinsic and fully extrinsic motivation, depending on how integrated with the individual's sense of self completing the task is, how much satisfaction the individual will derive from completing the task, or how much they value it personally (72). The concepts of locus of control and extrinsic/intrinsic motivation are relevant to college work, because college assignments contain the possibility of both an external and an internal locus of control for students. Moreover, an assignment such as a writing task involves the student satisfying explicit goals set up by the instructor, such as answering an assignment question; presenting the assignment appropriately through the use of standard academic language and discipline-specific terminology and formatting; and organizing essays according to instructions provided by the professor, all of which would be located on the extrinsic-intrinsic motivation spectrum. But it also involves—at least in the American educa-

tional system—taking a position with respect to the assignment question, and negotiating that position in response to texts written by other authors: aspects of writing that connect more with students' completing tasks for their own satisfaction, and thus relate more to intrinsic motivation.

The metrics of locus of control and intrinsic motivation are also helpful for our understanding of how students with different levels of academic preparedness respond to what they are asked to do at college. Jones shows that students with weaker skills tend to experience a more external locus of control and low intrinsic motivation, whereas students whose skills are stronger experience a more internal locus of control (226-28). I suggest that less well-prepared students' motivation for completing tasks comes from a desire to satisfy the instructor's requirements—extrinsic motivation—versus a desire to express themselves and their own ideas through writing—intrinsic motivation. Although the strongest students may come to their college writing center explicitly for help getting an A in their courses, such students have internalized the reasons behind *wanting* the A, and thus, Ryan and Deci explain, their motivations would be considered to be closer to the intrinsic end of the spectrum. That is, they want the A for themselves, rather than to satisfy their instructors.

Writing centers will be more effective, then, if we can help students integrate their desire to undertake a task with their own self-conceptions. Encouraging this shift is particularly important in helping students move from a focus on surface concerns to one on invention and textual engagement, which is what instructors generally reward in writing classes. Writing centers, therefore, are useful spaces for students in general and basic writers in particular, if they can provide a venue where students can ask for help with those areas of the writing process that might be more identified with the self—finding something to write about, engaging with and developing upon someone else's ideas, and, importantly, seeing grammar and language as something more integrated with a student's sense of identity as a writer, an academic, rather than as an arbitrary system imposed from above. Above all, writing centers are places where students can continually negotiate their identity with respect to who they are, as writers, in a particular course. This latter is a primary point of engagement, because it allows us to help students see the connection between language and knowledge-making, and with representing themselves as writers of important ideas.

Returning to the relationship between external and internal locus of control and basic writing, the areas that students focus on in their tutoring sessions show us where they are locating control for success in their current

tasks, and thus, where they might fit on the college preparedness spectrum. Over the course of several tutoring sessions, students expand their focus from seeking assistance only with those elements of the writing process that I connect with extrinsic motivation and an external LOC, to those that I connect with intrinsic motivation and an internal LOC. This shift of focus is significant because it suggests that, through a series of tutoring sessions, students whom we might consider to be basic writers show movement towards seeking assistance with those types of writing skills that we would associate with student writers who have stronger skills, and who thus do not fit the basic writer profile so readily.

THE WRITING CENTER AT YORK COLLEGE: THE STUDY

The data that I present in this study are taken from online student satisfaction surveys completed during the Spring semester of 2009. The surveys were entirely voluntary and anonymous, and I relied on the tutors to encourage their students to participate. We received forty-nine usable responses out of about one thousand seven hundred tutoring sessions over the semester. Although the number of responses is small, they do, however, appear to be consistent; we can take them to thus be suggestive, if not conclusive.

The small number of responses, I believe, stems from the online nature of the survey, and the fact that it was not integrated into the tutoring sessions in any formal way. That is, while tutors were encouraged and reminded to direct their students to complete the survey on the computers that the York College Writing Center houses, the tutors did not build completing the survey into their tutoring sessions. In order have a larger number of respondents for a follow-up study in Fall 2009, the survey was also distributed on paper to every student who attended a tutoring session in the second-to-last week and last week of classes, as well as being available to students in its online form throughout the semester. This method yielded 190 responses.

My hypothesis was that our students whom, as I have suggested above, we identify as basic writers based on metrics of academic preparedness and linguistic background, would first come to the writing center for help with such areas as organization, interpreting assignments, and, of course, sentence-level work: all things that have to do with fulfilling the requirements of an assignment, or with satisfying what an instructor wants an assignment to look like. We know, anecdotally at least, that many students at community colleges and four-year institutions alike attend the writing center because they have been sent there by their instructors, either via a formal referral,

because of comments on a draft of a paper, or in order to have a grade raised (see Mohr for a discussion). These students are therefore coming to their writing centers not because they want help in fulfilling a writing task for their own personal satisfaction, but because they have been told to come. I hypothesized further that students whom we would *not* identify as basic writers, on the other hand, would predominantly ask for help with things like generating ideas and using texts to support these ideas (which skill includes strong reading comprehension): all tasks that have to do with the students representing their own ideas as well as possible. These students would be visiting their writing centers because they believed that their tutoring sessions could help them achieve their own purposes in expressing their ideas, or doing creative and original work.

On the student survey, respondents were asked what they had worked on at York's Writing Center, and were given six possible answers to choose from (shown in the first column of Table 1). They could select more than one area. I did not ask them to limit their responses to what they had worked on in one particular session, so I assumed, for coding purposes, that the responses from students who had attended more than one session encompassed all of those sessions. In my analysis of the responses, I divided these six aspects of the writing process into categories, based on whether I considered success in these areas to satisfy some external assessment, or internal satisfaction—in other words, where would the student locate the locus of control for each of the tasks, and the motivation for doing them? The question I asked was: are students asking to work on these areas in order to satisfy their instructors' demands, or to achieve their own aims in writing? I arrived at the divisions shown in the right-hand column of the table below.

Table 1. Aspects of the Writing Process Categorized in Terms of Locus of Control

| Aspect of writing process | Locus of control |
|--|------------------|
| Spelling, grammar, punctuation | external |
| Organization | external |
| Answering the assignment question | external |
| Responding to / interpreting instructor | external |
| Reading comprehension | internal |
| Invention (finding something to write about) | internal |

I analyzed these various aspects of the writing process in terms of whether they were associated with an external or internal LOC based on my

own experiences as a tutor of students at various levels, as well as discussions by Friedrich, Matsuda, and Grimm. I consider the first four elements on the list above to be extrinsically motivated: they help students to complete a particular assignment by meeting their instructors' explicitly stated demands. Ryan and Deci suggest that, in order to succeed, students should at least identify with the reasons for completing a task; therefore, we ideally want to guide students away from behaviors from which they do not gain personal satisfaction, and that they do not identify with their sense of self. This means, of course, moving them to a stage where they have a higher level of intrinsic motivation for doing the work. I suggest that the last two elements on the list—reading comprehension and invention—do this: they help students go beyond bare requirements, to using the prompt and the texts with which they might be working to find new ideas, rather than to produce what they think the instructor wants to hear. Thus, the reasons for the behaviors are more easily identified with self-expression, and are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, because students will feel that they are the ones with control in the task.

The links between internal and external LOC and the different aspects of the writing process that I draw in Table 1 can also be thought of as lying on Ryan and Deci's intrinsic motivation scale, which I mentioned in the previous section, rather than being divided simply into external and internal LOC tasks. Applying them to the scale suggests a trajectory from low to high intrinsic motivation that we might want our students to follow. We would place spelling, grammar, and punctuation at the end of the scale associated with low intrinsic motivation, and an external LOC: these elements of the writing process could easily be seen by students as being entirely associated with satisfying the instructor's demands. Towards the middle of the scale, because satisfying instructor demands and larger discourse requirements require a deeper cognitive investment, would be organization, answering the assignment question, and responding to instructor comments. Next on the scale, still moving towards intrinsic motivation and an internal LOC, would be reading comprehension, because it requires students to respond to others' ideas in a way that they can invest in. And at the point closest to intrinsic motivation and the highest internal LOC would be invention—finding something to write about—because this is the part of the writing process that can be most closely related to a student's sense of self. Invention still requires responding to others' ideas, but it also focuses on students developing their own perspectives. This is where we would like students to be by the end of the semester.

Looking at what students ask for in their tutoring sessions shows the identity and language facets of basic writing coming together, because a

higher level of intrinsic motivation and internal LOC results from students identifying a task as being more important to their own development, rather than being work that satisfies external requirements. In the writing center, too, there is always the danger that students will shift responsibility for determining if their work is satisfactory to the tutor, thus perpetuating the external LOC/extrinsic motivation problem. However, as Boquet points out, tutoring sessions largely “thrive on asymmetry” (127), whereby the tutor gives advice, and the student takes it. While the ostensible aim of writing center philosophy is to break down this asymmetry, the reality is that the tutor is also perceived in a role of authority, and students come to the writing center to partake in the tutor’s knowledge of the institution and of academic writing, and, ideally, to internalize these (Carino, “Power”). One of the possible results of this is the student becoming dependent on the tutor, which is why it is important to help students find an internal locus of control in their writing. Otherwise, the writing center simply replicates the power dynamic between instructor and student, and leaves students’ perception of LOC thoroughly outside themselves.

Examining what students ask to work on in their tutoring sessions at the York College Writing Center, we will see how these predictions played out among our respondents. I expected to see that our students would focus predominantly on those aspects of the writing process that I associate with an external LOC, and with extrinsic motivation: characteristics that tend to be associated with students who have not been particularly academically successful (Ryan and Deci; Jones). While this is certainly true for students beginning at York’s Writing Center, this is not what seems to happen over a sequence of sessions, as we will see in the next section.

The Results

In their responses, students could choose more than one item that they worked on in their sessions. Therefore, whereas we had only forty-nine respondents to the survey, we have eighty-eight responses to the questions in this part. Again, we see that students indicated that they sought help with grammar, punctuation, and spelling most often, followed by organization, interpreting and responding to instructor comments, and interpreting the assignment question.

Table 2. Overview of Student Requests

| Area requested | Responses |
|--|------------------|
| Grammar, punctuation, spelling | 31 (35%) |
| Organization | 25 (28%) |
| Interpreting / responding to instructor comments | 11 (12%) |
| Interpreting the assignment question | 9 (10%) |
| Reading comprehension | 8 (9%) |
| Finding something to write about | 4 (4%) |

The overall data confirm the hypothesis that York's students are coming to the Writing Center primarily to work on the areas that I have identified as being connected with an external locus of control. We see that the majority of students are asking to work on grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and organization, with a big jump to the next-most popular requests, help with responding to instructor comments, to the assignment question, and reading comprehension. These data suggest that our students are, first and foremost, concerned with the presentation of their papers, and rank responding appropriately to other texts, whether they originate with the instructor or elsewhere, as a distinct second. This strong tendency is probably due either to the students' instructors' explicit directions, or because the students equate messy work with bad writing, as Shaughnessy suggests they sometimes do ("New Approaches" 4).

However, before we despair at the level to which students just want grammar work in their tutoring sessions, examining the whole spectrum of use, from students who attend just one session, to students who attend five or more, gives us a different picture. Over the course of several sessions, the focus of students' tutoring sessions shifted: while presentation remained a concern throughout, our students gradually started to request help with interpreting the various texts and feedback they were working with, and to request help with developing their own ideas in their papers.

The number of tutoring sessions that students attended seems to be a significant indicator of how far beyond the extrinsically motivated aspects of writing students will go. This is important because, ideally, we want to see students finding their own reasons to work on their writing, in the writing center and elsewhere, rather than only seeking to satisfy their instructor's requirements. But this is not what we see for students who attend just one session; as we see in the first row of Table 3, these students are very much focused on grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Table 3. Student Requests by Number of Sessions: Raw Numbers and Percentages

| Number of sessions | Total number of students | Requested help with grammar | | Requested help with organization | | Requested help with instructor's comments | | Requested help with interpreting assignment | | Requested help with reading comprehension | | Requested help with invention | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------|----------------------------------|------|---|------|---|------|---|------|-------------------------------|------|
| | | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| 1 | 12 | 10 | 83.3 | 7 | 58.3 | 4 | 33.3 | 1 | 8.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 5 | 3 | 60 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 40 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 6 | 3 | 50 | 4 | 66.7 | 1 | 16.7 | 1 | 16.7 | 3 | 50 | 1 | 16.7 |
| 4 | 6 | 3 | 50 | 4 | 66.7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 16.7 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | 5 | 3 | 60 | 4 | 80 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 20 | 1 | 20 | 0 | 0 |
| 5+ | 15 | 9 | 60 | 4 | 26.7 | 5 | 33.3 | 3 | 20 | 2 | 13.3 | 2 | 13.3 |
| Total | 49 | 31 | 63.3 | 24 | 49 | 10 | 20.4 | 8 | 16.3 | 7 | 14.3 | 3 | 6.1 |

Single-session students made a total of twenty-two requests for the various elements of writing on the survey. Help with grammar, punctuation, and spelling was by far the most frequently requested area of the writing process, followed by organization: the data indicate that all but two of these students asked for help with their grammar, and seven out of the twelve students coming to the York College Writing Center for a single session asked for help with organization. Significantly, too, none of the students who attended only one tutoring session asked for help with those elements of writing that I associate with an internal LOC; even asking for help with interpreting the assignment question was something only one of these students did.

The single-session students confirm the impression that when students first come to York's Writing Center, they are seeking help with fulfilling the demands that we would associate with an external LOC: those that have to do with satisfying someone else's requirements, rather than finding a way to express the students' own ideas more successfully. The data from the other end of the spectrum, however, show that when students return to the Writing Center for multiple sessions, they shift from the left- to the right-hand side of the intrinsic motivation spectrum, from low to high. The last two rows of Table 3 above show the responses from students who attended five or more tutoring sessions. There were twenty respondents in this category, and respondents indicated thirty-two separate requested areas. Among

this group of students we see that the majority still report having asked for help with grammar and organization in their tutoring sessions, but there is also a definite move towards the factors that I link with an internal locus of control and intrinsic motivation. These data show that, while a majority of the students still report having asked for help with their sentence-level work, the repeat visits to the writing center allow them to move on to the areas that I associate with higher levels of intrinsic motivation and internal LOC. Looking at this breakdown of the data, my analysis is that after repeated sessions at the writing center, students expand their definition of what successful writing means, and, moreover, they have the skills to take advantage of their tutor's help with the types of writing task that this expanded view entails.

The final variable to consider is the point at which these changes start to occur: how many tutoring sessions do students need to attend to experience this shift or expansion in the focus of their sessions? Table 3 also shows the trajectory of student requests over the course of several tutoring sessions, and so we see that the threshold for students to start asking to work on those areas of their writing that we have identified as being intrinsically motivated, with an internal LOC, is three sessions. Further, even when students just attend more than one session, interpreting the assignment question becomes much more important to the students than direct instructions from the instructor (in the form of comments on the paper), but it is at the three-session mark that we see a consistent pattern of students reporting that they have asked for help with reading comprehension and invention. From this preliminary data, we get a strong impression that students who attend the Writing Center at York do move from an external to internal locus of control in their writing over the course of a semester. But the data also show that one session at the Writing Center will not be enough to help them make this change.

How Students See Grammar

It is also worth noting in the data above that the way students approach their sentence-level work may change over a series of tutoring sessions, which means we may not be comparing like things here; instead, students may be moving to a conception of academic writing which is more integrated with their sense of self. The tendency to prioritize surface concerns over developing their own ideas may arise because students have an impression that the surface serves as a gatekeeper for satisfying their instructors (which may, in

fact, be true); it furthermore fits with the profile of basic writers, given by Jones, that suggests that these students have a more external LOC than students whom we would not classify as basic writers. But there is more to the psychology of asking to work on sentence-level concerns, I believe. Coming to the writing center to get one's grammar "fixed" is a way to be much less vulnerable when asking for help: it is a request for help with conforming to external requirements, rather than a request for help in changing how one does something. It is much easier to articulate a request for help with grammar and organization: for one, it means starting with something, rather than nothing, and so it does not require the students to ask for help with a true deficiency—something that they altogether cannot do. Better to ask for help with something that they know, from an external source, needs to be fixed.

The data that I have presented here show that writing center staff can use those surface concerns, and helping students address them, to move students into a deeper understanding of how writing works. Our data suggest that if students are involved in working at the sentence-level of their own writing (rather than having a tutor proofread or edit), they and their tutors can work towards a more holistic engagement with this work. We might take the following attitude: even a "fix-it shop" image of a writing center is helpful to the students, in that it may get them to come for tutoring in the first place. As we see, if students find their first tutoring session useful and come back, they start moving into a relationship with their writing which is based more on intrinsic motivation than on their instructor's explicitly stated requirements (although it does not necessarily mean that the students got what they expected when they made the original decision to come to the writing center). But this is only the case if that first visit parlays into a return visit: only then can writing centers help students move towards intrinsic motivation, which is, as I suggest, our goal.

WRITING CENTERS AND THE END OF REMEDIATION

As I mentioned before, the relationship between writing centers and remediation has been a complicated one. Showing the connections between writing centers and institutional demands, Peter Carino ("Open Admissions") discusses how the services that writing centers offer changed depending on the skill levels of incoming students. Focusing on the relationship between the Open Admissions movement and the kinds of services offered by writing centers operating during that time, Carino shows that the

centers at the forefront of the “alternative pedagogy” movement were those at colleges where students were relatively academically well-prepared, as at Brooklyn College under Kenneth Bruffee (38-39), whereas writing centers at schools whose students’ preparation was weaker functioned more as service modules, working on language and grammar skills rather than higher-order concerns, as at Nassau Community College under Paula Beck (42). As Nancy Grimm puts it, “writing centers were expected to solve the problems students weren’t supposed to have when they came to college” (531); they were—and are—where students “whose written work is marked by difference are ‘sent’ ” (525). Clearly, these perceptions have the potential to limit a writing center’s role on campus to being a location where students come to get their writing “fixed,” so as to satisfy the expectations of instructors, without seeking help about any of the knowledge-making that their instructors might be asking them to do in their writing.

What are the broader implications of this move to extra-curricular remediation, for the students, the writing center, and the institution? Mary Soliday, in *The Politics of Remediation*, notes that moving support for developmental writers out of the curriculum places more of a burden on them in terms of time: these students often have full-time work or family responsibilities. While writing centers usually offer their services free of charge (and this is certainly the case at York), even the extra time required to attend just one session per week at the writing center takes away earning time (Soliday 141-42). Furthermore, students who already feel marginal may not want to add to their marginality by seeking out help that carries with it the stigma of remediation. And the impact is institutional, too: moving remediation out of the curriculum means that providing financial support for this time-intensive work often becomes the province of managers of the “soft money” of the institution; therefore, the writing center is more vulnerable to budget cuts and institutional rearrangements that result in a lack of autonomy for the work of the center (Soliday; Grimm). The overall effect of these changes is that students who have not had traditional college preparation find themselves in situations where they are less able to take advantage of the support that is available, and they are in more jeopardy of being marginalized by their institutions. Furthermore, locating remedial writing support in an extra-curricular agency creates two more problems: attending tutoring is voluntary for students, and budgetary constraints often mean there are not enough tutors or tutoring hours to work with every student who fits into the basic writer category. Many of the students who receive assistance at writing centers are therefore those who have either sought it out independently, or have fol-

lowed through on an instructor's directions to seek help from the writing center. Students who seek extra-curricular support are likely to have a higher level of intrinsic motivation anyway (Jones), and so while it is quite possible that the students who are not using the writing center do have stronger skills, but do not think of going to the writing center, or do not have time, or do not think it will do anything for them, they may also have lower intrinsic motivation to complete their tasks. So the students who participated in the survey at York may have started from a better place academically, in terms of motivation, and thus may be skewing the data, though I believe that the trajectory that the data show suggests that the writing center is genuinely useful in increasing levels of intrinsic motivation in all students who come to multiple sessions.

The bigger challenge is to reach the students who do not see the writing center as having an important enough role in helping them to succeed in college. Several authors have addressed the challenges of marketing the writing center to the campus community without promising to be all things to all people (Mohr; Grimm; Pemberton). One way that we might market the writing center effectively at York is to show links between improved grades, retention, and writing center attendance, though we are only now starting to collect reliable data to make these links. Tutors already visit a number of writing and writing-intensive classes every semester, so as to give students and faculty a fuller picture of what kind of work students can expect to do at the center, and the director and coordinator visit departmental, academic, and student-support events to promote the writing center, and to talk about the services it offers. We hope that these strategies will not only bring more students to the center, but also that students, faculty, and staff alike will have a clearer picture of what the writing center can do for the students of the college.

The data that I have presented here suggest that the work students do at the York College Writing Center allows them to move beyond those skills and concerns usually associated with basic writers—if they attend three or more tutoring sessions. The success of writing centers lies in working with students on language and organizational issues, and using these as ways to encourage an internal LOC in their writing. As long as students and teachers see writing—and, in particular, the sentence-level aspects of writing—as external to the deeper cognitive processes involved in understanding disciplinary content, then there will be an attitude that writing can be “fixed.” The students who come to the writing center, whether they attend just one session or several consecutive sessions, apparently do see the language in

which they present their ideas as having a gatekeeping function in all of their courses. But keeping students coming back is crucial: it is only the repeat visitors who see their work with language as part of the whole paper writing process, indicated by the fact that they report asking for help with their grammar in the context of other parts of the writing process, including those that we associate with an internal LOC. Helping students to move towards intrinsic motivation brings them closer to admission to the mainstream academic culture, but to make that kind of progress, they must come to the writing center multiple times.

Given the academic and linguistic profile of students at York College, it is not surprising that they identify language issues as their most pressing concern. We have a responsibility to help these students see that the campus's Writing Center can do more for them than help them to fix their grammar at the end of the writing process, and thus to broaden their perspective on what language can do for them in a college context. The data presented here suggest that this is what is happening. Students are getting somewhere: their own reports on what they are working on in their tutoring sessions, when taken together, show students moving through the skill trajectory of basic writers, from external LOC and extrinsic motivation to a LOC and motivation that is much more closely related to a sense of themselves as writers with agency.

The question with which I began this article asks whether writing centers could take on the challenge of remediation on campus and still maintain a philosophy and pedagogy that is not a skills-based one. I have demonstrated that current writing center philosophy may not be adequate to deal with the challenges of supporting students from non-traditional college backgrounds. By focusing primarily on higher-order concerns, this philosophy does not recognize how sentence-level work can provide students with a safe place to start on their educational trajectory. In this age of post-curricular remediation, adapting our philosophy to help students move towards intrinsic motivation, rather than from lower- to higher-order concerns, is a more pressing responsibility than ever before.

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Note

1. This semester-by-semester “improvement” is important. Many students return to their college writing centers semester after semester, and while we assume their skill level increases every semester, my data suggest that, for each semester, they start at the same place—what the instructor wants—and make progress towards being intrinsically motivated within the particular discourse required in their course. This makes sense if we think that students, as they progress through the curriculum, are having to come to terms with a new or more complex disciplinary discourse each consecutive semester; it is not that they are going backwards, but rather, they are consistent in extending their knowledge in the same way from semester to semester.

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Standards, Teaching, Learning

Mike Rose

ABSTRACT: Standards are the criteria we use to judge competence, and the incarnation of some version of the issue of standards has woven in and out of education policy for the last thirty years. Unfortunately, much of the discussion has been ideological, rigid, and cast in either/or terms. In this essay, I use examples from basic writing and freshman composition to try to reclaim the notion of standards for use in the classroom. I conclude with an extended illustration of how a teacher's standards, more broadly defined, might play out in considering whether and how to teach the old standard, James Joyce's short story "Araby."

KEYWORDS: educational standards; basic writing; teaching literature; Joyce's "Araby"; underprepared students

Standards are criteria used to judge competence, and we rely on them every day, all the time: in sports or cooking, in raising children or voting, in forming relationships or teaching school. Another basic truth about standards is that we argue about them. This is surely true in education where standards have a contentious history.

When I was working in programs for underprepared high school and college students back in the 1980s, a national debate emerged over standards, expressed as a conflict between equity—increasing access to higher education—and excellence, holding firm on merit and achievement. The nation then saw the rise of the standards movement, an attempt to articulate precisely what students should know K-12, grade by grade about history or mathematics or social studies—and to align instruction to these standards. And this movement led to another set of debates about district or state control versus local autonomy and teacher independence, among other things. An emphasis on accountability then became part of standards talk, and it all intensified considerably with the advent of high-stakes testing, most notably, the federal No Child Left Behind Act. And, these days, there is pressure to bring standards-based accountability models to higher education.

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Regardless of what one thinks about the merits of any of these concerns about standards, the discourse and debates around them does seem to have narrowed and polarized our understanding of standards, the way we define standards and conceive of them in instruction.

As someone who has taught for a very long time, I find many of the policy discussions concerning standards to be of limited use in the daily work of teaching. We need other ways to talk about the issue of standards if we are to help students develop what educator Mina Shaughnessy calls their “incipient excellence.”

To foster an alternative discussion about standards, we need to do our best to move beyond the various definitions and debates and the easy labeling of positions as either “progressive” or “conservative.” One way to do this is to start from the specifics of the classroom. Although I hope that what I say applies to other domains, I will ground my discussion on the teaching of writing at the college level and begin with two classroom stories.

Vince, who received a Ph.D. from a prestigious psychology department, tells his story from the enviable position of one who has succeeded in the academy. Coming from working-class, Mexican-American origins, Vince learned his first English from a television set, but with his parents’ encouragement, he worked hard at his second language, and by high school, he was taking college-preparatory English classes. They were designed to help students do well on achievement tests and the Scholastic Aptitude Test; the classes consisted primarily of workbook grammar exercises, although students also read some literature and wrote a few book reports. After completing high school, Vince figured he was ready for college, so he was stunned when he sat for his university English placement exam: “We were to answer a question on a reading passage, something on the use of grain—and we were supposed to argue for one position or another. ‘What the hell am I supposed to write?’ I thought. They wanted an argumentative paper, though I didn’t know that then. . . . I knew my grammar, but applying it to that kind of writing was another story.”

Vince’s poor performance landed him in remedial English. As he recalls, “The teacher seemed very distant and cold. I’d get my papers back graded with a C or lower and with red marks about my style all over them.” Vince couldn’t figure out what the teacher wanted. “I kept trying, but I kept getting the same grades. I went through this routine for four or five weeks, becoming more withdrawn. Finally I said, ‘Forget this,’ and stopped going to class.”

Vince took the class again two quarters later and got a teacher who gave feedback in a more useful way and was more encouraging. He started going to the campus learning center and asked for help from teaching assistants in other courses in which the instructors had assigned papers. He learned to write good academic prose and in graduate school was frequently complimented for his writing.

Vince's story illustrates several problems with how standards are used in the teaching of English. Often, they are reduced to so-called objective measures, like multiple-choice grammar tests, and although the instruction geared toward such measures can be specific and targeted, it is also limited. Vince's high-school English classes had been labeled "college preparatory," so he believed they would prepare him to write in college, but they had not prepared him for even his first university writing assignment, the English placement exam. This discontinuity in requirements and the standards used to assess performance—in this case the shift from grammatical analysis to the development of an effective argument—is common.

In his first college class, Vince faced another problem associated with standards: They often are applied to students' work in ways that shut down rather than foster learning. In Vince's case, the teacher seemed to value a literary style and rejected as inadequate Vince's more straightforward prose. Such teachers match student work against an internalized model of excellence and find the work lacking, rather than using their knowledge of genre, rhetorical strategy, and style to assess the ways a paper could be improved, given what the writer seems to be trying to do. This kind of teacher functions more like a gatekeeper than an educator. Standards used this way become a barrier to development.

The second, briefer, story comes from a remedial English class at an inner-city community college in Los Angeles. About 30 students are enrolled, most of them from working-class backgrounds and a variety of ethnic origins, ranging from Armenian to Salvadorian. The students have been writing educational autobiographies. And one of the interesting issues they raise involves standards. Some express anger at past teachers who didn't hold high expectations for them, who didn't explain the criteria for competence and hold students to them, who didn't help their students master the conventions of written English that they're struggling with now. Some of these teachers sound as though they were burned out, but others seemed reluctant to impose their standards for philosophical or political reasons or because they thought a less rigorous pedagogy was better suited to these students. One teacher, for example, is described as "hang loose,"

a man who created a pleasant classroom atmosphere but played down the evaluation of students' work.

This episode highlights the important role that standards and high expectations play in good teaching. It also clarifies why so many educators and parents from poor or non-dominant communities—though mindful of the injustices that can occur in the name of standards—are calling for classrooms in which standards are clearly articulated and maintained. Standards that are employed fairly facilitate learning and show students that their teachers believe in their ability to meet academic expectations.

People leery about calls for standards need to remember their benefits and reclaim them for democratic ends, despite the fact that standards and assessments can be used to limit access and stratify students into educational tracks, or can lead to an overly-prescriptive and narrow curriculum. At the same time, the champions of standards need to take a closer look at how standards and our means of measuring student mastery of them can limit, rather than advance, the academic excellence they desire.

To develop our alternative discussion about standards, we must hold Vince's story about the misapplication of standards and the community college students' tale of low expectations simultaneously in mind, in productive tension. As we do so, some questions emerge:

The current drive to enact and enforce standards by statistical measures dominates schooling. But what effects do such measures have on instruction? As people on many sides of current educational debates are saying—see Deborah Meier and Diane Ravitch's blog, "Bridging Differences," for example—standardized measures can limit the development of competence by driving curricula toward the narrow demands of test preparation instead of allowing teachers to immerse students in complex problem solving and rich use of language.

How good are we at explaining our standards to students? Too much teaching is like the instruction Vince encountered in his first remedial course: Teachers match a response or product against an inadequately explained criterion of excellence. To avoid such stifling imposition of standards and to encourage student expression, some teachers refrain from applying their criteria of effective performance. But this can be problematic as well, for many students report that they feel cheated, and sometimes baffled, by such instruction.

How can we reconceive standards so that they function not just as final measures of competence but also as guides to improving performance? Many discussions of standards stay at the level of test scores or models of excellence. Instead of these static measures of attainment, our focus should shift to the dynamics of development. Such a shift would have led Vince's first teacher to make explicit the distinctions he saw between his criteria and his student's performance. He also would have tried to understand the possibilities of Vince's own style and helped Vince enhance it with some stylistic options drawn from his more elaborate repertoire.

What about the transitions students face as they move from one level of the educational system to another? Are the standards we use coherent—that is, is there some level of agreement between secondary and postsecondary institutions about what constitutes competence in a given discipline? What opportunities exist—for example, through university-school alliances—that would help us articulate areas of agreement and disagreement so that students like Vince don't find themselves baffled by very different kinds of curricula and sets of expectations?

Standards evolve through consensus, but it's an unfamiliar consensus to many of our students, so don't we need to make the historical and social processes by which standards are constructed a topic of classroom discussion? Such discussion can help us find out what students perceive our standards to be and illuminate the cultural and cognitive difficulties they might have in adopting those standards. We might discover what lies behind the withdrawal of students like Vince.

How reflective are we about the attitudes and assumptions that underlie our standards? How open are we to considering the provisional nature of these standards and modifying them? In writing instruction, for example, teachers sometimes judge students' work according to idealized models of composing that distort actual practice, or some teachers champion the "great tradition of English prose" without considering the many ways that tradition is modified as audiences and purposes shift. What mechanisms are there within teacher education and professional development to encourage such reflection?

My hope is that addressing such questions will enable us to reframe the discussion of standards, moving it away from the either-or polarities of equality versus excellence, creativity versus constraint, or progressive versus conservative. Perhaps such questions will help us think more fruitfully about how standards are linked to instruction and learning—and how standards can be used to foster competence as well as measure it.

I touched on but didn't explore another dimension to the setting and use of standards and that is the development of the standards themselves. Curriculum specialists come to consensus about what students should know about a particular subject—photosynthesis, for example, or the Civil War. In the cases we just saw involving freshman composition, an exemplary program would engage in discussion about the kind of writing students need to master, the important conventions of that writing, criteria for competence, and so on.

Underlying these issues is a more basic set of questions: What is the role of a particular subject area in cognitive development? Why do we study it? How does it fit into our philosophy of education? On average, such questions come up less often in the process of forming standards. In some cases, the answers to them are assumed—of course students need to know the facts of photosynthesis. Also, in this age of high-stakes testing, the pressure to cut to the chase is intense—the push is to do the technical work of setting standards. But the basic questions are hugely important, for they get to the heart of why we educate in the first place.

During the time I was working on this essay, an article appeared in *Atlantic Monthly* that raised for me these basic questions about subject matter and instruction, and I want to devote the second half of the essay to them. The article deals with college students, but I think it contains lessons about standards and teaching that run across the educational pipeline. The piece is written by an anonymous professor who teaches Freshman Composition and Introduction to Literature at a community college and a small private college. His courses are required, and his students are a diverse, non-traditional group, people who enroll to advance at work: criminal justice, health care, civil service.

The purpose of his article is to challenge the notion that everyone should go to college, and the professor supports his claim with a narrative of student incompetence. His students can't write about Joyce's "Araby" or Faulkner's "Barn Burning." They can't write a research paper presenting two sides of a historical controversy. (Why Truman removed MacArthur, for example.) They haven't read a book in common. This is the stuff of the classic debate on standards—access and equity versus excellence—and the professor uses a familiar story line to present it: the beleaguered teacher fighting the good fight against ignorance.

The professor doesn't come across as a bad guy, and he frets over the grades he doles out. But what struck me—and a lot of other readers—is that

he seems clueless about alternative ways to both enact his standards and engage his students in the humanities, to help them become more effective critical readers and writers. Nor does he seem to grant them much experience or intelligence that could be brought to bear on core topics in the humanities. He appears to be a bit like the instructor Vince—whose case I presented earlier—encountered in his first English composition class.

Standards, particularly in the newer sense of curricular goals aligned to instruction, are a systematic means of specifying what students should learn. But there are other ways to be systematic as well. I want to think about the interaction of subject matter, teaching, and learning in a way that honors the standards impulse, but comes at it in a different way, that methodically considers the broader questions of the purpose of teaching a particular subject (in this case literature), why and how we teach it, its connection to intellectual development and human experience, our beliefs about intelligence and about teaching, and what our goals might be, our expectations. Articles like the one in *Atlantic Monthly* often use examples from literature and the humanities, so I'll focus on James Joyce's "Araby," one of the stories the professor tells us that his students didn't much like or understand.

"Araby," the third story in Joyce's *Dubliners*, has become part of the Western literary canon, a familiar entry in countless anthologies. It was on the Introduction to Humanities syllabus I was given to teach 30 years ago.

"Araby" is set in Joyce's dreary Early-Twentieth Century Dublin and is narrated in the first person by an adolescent boy who is thoroughly infatuated with the older sister of one of his pals. The boy's language is rich, fervid, and his description of his friend's sister is flat-out rapturous. Though he watches her from afar and only directly encounters her once in the story, ". . . my body was like a harp and her words and gestures were like fingers running upon the wires." You get the idea.

The defining moment in the story begins to develop when the girl, in that single encounter, expresses regret that she can't go to Araby, the bazaar that's in town, and our narrator, emboldened, says he will go and bring her something. After an agony of waiting for his drunken uncle to come home with a few shillings, the boy rushes to Araby, arriving at closing time. It is as dreary a place as the city surrounding it. He finds an open booth, eyes vases and tea sets, feels the few coins in his pocket, and realizes suddenly, painfully, the foolhardiness of his desire and quest. "I saw myself as a creature driven and derided by vanity," the story ends, "and my eyes burned with anguish and anger."

There are a lot of things to consider in selecting any piece of literature for a syllabus. Certainly, one's own pleasure with the text matters—it enlivens the teaching—but there needs to be further justification, since teaching literature means reading a story or poem with others to some pedagogical end, a social intellectual activity. Here are some of the things I would think about as I considered assigning "Araby."

I'd ask myself what it is I want to achieve through teaching the story, and these goals would be the stuff of instructional standards. What about literature and the appreciation of it do I want students to learn? What about the structure of the short story? Or Joyce and his Dublin? Or symbolism and imagery? Or conceptions of romance and gender? And I'd ask these questions if I were teaching "Araby" to a group of high schoolers or to a graduate seminar in English—though, of course, the specifics of what I did in each classroom would be different.

I'd intersect such questions with what I know about the students before me, high schoolers to advanced graduate students. Some of what I know comes from their location in the system: Were there prerequisite courses? What have they already been reading for me? And some of what I know is provided by their performance, by discussion in class, by tests or papers, by comments made in conference. And some of what I know emerges via relation, through what I learn about them as people with histories, interests and curiosities, hopes for the future.

Honoring the histories of the people in the class brings into focus another set of, not unrelated, questions, questions about the politics and sociology of what gets selected into literary canons, of what authors get read. These questions belong in a discussion about standards. So I'd be asking myself: Does my syllabus reflect in some way, to some degree the cultural histories of the students before me, particularly if those histories have typically been absent from the curriculum? There can be great pedagogical power here, and anyone who has taught literature has seen it: Students lighting up when they read stories with familiar languages, geographies, family scenes, or cultural practices that they haven't read before in a classroom. Given this perspective, and depending on who was in my class, I might take a pass on "Araby." I know that when I first read the story as a college freshman, it seemed as flat and distant as could be. There are many other stories that would enable me to reach my goals about literary technique.

But culture is a complex business, as is teaching. While being responsive to students' cultural histories and practices, we have to be mindful of how easily "culture" can be narrowed and reduced as we try to define it.

Education scholar, Manuel Espinoza, a former student of mine, says it well: there is “no monolithic us,” no blanket African-American, or working-class, or Puerto Rican culture, and thus no ready match-up to writers from these backgrounds. Black kids won’t automatically respond to Alice Walker. How a story of hers is taught becomes a key variable.

So maybe “Araby” shouldn’t be ruled out. . . .

Which leads me to a third frame of reference I’d take when considering “Araby.” And that is my own experience with the story: as an underprepared college freshman from a working-class background, as someone who later taught “Araby,” and as a middle-aged man reading it once again in preparation to write this essay.

As I noted a moment ago, I didn’t much like or understand “Araby” the first time I read it. Though I had a terrific senior high school English teacher—and some wonderful teachers later in college—my college Freshman English instructor was awful. As I subsequently learned more about literary technique in general, and Joyce in particular, and especially as I had to eventually teach “Araby” myself, I came to appreciate it. And reading the story now and thinking back to my own adolescence, it touched me deeply.

I take a few lessons from this brief survey of my own time with “Araby.” If I did elect to teach the story, I would consider in hindsight what didn’t happen with me upon first encounter—which provides another way to think about how to open the story up to others and my goals for doing so.

I missed completely in my freshman year the overlay of the story with my own experience. Like the narrator, I too lived in a sad and taxing place and sought release in my imagination. And, like him, I had a desperate and unrequited crush—in my case on a waitress in the Mexican restaurant down the street. My heart too picked up speed just walking past the front window, hoping that she was at the counter. The important point here is that we sometimes don’t see connection or relevance automatically, readily. This is the place where artful teaching comes in.

Teaching also comes in, of course, in understanding literary technique, the way “Araby” works as a story: the structure of the thing, the boy’s hyperbolic language, the small touches that mean so much. I remember not getting the ending at all: how did we go so quickly from looking at vases and jingling a few coins in the pocket to the crashing “my eyes burned with anguish and anger”? But a little guided reflection on that ending would have revealed a powerful truth, surely known to me as a teenager, and, for that fact, to all the students in the anonymous professor’s class: that our hopes are sometimes dashed through the smallest thing—an overheard remark, a glance

away, an opportunity missed by a minute or two. Now, we are at the heart of what literature can provide: an imaginative entry to human experience. John Dewey makes this observation about subject matter: “[T]he various studies represent working resources, available capital . . . [yet] the teacher should be occupied not with subject matter in itself but in its interaction with the pupils’ present needs and capabilities.” Dewey reminds us of the intimate and powerful relationship between a subject (literature, or biology, or geography) and human development—with teaching as the mediating force. Standards, expectations are a crucial part of the dynamic, though that dynamic can become distorted if we hold to a rigid conceptualization of standards or get consumed in the technical development of them. It is finally our philosophy of education, our fundamental justification for schooling, that gives standards—any definition of standards—their meaning.

News and Announcements

Second Annual Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education

Acceleration is one of the most promising new concepts in developmental education. Beginning with mainstreaming in the early 1990s, acceleration also includes summer bridge programs, learning communities that link a developmental and a credit course, studio courses, intensive semesters in which developmental students take two developmental courses in one semester, ALP (the Accelerated Learning Program), and perhaps others we haven't even heard about. The general principle is that we can improve success rates and persistence if we shorten the amount of time it takes a developmental student to complete required developmental courses and to take credit courses.

The Community College Baltimore County (CCBC) will host its second annual conference on acceleration June 24th and 25th, 2010. We have invited proposals on a variety of different models of acceleration including stretch, intensive, studios, learning communities, summer bridge, seven-week models, and ALP. Presentations will consider acceleration in writing, reading, math, and ESOL programs (see the Call for Papers below).

CCBC will also host a one-day pre-conference workshop on June 23rd focused on our model of acceleration: the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP). This pre-conference workshop is intended for those considering adopting ALP on their campuses. The workshop will provide participants with an understanding of ALP, data demonstrating its success, and practical suggestions for implementation. Participants will also receive a "start-up manual."

Registration for the two-day conference is \$190 and for the one-day pre-conference workshop on ALP is \$80. Rooms at the Tremont Hotel in Baltimore are available at \$129 plus tax per night, single or double occupancy.

Details on the conference and a registration form are available at <http://tiny.cc/acceleration>.

Questions? E-mail Peter Adams at padams2@ccbcmd.edu.

Second Annual Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education: Call for Papers

We invite proposals for presentations on *acceleration* in developmental education. Sessions will be an hour and fifteen minutes long. **The deadline for proposals is March 30, 2010.** All presenters must register for the conference.

We welcome proposals for panels or individual presentations with one, two, or three speakers in a session. If you have an idea for a presentation that we haven't thought of, send it in, and we'll consider it, but here are the kinds of presentations we are thinking of:

- any model of acceleration
- any discipline—writing, reading, math, ESOL
- new programs as well as mature programs
- presentations that are anecdotal and/or practical as well as those that are more theoretical
- presentations supported by data

We are also interested in less formal, roundtable discussions. For example, several people, perhaps from different schools, could offer a session in which they get the conversation going and then encourage participants to join in.

Windows computers and projectors will be available in each breakout room, but there will not be internet access.

A proposal form is available at <http://tiny.cc/acceleration>. Questions? E-mail Peter Adams at padams2@ccbcmd.edu.

Ordering Information for *Why School?* by Mike Rose

The New Press is pleased to announce the publication of *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* by award-winning author and lifelong educator Mike Rose. At a time when we overwhelmingly justify schooling by its economic payoff, measure success with a test score, and underfund the whole enterprise, Rose challenges us to remember the real purpose of education by posing crucial questions. What is unique about education in a democracy? Why do we send our children to school? Why do so many fail in school and how can we reach them? In this inspiring new volume, Rose decries the ubiquity of test scores and economic competition that drive education policy today and offers instead a generous and democratic vision of schooling in American society.

To request a FREE EXAMINATION COPY of *Why School?*, send an e-mail to academic@thenewpress.com, listing your university and department affiliation, the course(s) you teach, and a complete mailing address (U.S. only, please).

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