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Journal of Basic Writing

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JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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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

With this issue, we ponder the future of basic writing. Although "remedial" writing has existed in the U.S. colleges and universities for more than a century, what most of us mean by basic writing is the field that developed as a result of the Open Admissions movement of the late 1960s and 1970s. Always a contested space, subject to political and economic forces beyond its control, basic writing has nonetheless served thousands of students and produced a substantial and influential body of scholarship in the larger field of composition studies.

What is the state of basic writing today and what does the future hold for the field and the students it serves? These are questions that are not easily answered. In "The Future of Basic Writing," George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk provide an overview of the forces that threatened BW in the 1990s and beyond. The sources of these attacks were wide ranging and included university administrators and boards of trustees seeking to increase their institutions' status by eliminating "remedial" courses; state legislators reluctant to provide financial support for teaching "skills" they felt should have been mastered in high school; and BW scholars who argued that basic writing was just another way of stigmatizing students who, they maintained, would be better off going directly into the college mainstream. In this article, excerpted from their recent book *Basic Writing* (see the News and Announcements section at the end of this issue for information about how to access this book), Otte and Mlynarczyk review the effects, not all of them negative, that these attacks have had. Some of the more salutary results include the development of more effective models for teaching basic writing—and reading—within the regular college curriculum rather than as a "pre-requisite" to be completed before the "real work" of college can begin. In trying to anticipate future needs for BW instruction, Otte and Mlynarczyk note that in 2009 and 2010, partly because of the economic recession as well as the new G.I. bill passed in 2008, record numbers of nontraditional students have enrolled in the nation's colleges, especially its community colleges. Will these students receive the type of support they need to achieve success as readers and writers—the type of support that recent research has shown to improve their chances for success in college and in careers? Only time will tell. In the meantime, in this issue, we take a look at some of the significant trends that are molding basic writing today.

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One obvious trend is the increasing use of technology in basic writing instruction. Some schools are being pressured to replace basic writing courses with computer labs where students work independently using commercially available materials. Obviously seen as a cost-cutting measure, this trend is reminiscent of the unsuccessful "programmed instruction" of the pre-computer 1960s. More promising is the use of the Internet to provide personalized BW instruction within an online community of basic writers under the leadership of a sensitive and well-trained teacher. In "Teaching Basic Writing in a Web-Enhanced Environment," Linda J. Stine gives careful attention to this emerging field, providing a wealth of practical information to guide program administrators and teachers who are considering the adoption of fully online or hybrid basic writing instruction.

Another crucial area for discussion as writing program administrators and classroom teachers work to develop more effective BW programs and curricula is the question of the writing itself. What should students be writing *about*? If basic writers are to be motivated to invest the tremendous effort necessary to improve as writers, they need to be writing about topics that fully engage their interests and energies. In "Expanding Definitions of Academic Writing: Family History Writing in the Basic Writing Classroom and Beyond," Sherry Rankins-Robertson, Lisa Cahill, Duane Roen, and Gregory R. Glau maintain that "[v]iewing academic writing and literacies as transparent and generalizable can negatively influence the teaching and learning of writing because such a view has the potential to under-prepare students to meet the dynamics of changing rhetorical situations, diverse disciplinary conventions, and varied purposes for writing." They assert that first-year composition courses, and especially basic writing courses, are ideally suited to help students develop a richer understanding of academic discourse by researching and writing about family, often in multiple modalities. When the scope of school-sponsored writing is expanded to include family writing, students are encouraged "to see the relevance of writing to their lives outside of school" and, at the same time, "to reflect critically on their conceptions of family, often coming to see family as a more complex construct."

A third question—and one that will be the focus of the 2011 Council on Basic Writing (CBW) workshop at the national CCCC Conference next spring (see the News and Announcements section for details)—is how BW can join forces with other student support services to maximize the effectiveness of basic writing programs. In "Realizing Distributed Gains: How Collaboration with Support Services Transformed a Basic Writing Program

for International Students," Mutiara Mohamad and Janet Boyd describe the "fortuitous collaboration" that developed as they worked together to improve services for international students at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. Although the collaboration described in this article relates specifically to writing support for non-native speakers of English, it has obvious implications for basic writers as well. What is noteworthy about the approach that developed as Mohamad and Boyd worked together to serve their student population more effectively is their realization "that administrators need not wait for directives from the top down but can take the initiative to effect gradual institutional change."

The final article in this issue addresses a question that has concerned the readers and editors of this journal for decades. What are the implications of "basic writing," the term we use to describe the work we do? This term, coined in the 1970s by Mina Shaughnessy, the journal's first editor, has periodically come under attack. In fact, in the Spring 1995 issue of *JBW*, editors Karen Greenberg and Trudy Smoke asked a number of prominent scholars in the field whether the journal should be re-named to avoid the negative connotations of "basic writing." The results of this informal poll were inconclusive, and the journal retained its name. But Pamela VanHaitsma asks a similar question in "More Talk about 'Basic Writers': A Category of Rhetorical Value for Teachers." In particular, she asks: What are the institutional, political, and other contexts in which the term "basic writer" bears positive influence, and does, or can, the *tactical* use of the term enable such influence? This question also embeds another: What does BW as a field still seek for students and teachers? In her case-study analysis of what she calls "teacher talk" around "basic writer," VanHaitsma suggests that even as the term may work against the interests of students in the rhetoric of critics on both the left and the right of the political spectrum, it serves to argue for resources for students and pose important questions about students' competencies and learning. It also empowers the effort to bring social justice to teaching and strengthens the activity of theorizing so foundational to both basic writing and composition as intersecting fields. After examining the ways in which the term "basic writer" is used by teachers on the campus where she conducted this case study, VanHaitsma asserts that "debates about basic writing's existence would be better served if they shifted away from wholesale critique or defense and instead grappled with more rhetorical questions about value for particular institutions or programs at specific moments in time."

As this issue of *JBW* goes to press, we are pleased to announce an addition to the journal's editorial team—Professor Cheryl C. Smith of CUNY's Baruch College. Cheryl is coordinator of Writing Across the Curriculum at Baruch and offers workshops to graduate students and faculty on teaching with writing. Her research interests include the ethical dimensions of writing assessment, the use of pedagogical innovation to improve the self-efficacy of at-risk students, and the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on writing and the teaching of writing. Cheryl will be working directly with authors to develop and edit articles that have been accepted for publication. We extend a warm welcome to Cheryl.

—Rebecca Mlynarczyk and **Hope Parisi**

The Future of Basic Writing

George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk

ABSTRACT: *In this article, we assess the status of basic writing early in the twenty-first century. Beginning with a discussion of the attacks on BW that intensified during the 1990s and early 2000s—attacks that originated from such diverse sources as state legislatures, university officials, and BW scholars themselves—we go on to summarize the responses to these attacks in the form of modified BW programs and practices. What does the future hold for basic writing and basic writers? There are no clear answers to this question. But the recent influx of increasing numbers of non-traditional students to the nation's colleges and universities indicates that the need for basic writing and other compensatory programs will increase substantially in the years to come. And research suggests that, in the long run, providing access to higher education along with appropriate forms of academic support such as basic writing pays off for individuals and for society.*

KEYWORDS: *basic writing; remediation; higher education; educational standards; underprepared students; educational opportunity*

In 2010, the story of basic writing is far from resolved. The global economic downturn that began in 2008 echoes on a huge scale the New York City financial crisis that eviscerated BW programs in the City University of New York in the mid-1970s. Mina Shaughnessy, speaking at the 1976 Conference of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors (CAWS) to those who had lived through budget cuts and retrenchments, struggled to find a way of seeing something good come of such hardship. She found some consolation in the solidarity that was forged during these shared struggles:

> I cannot imagine a group of teachers who have ever had more to
> say to one another. It is a special fraternity joined not only by our

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common purposes and problems as teachers but by our having come to know, through our students, what it means to be an outsider in academia. Whatever our individual political persuasions, we have been pedagogically radicalized by our experience. . . .

Such changes, I would say, are indestructible, wherever we go from here. ("The Miserable Truth" 269)

Basic writing came back from that scene of devastation, and it may once again in a new century, but not as a unified project. Coherence, if it ever exists in academic research or its application, is a property of beginnings. Maturity breeds complexity. What research has disclosed about basic writing—whether as a teaching project, a population of students taught, or a context for such teaching and learning—is that its incarnations differ from one site and time to the next.

Recognizing that basic writing will continue to evolve in the years ahead, in this article we will assess the current situation and suggest some possible future directions for the field. In order to contextualize this discussion, we will first review the political climate that has led us to this point.

POLITICAL PORTENTS

Questioning the Value of Remediation

Throughout the 1990s, the debate over whether BW students had any business being in college was reopened with a vengeance. An early warning shot came in the form of a "Point of View" piece in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in 1991. Marc Tucker, then president of the National Center on Education and the Economy, effectively made his point with his title: "Many U.S. Colleges Are Really Inefficient and High-Priced Secondary Schools." His elaboration of the point basically outlines a program that would be followed throughout the decade:

Remediation is a poor substitute for prevention. Non-existent standards are a part of the problem, not the solution. Colleges that take whomever they can get in order to fill seats are in no position to complain about the schools. If some part of the current capacity of higher education has to be shut down if we institute appropriate standards, then so be it—if the funds released can be made available

to the schools to do the job properly the first time. If colleges want to keep that money to do what they should have been doing all along—both to help the beleaguered schools and to run their own part of the "secondary" system effectively—then legislatures and the federal government should be ready to listen. It is time to be honest about these issues and to do something about them.

Some of the politically charged attacks against basic writing that surfaced in the 1990s were inspired by the publication of James Traub's *City on a Hill: Testing the American Dream at City College* (1994), a journalistic account of the trials and tribulations of BW students and teachers at CUNY's City College, one that calls the whole enterprise into question. Largely anecdotal, the book purports to let its readers draw their own conclusions, but its effect is to make the critical question it begins with rhetorical: "How powerful are our institutions in the face of economic and cultural forces that now perpetuate inner-city poverty?" (5). As Nathan Glazer would write in an approving review of the book (but one with seams of sympathy for City College and its students), "Remedial education, even the best kind, can only do so much." Why? Because, though both the commitment of the students and the school's ability to match it once seemed so high, "Now the students have changed because the city has changed, and because the society has changed. It has not been a change to which many institutions have successfully adapted" (41).

As Glazer's comment suggested, the issues raised rippled well beyond one college in New York City—and one book, albeit one named a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. For a variety of reasons—social and demographic changes, increasing numbers of high school students enrolling in college (see Otte, "High Schools as Crucibles of College Prep"), and ongoing efforts to democratize and diversify higher education—remediation had become a vast industry. Attention to it was growing as both costs and enrollments in higher education grew. This was particularly true at the time of Traub's book, a period of significant economic downturn, which led to a budget crisis for CUNY and City College. Especially in a difficult economic climate, the BW enterprise was ripe for downsizing. As Mary Soliday later showed in *The Politics of Remediation* (2002), the representations of the actual extent of remediation varied considerably: "Estimates on the numbers of institutions that offered remediation in the '90s range from 40 to 81 percent" (124). The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) estimated that, at the beginning of the 1990s, a third of

college students took at least one remedial course; by the end of the decade, that number was 28 percent, with about three-quarters of all post-secondary institutions offering such courses. Significantly, the one area of decline was "remedial writing": institutions offering such courses fell from 71 percent to 68 percent from 1995 to 2000 (Parsad and Lewis).

What matters more than the exact numbers is what people made of them. There could be numerous explanations for the prevalence of remedial college courses at the end of the twentieth century: high schools were not doing their job, assessments were too strict or unreliable, culturally different students were resistant to assimilation, and so on. Of all the explanations, one seemed to have particular power for those looking at the remedial enterprise from the outside: the problem was to be found in the high schools, which were ripe for reform. Public dissatisfaction with the high schools led to demands for higher standards and more testing. By the end of the decade, legislatively mandated exit exams would be imposed for public high schools in most states, and in some states (California, New York, and Virginia, for example) colleges were required to help high schools meet the new standards (Otte, "High Schools as Crucibles of College Prep").

Basic writing, as a field, had some complicity in the conclusion that the high schools were not doing their job since it had, from the beginning, cast students as "underprepared." From this perspective, basic writing was the place to address the problems of a special population in need of special support. In one of the many defenses of BW in the 1990s (this one from 1995), Mary Sheridan-Rabideau and Gordon Brossel argued, "Basic writing classrooms . . . provide safe spaces where students are encouraged to address their writing difficulties within a supportive environment" (24). In explaining why basic writers needed such "safe spaces," these authors reasoned, "Unfamiliar with and underprepared for fulfilling the university's writing expectations, basic writers are often exploring writing practices that more experienced writers may already be quite comfortable with" (23–24).

But that is also a milder way of stating a conclusion that Shaughnessy had come to a couple of decades before when she refused to validate a type of education that had failed to properly educate millions of young adults. In *Errors and Expectations*, she expressed her wish that programs such as the one she established and ran would help to "close the shocking gaps in training between the poor and the affluent" (291). She and those who followed her lead in attempting to compensate for these gaps—especially in the absence of the needed reforms—eventually came in for critique. For example, in

"The 'Birth' of Basic Writing" (an expanded version of "Discoursing Basic Writing," which appeared as the first chapter of *Representing the "Other"* [Horner and Lu]), Bruce Horner noted that rising to such pedagogical challenges in the absence of called-for social changes could actually entrench rather than address the inequities Shaughnessy inveighed against: "Unfortunately, pedagogies labeled as 'effective' at producing results within the constraints of degrading material conditions work in tandem with such reports and protests to legitimize those conditions—conditions of crisis that seem somehow never to be relieved" (Horner and Lu 27).

Real World Repercussions

Horner's analysis effectively explains as well as excoriates the way, in the 1990s, politicians seemed concerned less with relieving "the constraints of degrading material conditions" than with reducing the cost of programs that had been attacked as ineffective. Assuming an increasingly activist stance toward postsecondary "remediation," state legislatures across the country began to pass laws limiting the availability of remedial programs. Different states have taken different approaches to "the remediation problem," but a common thread is to force students judged to need remediation in reading, writing, or mathematics into community colleges or adult education programs rather than admitting them to baccalaureate programs in four-year schools (Greene and McAlexander 15).

At the same time that states were placing restrictions on remediation, colleges and universities interested in raising their standards and status began to look critically at their entrance requirements, student retention rates, and progress toward the all-important baccalaureate degree. They soon saw that students initially classified as basic writers had a negative effect on these numbers—coming in with lower placement scores and often taking longer to graduate. The 1999 decision by CUNY's Board of Trustees to end open admissions at its four-year colleges, sending all students needing remediation to its community colleges, was an early example of this trend. Citing similar concerns about the erosion of standards, the Board of Trustees of the California State University system (the middle tier of that state's system, which also includes community colleges and research universities) ruled in the late 1990s that students must complete all remediation in English and mathematics within one year (Goen-Salter 83).

For those concerned with basic writing and basic writers, there was worse to come. In the new millennium, several of the oldest and most

highly esteemed open admissions units attached to universities were phased out. In 2003, the University of Cincinnati (UC) decided to do away with University College, a two-year open admissions unit at the main campus. For decades, University College had offered developmental work within a supportive environment to underprepared students with the goal of helping them make the transition to a regular baccalaureate program at the University. Michelle Gibson and Deborah T. Meem, professors at the University of Cincinnati who taught basic writing at University College for many years, explain the rationale behind the decision to eliminate University College: "The goal of our university has been to remove nearly all underprepared students from the main campus's degree-granting units in order to bolster UC's academic ratings in such publications as *US News and World Report*" (64). In the summer of 2009, the University of Cincinnati announced that, beginning in 2010, the main campus will admit only "those students who meet the university's academic success criteria" (Hand). Students who seem less likely to "succeed" will be referred to the university's regional campuses or to programs at Cincinnati State Technical and Community College.

In 2005, the Regents of the University of Minnesota made a similar move, voting to eliminate the University's General College, which had a distinguished history of offering basic writing and other support services to underprepared students. This decision, like the one at Cincinnati, was motivated by the institution's desire to move into the top tier of research universities. Administrators at the University of Minnesota pointed out that students who began in General College took much longer to graduate, thus increasing the average time to attain the baccalaureate degree, one of the standards used to assess the quality of research universities (University of Minnesota). As of 2009, students who formerly would have entered the General College could take courses in the College of Education and Human Development, but the University's goal is eventually to reduce the number of students in need of remedial work by 60 percent (Greene and McAlexander 16).

Although a baccalaureate degree has become an increasingly important credential in today's society, access to basic writing and other compensatory programs for underprepared students is not a high priority for state legislators and university officials. And at the end of the 1990s, basic writing came under fire from within as well as from without.

BASIC WRITING UNDER SIEGE FROM WITHIN

Arguing for Abolition

As legislators and university officials were questioning remedial efforts such as basic writing, scholars within the field were also taking a close look at BW programs and practices. This scrutiny became especially intense in the 1990s, with some saying that the whole structure of tracking and teaching BW students was unacceptable and needed to be jettisoned. The most dramatic expression of this was Ira Shor's "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality" (1997). Arguing that regular composition, instituted at Harvard in the last decade of the nineteenth century to control and gentrify a rising middle class, was itself a mechanism of "containment," Shor argued that basic writing was essentially more of the same:

> BW has added an extra sorting-out gate in front of the comp gate, a curricular mechanism to secure unequal power relations in yet another age of instability, the protest years of the 1960s and after. To help secure the status quo against democratic change in school and society, a BW language policy producing an extra layer of control was apparently needed to discipline students in an undisciplined age. At the time of BW's explosive birth, the system was under siege by mass demands for equality, access, and cultural democracy. Since then, the economy, short in graduate labor until about 1970, has been unable to absorb the educated workers produced by higher education in the past 25 years. In this scenario, BW has helped to slow the output of college graduates. BW, in sum, has functioned inside the larger saga of American society; it has been part of the undemocratic tracking system pervading American mass education, an added layer of linguistic control to help manage some disturbing economic and political conditions on campus and off. (92–93)

Even in its strong words (like the "apartheid" of the title), Shor's analysis was essentially an elaboration of David Bartholomae's claim, in his 1992 Conference on Basic Writing keynote address, that BW was guilty of "confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow" ("The Tidy House" 18). Shor's claims were rebutted by Karen Greenberg ("Response"), Terry Collins ("Response"), and Deborah Mutnick ("The Strategic Value of Basic Writing").

In fact, the debate overshadowed other BW research throughout the decade and into the next. The whole Spring 2000 issue of *JBW* was essentially devoted to the debate, and even Gerri McNenny's collection *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* (2001) is less about mainstreaming than it is about the debate over mainstreaming.

The dissensus was evidence of a turning point in the history of basic writing. Controversies had always existed in the field, but in the past they had focused on how best to proceed with BW instruction, not on whether to do so. The 1990s changed that irrevocably. Only part of this critique was mounted by those present at the creation like Bartholomae and Shor. There was also a generational shift producing scholars who argued for a wholesale rethinking of basic writing, not as a logical curricular offering but as a social, historical, and, perhaps now, outdated construction. The concerns of this new generation were effectively articulated by two prominent voices, Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu. In their introduction to *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Writing* (1999), they wrote:

> We see ourselves as part of a generation of compositionists trained in the late 1980s whose experience of basic writing was shaped by the canonical reception of certain texts on basic writing in graduate programs and professional journals. The gap between official accounts of basic writing and our day-to-day experience as writing teachers and students resulted in a dissatisfaction with what we saw as the occlusion of attention from the social struggle and change involved in the teaching and learning of basic writing, and representations of the "problems" of basic writers and basic writing in ways that risked perpetuating their marginal position in higher education. (xiv)

Distinguishing between "basic writing" and "the specific sociopolitical and intellectual contexts of both the production and reception of a discourse dominating the field ('Basic Writing')" (xi) allowed Horner and Lu to distinguish between the "heterogeneity of basic writing" and the "hegemonic position of Basic Writing" (xii), between the field's voices of dissent and complexity on the one hand and BW as the Establishment on the other.

The Great Unraveling

With or without "cultural materialist" critique and whether uppercased or not, basic writing was looking far from hegemonic as the 1990s

came to an end. This was not just due to debates over its abolition but to its actually being abolished or downsized, as attested to in accounts like Gail Stygall's 1999 article "Unraveling at Both Ends: Anti-Undergraduate Education, Anti-Affirmative Action, and Basic Writing at Research Schools." Stygall, like Gibson and Meem, Greene and McAlexander, and Soliday, recounted a political as well as a politicized deconstruction in which forces from within the institution joined with forces from without to bring basic writing down.

Horner and Lu were by no means oblivious to the consequences for BW students and teachers of such unraveling. In "Some Afterwords: Intersections and Divergences," the piece concluding *Representing the "Other,"* Horner writes:

> Certainly our insistence on the historicity of Basic Writing challenges the construction of "basic writing" into an objective, unified, and stable entity, represented as a "course," "student," or "writing." To teachers concerned with their own and their students' immediate institutional survival, however, any suggestions that "basic writing" is a construction may seem an elitist gesture from those situated to afford engagement in fine theoretical distinctions, at best an irresponsible admission, but in any event likely to provide additional fodder to those on the New Right attacking basic writing programs, teachers, and students. For if "basic" writing does not signify a "real" phenomenon, a concrete body of students with self-evident needs that must be met, then one may legitimately question whether or not to preserve basic writing programs. Similarly, given existing power relations in the United States, any emphasis on the political import of the teaching of basic writing may well seem to threaten to encourage those in positions of dominance to exercise that dominance more conclusively by putting an end to basic writing programs. Even teachers who agree that representations of basic writing are constructs that have functions strategically but problematically may well argue that such theoretical critiques are not worth the immediate, perhaps long-term, and significant material losses that such critiques may cost. (191–92)

In light of this litany of objections, the recourse Horner and Lu offer—at least in the capsule form provided in the introduction to *Representing the "Other"*—may seem small consolation: "By recognizing the heterogeneity of

basic writing at any given time and place, teachers can draw on the full range of positions and forces—dominant, alternative, and oppositional as well as residual or emergent—with some of which we might align ourselves and with all of which we must contend" (xiii). Given their own insistent focus on basic writing's "marginal position in higher education," this recognition seems to call for a remarkable resourcefulness from a harried and insecure cadre of largely part-time instructors and out-on-a-limb administrators.

Around the turn of the century, it began to seem that any efforts by teachers and administrators (no matter how resourceful they might be) to improve or even preserve their basic writing programs would be doomed to failure. Debates were roiling, programs closing. But in the midst of this disarray, two of the most significant testaments to the importance of basic writing since *Errors and Expectations* were published, reporting on research at CUNY's City College—the same site where Shaughnessy had done her groundbreaking work. Marilyn Sternglass's *Time to Know Them* (1997) gave compelling evidence of basic writers' ability to succeed, using the most carefully collected longitudinal evidence ever seen in BW research. Although this research demonstrated that educational opportunity coupled with academic support could transform students' lives, ultimately it didn't seem to matter much. The elimination of basic writing from City College was imminent. By the time Mary Soliday's *Politics of Remediation* (2002) was published, the erasure of basic writing at that college was an accomplished fact, despite the success of Soliday and Gleason's own mainstreaming experiment there.

BASIC WRITING REVISED

Public Policy and Basic Writing

Yet as basic writing was being phased out at many four-year colleges, BW programs were being preserved, or even transformed, at other institutions. One place where questions about the future of basic writing were raised was in the special Fall 2006 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, which celebrated the publication of the journal's twenty-fifth volume. It seems significant, in light of CUNY's decision to shift BW into the community colleges, that by this time in the journal's history the editors were both community college professors—Bonne August and Rebecca Mlynarczyk. In 2007, when August stepped down, Hope Parisi, another community college professor, became coeditor.

In the special issue of 2006, the editors asked some of the leaders of the field to analyze the current state of basic writing. In their contribution titled "In the Here and Now: Public Policy and Basic Writing," Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington assert that BW researchers must contend with "three themes that run through contemporary discussion of education generally, and writing specifically: that students aren't prepared for college or work during their high school years; that this lack of preparation is costing institutions and, directly or indirectly, taxpayers; and that these first two problems are rooted in a system that requires outside agents to come in and repair it" (30). They propose countering these three themes with carefully crafted rhetoric, empirical data, and a resolve to reach those beyond as well as within the academy: ". . . we need to *make* the decisions, *do* the research, and *use* the data we collect in strategic ways. It's time to move beyond academic discussion. We need to take our perspectives and our programs public: it's time to take data in hand, with rhetorical fierceness" (45). If this seems utopian, Adler-Kassner and Harrington would stress that it is nevertheless necessary given how the problem of the "underprepared" student is currently framed: "Unless compositionists of all stripes—those teaching basic writing, those who work with first-year composition and graduate students—are able to shift the direction of this discussion, it will have significant and deleterious effects on our work, affecting everything from the students who sit in our classes to the lessons that we design" (30).

But such urgency does not assure that what is needed is also what is possible. At this point, says Laura Gray-Rosendale (also writing in the special 2006 issue of *JBW*), the field has become so context-focused, so concerned with local/institutional circumstances and individual cases that

> we may have lost some of our ability to describe relevant institutional, political, and social trends in broader, general terms within basic writing scholarship. . . . While focusing on the minute specifics of basic writers' situations has allowed us to gather a great deal of crucial local knowledge, focusing so much of our energies on these projects may leave us in danger of abandoning the important national and global concerns that have defined our discipline for many years and have been fundamental to making successful arguments on behalf of our students. ("Back to the Future" 20)

Recent developments concerning basic writing have certainly confirmed the point made by the authors of these articles: BW professionals

need to communicate more effectively with college administrators, politicians, and the general public about what they do in basic writing and why these endeavors are worthy of continued support. In order to do this, they need to publicize how BW programs have evolved to meet students' (and society's) changing needs. In introducing the special issue of 2006, Mlynarczyk and August emphasize the ways in which this evolution was already happening: "In response to legislative mandates banning 'remediation' from four-year institutions, faculty committees are developing creative and academically sound programs to offer students BW support as well as academic credit" ("Editors' Column" 1). Two such programs were featured in the issue. Mark McBeth describes a new approach to basic writing developed at CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice that offers students a rich academic experience while at the same time helping them to pass the ACT exam required for exit from the course. In "Redefining Literacy as a Social Practice," Shannon Carter details the comprehensive approach developed at her institution, Texas A&M University at Commerce, in which BW students begin by analyzing a discourse they know well and gradually apply what they have learned to understand the relatively unfamiliar features of academic discourse.

Alternative Program Structures

The changing structures of basic writing programs are summarized in William Lalicker's "A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures" (1999). In this report based on a survey Lalicker conducted on the Writing Program Administrators (WPA) listserv, he groups existing BW programs into six broad categories. The first, which he terms the "baseline" or "prerequisite model," is the traditional noncredit "skills" course in which basic writing is viewed as a prerequisite to be completed before taking "college-level" composition. Although some programs using this model have adopted more progressive pedagogies and practices, the prerequisite model often causes resentment among students, who fail to see the relevance of these required noncredit courses. The five alternatives listed by Lalicker seek to avoid this problematic aspect of the prerequisite model by integrating BW instruction more completely into regular college course structures—often granting some academic credit for this work. In the stretch model (such as the well-known approach used at Arizona State University), BW students are given two semesters to complete a regular one-semester composition course (see Glau, "*Stretch* at 10," "The 'Stretch Program'"). In the studio model first

developed at the University of South Carolina, basic writers take regular first-year composition along with a required studio workshop in which they receive additional help with their writing (see Grego and Thompson). Other colleges have opted for directed self-placement. With this model, entering students are advised of the availability of basic writing courses and left to make their own decision as to whether to take BW or regular composition (see Royer and Gilles, "Basic Writing and Directed Self-Placement," *Directed Self-Placement*). A fourth alternative is the intensive model in which students who are judged to need basic writing are assigned to a composition course in which students meet for more hours than required for regular composition and receive extra support (see Seagall). The intensive model, which is similar to the studio approach in many respects, differs from it in that students remain with the same teacher and student group for all the required hours of instruction whereas with the studio model students from several different composition classes attend the same studio session. The final category listed by Lalicker is mainstreaming. Strictly speaking, this option does away with BW, placing all students in regular composition. However, Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason, directors of a successful mainstreaming project at CUNY's City College, point out that teachers who are not trained in teaching basic writing need extra resources and support in the form of professional development workshops, mentoring programs, and tutoring services for students. In effect, according to Soliday and Gleason, if mainstreaming is to succeed, then it must offer an enriched approach to teaching composition.

Other models for offering basic writing that are not mentioned in Lalicker's report include service learning, WAC (Writing Across the Curriculum) and WID (Writing in the Disciplines), and learning communities. In service-learning programs, students perform community service, which becomes the basis for their academic learning and reflection. In recent years, basic writing programs at many institutions have implemented courses that include a community service component. In *Writing Partnerships: Service-Learning in Composition* (2000), Thomas Deans states that, at its best, service learning is "a pedagogy of action and reflection, one that centers on a dialectic between community outreach and academic inquiry" (2). Based on his analysis of a variety of service-learning projects, Deans has developed a taxonomy of three paradigms that operate in these courses: (1) writing *about* the community (in which students use their community involvement as a subject to think and write about for their academic course), (2) writing *with* the community (in which students, professors, and community members collaborate in writing about issues and concerns relevant to that community), and (3) writing *for*

the community (in which students create written products for the community such as flyers or newsletter articles) (15–20).

The response to service learning from participants—teachers, students, and community members—has, on the whole, been positive (Deans 2), but descriptions of service learning in basic writing classes also allude to possible pitfalls. For example, in "Servant Class: Basic Writers and Service Learning," Don J. Kraemer takes a critical look at "the tensions and contradictions between the process-oriented, learning-centered pedagogy" usually associated with BW courses and "the product-based, performance-centered moment" emphasized in writing-for-the-community projects (92). After an analysis of his students' experiences in a writing-for project, Kraemer concludes: "When writing for the community, students do good—but very little seeking, describing, naming, acting, and changing" (108). These activities, which help students develop their rhetorical abilities, are, in Kraemer's view, more important goals for basic writing.

Even in the writing-about version of service learning, in which students use their community service to analyze a social issue, problems can arise if students do not feel personally invested in their service experience. In an article analyzing a qualitative research project focused on a basic writing course requiring students to tutor in a local elementary school, Nancy Pine found that only one student—the one who had elected to take this course because of the tutoring component—chose to include his tutoring experiences as part of the mix of sources for the required research essay. While acknowledging the complexities involved in helping basic writers to acquire academic literacy through analyzing their service experiences, Pine believes that "in writing-about composition service learning classes, it is crucial that connections between the service and course content be made explicit by and for students in multiple forms of writing and speaking" (53). Service learning has the potential to make coursework in basic writing more meaningful, but it requires careful planning of program structures and pedagogies.

When basic writing is offered as Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) or Writing in the Disciplines (WID), the concern for helping students become better writers moves beyond "remedial" programs and into mainstream courses. With WAC and WID, professors in a variety of disciplines work to encourage the development of students' academic literacies (see Bazerman et al. for a comprehensive discussion of these approaches). While it is certainly desirable for students placed in BW to receive writing support in their mainstream classes, it may be problematic if WAC or WID is seen as a replacement for basic writing. Faculty in disciplines other than English

may lack the desire, the fundamental knowledge of BW theory and practice, or the time needed to help basic writers become successful writers in their subject areas.

Another way of expanding the responsibility for teaching basic writing beyond the confines of the English department is seen in the growing trend toward learning community (LC) programs for students with BW placement. First developed in the 1920s and 1930s as enrichment programs for the most academically prepared students (Gabelnick et al.), in recent years learning community programs have also proved effective for students classified as basic or ESL writers. The rationale behind learning communities is to "purposefully restructure the curriculum to link together courses or coursework so that students find greater coherence in what they are learning as well as increased intellectual interaction with faculty and fellow students" (Gabelnick et al. 5). In learning community programs for basic writers, a cohort of students takes a BW course and one or more courses in other disciplines. Faculty members in the learning community collaborate to design and implement a curriculum that will help students see the interconnections between ideas from the different courses, sometimes developing joint syllabi and shared assignments.

Like other alternative approaches to basic writing, learning community programs have potential problems—most notably the "hyper-bonding" that sometimes occurs when students in the same learning cohort "gang up" to engage in disruptive classroom behavior or to sabotage an instructor or a project ("The Impact"). These negative behaviors are the exception, however, rather than the rule. For the most part, BW students who participate in learning communities are more engaged in their learning and have higher retention rates in the course and in the college, higher graduation rates, and higher grades than control groups of basic writers who do not have this experience (see Darabi, Heaney, Mlynarczyk and Babbitt for results at different colleges). Such positive, statistically significant outcomes are certainly important for the students and faculty participating in these programs. Perhaps equally important in this data-driven environment, they offer a way to convince college administrators and state legislators of the value of well-designed approaches to basic writing. Rachelle Darabi explains:

> Positioning basic writing courses within learning communities may lead not only to positive outcomes like greater student success but also relief of some of the tensions surrounding remediation at the university level. By increasing students' opportunities to succeed,

> universities can spotlight these successes rather than being defined by failures, allowing faculty and students alike to focus their attention on learning. (71)

The recent development of new models for providing basic writing instruction at many U.S. colleges is a hopeful sign. Program directors and professors across the country are using what they have learned about basic writing over the years to design innovative programs that better meet students' needs while also conforming to the requirements imposed by politicians or university administrators. For the most part, these redesigned programs are an improvement on the old prerequisite model of remediation, where students first had to complete basic writing to certify that they were ready for "college-level writing." Instead, students are developing the academic literacies needed for college coursework while actually taking "college-level" courses. Whether such programs will survive in the face of mounting pressure to cut costs and raise "standards" in higher education remains to be seen.

BASIC WRITING FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Anticipating the Need

In discussing the fate of basic writing in the years to come, one question that arises is whether the need for this type of support at the college level will decrease, increase, or remain relatively stable. Several indicators suggest that the need will increase substantially. Since the 1990s, many states' efforts have focused on eliminating the need for "remediation" in higher education. But the success of these efforts has been negligible. In fall 1995, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveyed two- and four-year institutions. Of those that offered remedial courses, about 47 percent reported that the number of students enrolled in these courses had remained about the same over the past five years. For 39 percent of the institutions, the number had increased. Only 14 percent of the schools surveyed said the number had declined (Parsad and Lewis).

The experiences of the California State University system illustrate the difficulty of trying to reduce the need for remediation in higher education. In a *JBW* article titled "Critiquing the Need to Eliminate Remediation: Lessons from San Francisco State" (2008), Sugie Goen-Salter takes a historical approach. Beginning in the 1980s when about 42 percent of entering students

were judged to be in need of remediation by the system's English placement test, the California Postsecondary Education Commission began to develop complex and expensive approaches to try to reduce, and eventually eliminate, the need for English remediation at the Cal State campuses (Goen-Salter 81). These measures have included many well-designed and well-implemented programs such as requiring that all students applying to the system take four years of English in high school, tightening the requirements of teacher education programs in the state, developing innovative partnerships between high school and college teachers, and inviting eleventh graders from under-represented minorities to take a mock placement test and attend Saturday workshops to improve their academic writing (81–82).

Despite these well-conceived and well-intentioned measures, by 1990 the number of incoming students to the Cal State system in need of English remediation had climbed to 45 percent. California continued to pour resources and energy into a variety of programs to solve "the remediation problem" before students arrived on its campuses, but by 1997 the number had climbed once again—to 47 percent of new students. In this same year, the Cal State Board of Trustees enacted new initiatives designed to reduce the number of students needing remediation to 10 percent by 2007 (83). They also imposed a one-year limit on the time students could take to complete remedial courses in English and mathematics. Those who failed to meet this limit would be "disenrolled" and required to complete the requisite courses at a community college before returning to the Cal State system (83). Despite these measures, in 2007, the year when it was hoped only 10 percent of new students would require remediation, the percentage of students who needed remediation after enrolling at Cal State remained at 46.2 percent (96).

Goen-Salter outlines this somewhat discouraging history of attempts to eliminate the need for remediation in order to highlight the success of the Integrated Reading/Writing Program (IRW) developed at her own campus, San Francisco State University. This program, which currently enrolls more than 1,000 students each year, provides integrated support in both reading and writing and enables students to complete the required English remediation as well as first-year composition in their first year on campus. The success of the IRW Program strengthens Goen-Salter's central argument that college is the appropriate place to help students develop the academic literacy required in today's society:

> To perform its democratic function, basic writing sits not at the point of exit from high school, but at the *entry* point to higher

education. Historically, basic writing has served to initiate students to the discourses of the academic community, which may be far distant from and even alien to those of their home communities. But basic writing doesn't just initiate students to a more privileged language; it also offers them the opportunity and instructional practice to critically reflect on a variety of discourses, of home, school, work and the more specific public discourses of the media, the law, the health care system, and even of the college writing classroom itself. (98)

It is appropriate to invoke the ideals of a democracy in defending the notion that college should be the place to help students master the various discourses they will need in our increasingly complex society. This, of course, was the central argument that fueled demands for open admissions in the late 1960s. And there are signs that, in the years to come, enrollment in American colleges and universities will increase dramatically to accommodate growing numbers of nontraditional students, many of whom are likely to be judged "underprepared" for college-level writing.

One development that will undoubtedly increase the size of the college population—and also the need for remedial support—is the new GI bill passed in May 2008. Under this law, veterans who completed at least three years of active-duty service in the U.S. military after September 10, 2001, are eligible to receive thirty-six months of full tuition at public institutions of higher education in their states (for specific details on the new law, see "GI Bill 2008: Frequently Asked Questions"). The greatly expanded availability of educational funding for veterans will result in large increases in college enrollments. And because of the demographics of the U.S. military, many of these new students will be first-generation college students who have been out of school for years—a group that has historically needed basic writing or other types of remediation to succeed in college.

Another indicator of the likelihood of a growing need for remediation is the Obama administration's commitment to increasing the percentage of Americans attending college. In February 2009 in his first address to a joint session of Congress, President Barack Obama pointed out that 75 percent of present-day jobs require more than a high school education but that only slightly more than half of all Americans actually graduate from high school. Obama expressed the hope that by 2020 the United States would have the highest percentage of college graduates of any country in the world, and he asked "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher

education or career training" at a four-year college, a community college, or a vocational program or apprenticeship ("Address"). In his first major education address (March 10, 2009), Obama pledged increased support for higher education, and his proposed 2009 budget included substantial increases in federal Pell grants as well as a tuition tax credit for students from working families ("Remarks"). The stimulus law that Obama signed in February 2009 acknowledges "the remediation problem" and requires states that receive stabilization money to improve high school courses and testing in order to reduce the number of students who need remedial courses in college (Dillon). But California's failure to significantly reduce the need for remediation (described earlier in this article) suggests that in the future many students will continue to arrive at college in need of appropriate remedial programs.

As U.S. college enrollments increase significantly among veterans and nontraditional students, the need for basic writing is also likely to increase, as it did in the early days of open admissions. And there is an accumulating body of evidence that remedial programs—including basic writing—can have substantial benefits not only for the students enrolled in them but also for U.S. society at large.

Examining Costs and Benefits

Although coverage in the mainstream media has tended to focus on the supposed failings of remedial programs at the college level, many of these claims are not supported by well-designed research. One scholar who has taken a rigorous approach to the question of how remedial courses affect students is Bridget Terry Long, professor of education and economics at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In a 2005 article titled "The Remediation Debate: Are We Serving the Needs of Underprepared College Students?" (in *National Crosstalk*, an online publication of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education), Long described the motivation for her research:

> While the policy debate about college remediation focuses on where it should be offered and who should pay for it, more careful thought should be given to what impact remediation has on students. Do the courses help remedial students perform better and remain in higher education longer? Is the investment in remedial programs worthwhile?

To address these questions in a reliable way, Long felt it was important to compare students with similar family backgrounds, high school programs and grades, and demographics—some of whom had taken remedial courses while others had not. She found a suitable student population in Ohio, where public colleges are allowed to set their own standards for assigning students to remedial courses. Looking at the results of remediation from this more nuanced perspective, Long found that "students in remediation have better educational outcomes than do students with similar backgrounds and preparation who do not take remedial courses." She believes that curtailing remedial programs or insisting that all such support be provided in community colleges could have serious negative consequences: "Lower levels of education are associated with higher rates of unemployment, government dependency, crime and incarceration." What may initially look like a cost-saving measure—eliminating remedial programs from American colleges and universities—could end up costing society much more in the long run.

Assessing the costs and benefits of open access to higher education has been the longstanding research interest of sociologist David Lavin. In studies conducted over many years, he has focused on the student population that entered the City University of New York under open admissions in the early 1970s, the same population that inspired Mina Shaughnessy to write *Errors and Expectations*. Lavin's most recent book, coauthored with Paul Attewell and titled *Passing the Torch: Does Higher Education for the Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations?* (2007), provides a fascinating glimpse of the lives of these students thirty years later. The book addresses two broad research questions: (1) when viewed over a long time span (thirty years), how have the students who entered CUNY under open admissions fared in terms of college graduation and later earning power? and (2) how have the educational achievements of the first generation affected their children's educational careers? (Attewell and Lavin xvii). After extensive, multifaceted statistical analysis of data from a sample of about 2,000 of these former CUNY students along with a much larger national sample (for purposes of comparison), Attewell and Lavin reach conclusions that confirm the value of making higher education widely available:

> A broad population of students, including those with poor high school preparation, enters the doors of public colleges. In response, these institutions have extended remedial courses—which were always offered to wealthy students in Ivy League colleges—to any

students who need them. Is that remediation a bad investment? Contrary to critics' contentions, our analyses suggest that remedial courses do not depress graduation rates for most students, and that remediation may reduce college dropout rates in the short term.

Taken as a whole, the evidence presented in this book indicates that the democratization of public higher education has not generated hordes of unemployable graduates or worthless degrees. Those who graduate with a college degree from public universities earn significantly more than high school graduates, net of background characteristics. For hundreds of thousands of underprivileged students, a college education is the first step up the ladder of social mobility and their college attendance generates an upward momentum for most of their children. (7)

One of the most surprising facts this study revealed was that most students who started college at CUNY during open admissions eventually earned a degree. When Attewell and Lavin examined the educational outcomes of 2,000 female students from this group over a long time period (thirty years), 71 percent had completed a degree, and three-quarters of those who earned a degree received a bachelor's degree (4–5). Obviously, studies that assess graduation rates by looking at a period of four or six years miss many of the students who eventually graduate from nonselective public institutions.

How does remediation—specifically basic writing—influence students' chances of graduation? Statistics reported in *Passing the Torch* show that students who take remedial courses do take longer to graduate (Attewell and Lavin 173). However, in recent studies that tease apart the effect of taking remedial courses from other influences such as family economic status and high school preparation, it appears "that most of the gap in graduation rates has little to do with taking remedial classes in college, but instead reflects pre-existing skill differences carried over from high school" (174).

In a related study titled "New Evidence on College Remediation" (Attewell et al. [2006]), there was evidence that community college students who took and passed remedial courses were more likely to graduate than were their peers who had not taken such courses (Attewell et al. 912; Attewell and Lavin 174). In fact, community college students who took and passed remedial writing were 13 percent more likely to graduate than students with similar high school backgrounds who did not take remedial writing (Attewell et al. 912). Four-year college students who took one or more

remedial courses had lower graduation rates, but students who took only re-medial writing graduated at the same rate as students who took no remedial courses (Attewell et al. 909). The statistics on graduation rates from four-year schools are especially important if one considers the students' ethnicity. Nationwide, a large proportion of African-American and Hispanic students who eventually earned a BA took one or more remedial courses—50 percent for African-Americans and 34 percent for Hispanics. If these students had been denied admission to four-year colleges, a large number of the minor-ity high school graduates from the class of 1992 would never have earned a bachelor's degree (Attewell and Lavin 173–74).

Attewell and Lavin conclude their discussion of remediation by em-phasizing what is gained from providing remedial support: "Currently, college remediation functions both as a second-chance policy for poorly prepared students and as a form of institutional quality control that pre-vents students from graduating unless and until they demonstrate basic skills. Critics of remedial education seem to overlook the importance of remedial education for maintaining academic standards" (*Passing the Torch* 175). Attacks on remediation that have gained widespread attention in the media often ignore the subtleties revealed by thoughtful, statistically based research. A closer look reveals that this type of instruction has important benefits not only for individual students but also for the institutions they attend and the society of which they are a part.

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The statistically based conclusions of scholars such as Bridget Terry Long and David Lavin and his colleagues are highly relevant to this discus-sion of the future of basic writing. In the face of attacks on remediation as a dangerous and costly experiment, views that were widely expressed in the 1990s and early 2000s, there is increasing evidence that, in the long run, pro-viding access to higher education along with appropriate forms of academic support such as basic writing pays off for individuals and for society. This is not only an economic issue but also a moral one, a point that is stressed by Michelle Gibson and Deborah T. Meem in their description of the demise of University College, the open access arm of the University of Cincinnati:

> The way a culture treats its non-elites serves as a benchmark of the culture's moral authority. Our country has sold the myth of the American Dream to generations of its poor and disenfranchised—a myth that has traditionally revolved around access to education.

If state support of higher education results in public universities providing less and less access to underprepared, working class, poor, or otherwise marginalized students, then our sense of who is able to pursue that dream—and who is not—is dramatically altered. (50)

In his 2009 book titled *Why School? Reclaiming Education for All of Us* (excerpted in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*), Mike Rose also emphasizes the role of American colleges and universities in offering students a second chance and, thus, fulfilling the promises of our democracy. "It is terrible," Rose acknowledges, "that so many students—especially those from poorer backgrounds—come to college unprepared." But, he goes on:

> colleges can't fold their arms in a huff and try to pull away from the problem. Rather than marginalize remediation, they should invest more intellectual resources in it, making it as effective as it can be. The notion of a second chance, of building safety nets into a flawed system, offers a robust idea of education and learning: that we live in a system that acknowledges that people change, retool, grow, and need to return to old mistakes, or just to what is past and forgotten.
>
> Remediation may be an unfortunate term for all this, as it carries with it the sense of disease, of a medical intervention. "Something that corrects an evil, a fault, or an error," notes *The American Heritage Dictionary*. But when done well, remediation becomes a key mechanism in a democratic model of human development. ("Colleges Need to Re-Mediate Remediation" A76)

Despite Rose's inspirational words encouraging colleges and universities to invest more of their financial and intellectual resources in effective remedial programs such as basic writing, the future of the field is far from certain. There is no way to determine whether research will lead to dramatic advances in pedagogy or further fragmentation. It is possible but by no means certain that current threats to basic writing may be trumped by future needs as economic forces reconfigure the political landscape. More powerful models for providing BW instruction may emerge, as well as more unified support for an under-supported field. Predictions are always dubious, particularly in a time of upheaval. So the fate of basic writing—and of basic writers—in the decades to come is an open question. What is not questionable is that the country needs an increasing number of well-educated,

literate citizens to compete in the economy of the twenty-first century. Past experience suggests that many students will continue to arrive at colleges and universities lacking the writing abilities and habits of thought needed to succeed in college and the workplace. Well-designed and carefully implemented basic writing programs can enhance these students' chances for success. But this will happen only if the concerted effort to displace these students from the nation's institutions of higher education is itself displaced. What is needed is a sustained national commitment to fully educate this vital but vulnerable student population. The fate of those who would need basic writing is tied to the larger society, a society that has to decide whether to do the right thing by them and expand its commitment or contract its own chances by curtailing educational opportunity.

Of course, a society never really decides to do anything. That falls to individuals, to their resolve and their initiative. The future of basic writing, like its past, will depend on how external forces combine with initiative from within, often resulting in moments of extraordinary leadership and fragile consensus as well as incremental progress and stunning setbacks. There are lessons to be learned from that history, some hard and some inspiring. Some may have lost their relevance with the passage of time. But some may make the past of basic writing a guide to building its future.

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Teaching Basic Writing in a Web-Enhanced Environment

Linda J. Stine

ABSTRACT: Remarkably little has been published on what works or does not work in online basic writing (BW) instruction. Internet-based learning is not a natural fit for BW students, and instructors planning hybrid or distance learning courses face a difficult task, with little theory to guide them. This article reviews current research and advice on three key questions about web-based learning in general: how online learning affects the teaching role, what kinds of assignments are appropriate to this medium, and how teachers can best promote the sort of student self-reflection important to academic success. BW teachers are encouraged to consider carefully how best to translate general Web-based teaching/learning theory into praxis tailored to their specific students and then to share the results, so that their questions, their experiences, and the experiences of their students begin to play a larger role in the online education debate.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; developmental students; Internet; computer-mediated communication; online instruction; adult learning; higher education

Internet-based learning[1] is not a natural fit for basic writing students. Online learning places heavy demands on such students' weaker skill areas—reading and writing—rather than building on their oral and aural strengths. It requires a level of technological skill that basic writers, especially older nontraditional students, often do not possess. It assumes a sense of independence and self-confidence that developmental students almost by definition have not attained. It also demands disciplined time management, which is an ongoing struggle for developmental students even in traditional class settings. Basic writing teachers considering a move to some form of blended course or to a distance learning environment, therefore, face quite a challenge, and yet despite copious literature on Internet-based education in general, remarkably little has been published on what works or does not work for online basic writing instruction.

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In an effort to contribute to the "more inclusive conversation" that Catherine Gouge (347) calls for, one in which writing teachers rather than university administrators or IT staff define the terms of the online/onsite debate, I gather together some of the "lore" (Del Principe) about online education in general, note times when I found myself questioning the lore—and the lure—of online course delivery for a basic writing class, and highlight areas where additional research is needed to answer three questions BW teachers will have to consider: how does online learning change the teaching role, what kinds of assignments are appropriate to this medium, and what tools/methods may best encourage the sort of student self-reflection so important to academic success? The more we understand about best practices in online learning in general, the better decisions we can make about which practices to adopt, adapt, or reject as we design successful learning experiences for our own basic writing students.

RETHINKING THE TEACHING ROLE

Teaching online is harder, more time consuming, less rewarding to many instructors because of the personal remove, and often less fairly remunerated than teaching in a traditional environment. Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons—personal, professional, political, not to mention the sheer volume of articles touting the Internet's potential to change and radically improve education—basic writing teachers in increasing numbers are trying out hybrid or distance education options. My own decision to design a blended course, in which students attend class one week and work online the next, arose from both practical and pedagogical reasons: the need to save busy working adults commuting time and, if possible, money, along with the hope that the online experience would provide these students with new writing opportunities while simultaneously increasing their comfort with the kinds of educational technology they would be facing in future courses. I quickly came to appreciate Martha Snyder's caution that moving a class online requires teachers to define—for themselves and for the students—the goals, values, instructional methods, and learning situations so as to make sure that the new course is logical and its materials congruent.[2]

One essential piece of planning information needed is the level of student technology access and skill, since this defines the kinds and scope of appropriate learning activities and ensures that teachers build in instruction where needed. As Joellen Coryell and Dominque Chlup remind us, "It is

important to train students *how* to before asking them to *do*" (270). Ideally, a hybrid classroom will be a dedicated computer lab equipped with a shared network drive accessible to all students, a projector, and Internet connection, allowing the teacher to demonstrate technology tools in class and give students time for hands-on practice. While not completely eliminating the problems that inevitably occur when students go home and try to replicate these activities on their own computers, in-class practice at least moderates some anxiety and stress. Teachers of true distance education courses, of course, do not have that show-and-tell luxury, but animated screen captures depicting the steps for desired skills can provide a useful alternative, especially for visually oriented students who learn better from pictures than from written directions. Adult basic writers with high writing anxiety and high computer anxiety will quickly feel—and become—lost if they cannot complete an assigned task because they are unable to navigate the technology. Even younger, more tech-savvy students do not necessarily translate their ease with a cell phone or a YouTube video into ease with an unfamiliar course management system.

Another important question to consider when planning the online component of a course is how teachers are going to "talk" to students when this "talking" is taking place online. In the classroom, we often respond quickly and briefly at first and then engage as needed in a lengthier dialogue to explain our answer, so that the message the students take away is the one we planned to send. Denied the option of immediacy and dialogue, online teachers must consider their words carefully when responding to student questions, papers, or postings. As many online educators have cautioned, e-mail is a "hot" medium that offers much more opportunity for miscommunication than does a classroom conversation (Halio 58). Sarcasm is dangerous, humor is hard to produce, and a long written message can decrease a student's chance of understanding the main point while a brief one can be interpreted as dismissive. Finding the happy medium may be especially problematic for teachers of basic writers; our students are often inexperienced readers, so we will need to find ways to check student reactions frequently.

When to respond can be just as difficult as *how* to respond, since online students want and expect the same sort of instant gratification that face-to-face conversations offer. Experts stress the importance of setting response parameters clearly. If the course management system offers automated responses, teachers are urged to create an auto-response that immediately acknowledges receipt of assignments (so students know their work has not gone astray) and explains when more detailed feedback will be provided. For

anxious basic writers, who frequently trust neither their writing nor their technology skills, providing a variety of instructor access options (phone, fax, chat, IM, Facebook, etc.) can be the difference between a student persisting or dropping out. I have found that giving students my home phone number establishes a bond of trust: my pledge to be there when they really need me and their agreement not to abuse the privilege. The personal bond, so necessary for demonstrating the encouragement, clarification, and individual concern that basic writers often seem to need, can get stretched to breaking when students do not have the luxury of regular, face-to-face interaction in class and office hours. Onsite students do not have to worry that their teacher might not show up in the classroom; they do, though, wonder if the teacher is really "out there" when they are working online. Renegotiating issues of trust and access is an important part of the online course planning process.

Where to respond on electronically submitted assignments is another question to consider. All experienced writing teachers know the basic recommendations for effective commenting on student papers: identify positives, give explanations rather than labels, speak as a reader not a grader, clarify not just what to change but how to do so, be respectful, be compassionate, personalize the responses, provide timely feedback, and tie it into specific assignment criteria with a clear summary of the main steps to take for improvement (Wolsey 313). Thomas Wolsey found that the online students he surveyed placed special value on detailed comments and components phrased as questions, and preferred feedback embedded in the text (using Word's "track changes") over summary comments at the end. While those findings may or may not hold true for other students, online instructors would do well to check student preferences and work within those preferences when possible. Students working online will not be able to ask for immediate clarification and elaboration the way they can when papers are handed back and discussed in class, so the more comfortable they are with the feedback modality, the better the chance for effective communication. One of the discoveries I made when investigating student preference was that my students liked to give feedback in writing but they liked to *get* feedback orally. This led me to supplement my inserted comments written on individual student papers by using a digital recorder to post an audio file on the class website containing a more extensive oral explanation of typical trouble spots.

Feedback methodology is also an issue to consider when planning peer review opportunities for an online or hybrid class. During one of the early

in-class sessions of my hybrid course, students practice a variety of review options and then discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each: which works best if the feedback is going to be printed out, which works best for focusing on the big picture, and which works best for giving and/or receiving comments, based on personal learning preferences. When they are ready to start online peer review, students decide within their individual groups how they want to get comments from the others, some choosing to talk things over by phone or Skype so they can ask for explanations, others choosing "track changes" so they have a clear printed record, and others asking for a summary via e-mail so they can focus on a few big issues without getting bogged down in detail. Teachers working entirely online might consider including an early discussion forum on this issue, suggesting general pros and cons and asking students to specify and explain their preferences.

Determining when, where, why, and how to structure online components takes considerable time, and these time pressures do not let up after the initial planning period ends. The time commitment required for online teaching typically continues to be heavier than for onsite teaching, even after the course design and materials have been created and any new technology has begun to feel familiar. It is simply harder to write than to talk, and managing online learning experiences requires much more writing from the instructor: announcements, e-mails checking in on students who are not contributing, responses to discussion postings, comments on blogs, and detailed comments on student papers. Online teachers find themselves logging on at least three to four times a week, if not daily, and for hours at a time to monitor discussions, model good responding practices, answer students' e-mailed questions, and send out announcements and clarifications, not to mention trying to track down and encourage students who are not participating (Smith, Ferguson, and Caris 43). Over and above such new demands is the time spent responding to and evaluating student papers. For these reasons, a maximum class size of twenty is typically recommended for online classes in general (Colwell and Jenks); most instructors, unfortunately, will have little power to enforce this ideal. Teachers who end up with more students than they hoped to find in their online classes must be extra vigilant in finding ways to create community without burying themselves and their students under a blizzard of discussion postings and e-mails.

Advice is available on methods of response and course structure that will help instructors manage the increased demands on their time (e.g., Warnock); teachers planning the move online need to consider this issue carefully. They must also consider their response to the diminished personal

contact: can an online teaching relationship provide the same satisfaction that a face-to-face classroom offers, or will it simply be a case of more work, less time, and less fun?

For me, problems of time and isolation have been more than offset by two unexpected rewards. First is the joy of discovering countless ways to expand my teaching arsenal as new technologies emerge day by day. Each new application I read about causes me to rethink both subject matter and subject delivery; the continuous innovation that technology change enables provides a sense of job satisfaction not as easily maintained while teaching the same topics from the same textbooks in the same manner. Second, although I am more separated from my students in the hybrid sections in that I see them only half as often, by the end of the semester I feel that I know them better than my onsite students as a result of having read their various kinds of writing with particular care in order to make sure that my responses are as clear as possible, since we may not have the opportunity for a follow-up discussion.

STRUCTURING ONLINE LEARNING ASSIGNMENTS

One of the main decisions teachers face when moving a course online is what new kinds of learning experiences to include. Such a decision requires careful attention to what Don Olcott terms the "five I's" of effective distance teaching (Palloff and Pratt 52): *interaction* (between student/student, student/teacher, and student/course material), *introspection* (student interpretation, revision, and demonstrated understanding of concepts), *innovation* (experimenting with new tools to address various learning styles), *integration* (of facts, concepts, theories, and practical application of knowledge), and *information* (what students need to know to move on to the next level.) Consider, for instance, just one decision relating to the first "I": the syllabus. The syllabus typically sets the tone for how students interact with teacher, students, and course material. A syllabus for a web-enhanced course must therefore at a minimum explain to the students the following points: how to log in (including instructions for using browsers, finding the course site, printing out or saving online material, searching the Internet, sending and receiving e-mail), requirements for successful online learning (time framess and time management), any important differences in the roles of instructor and students in an online vs. traditional class setting, how communication between instructor/students and students/students will take place, rules for

giving feedback and other issues of netiquette, and how students can get needed help (Palloff and Pratt 123). One new section that had to be added to my hybrid course syllabus, for instance, was a definition of what would be considered being "present" or "absent" during the online weeks. Another was how the inevitable technology problems would be handled: students are not penalized for deadlines missed because of a failure of the course management system, but when an assignment is submitted late because a student's own computer/printer/Internet access crashes, that student is penalized according to the policies laid out in the syllabus, since the mark of a responsible professional is to have a back-up plan. Another new section of my hybrid syllabus involved reminding students of the importance of backing up files in several places and how to attach files to an e-mail message that they can send to themselves using our CMS e-mail as additional insurance against lost or malfunctioning flash drives, procedures that we practice together in an early onsite class so that I can stress the importance and make sure students know the process. Of course, the longer the syllabus gets, the more chance that our BW students will overlook or misunderstand important sections. Anjanette Darrington suggests including an early discussion topic asking students to post what they do not understand about the syllabus. In addition to making sure that students actually read the syllabus, such an assignment gives the teacher a chance to provide timely explanations of anything misunderstood and to add new information as needed.

Innovation, the third "I," presents perhaps the greatest challenge for teachers of basic writers. All writing teachers understand the importance of providing a mix of assignments so as to get to know more about their students' strengths and weaknesses than the formal academic paper reveals. Online courses suddenly make available an embarrassment of riches. Cynthia Selfe, for instance, asks writing teachers to "encourage students to deploy *multiple* modalities in skillful ways—written aural, visual—and . . . model a respect for and understanding of the various roles each modality can plan in human expression, the formation of individual and group identity, and meaning making" (625-26). She challenges teachers to help their students create meaning through all the kinds of multimodal composition that the Internet enables, so as not to limit their "bandwidth of composing resources" (641) to words on a printed page. This is indeed a challenge for *any* writing teacher; it is an even greater one for developmental writing teachers charged specifically with helping their students gain control over the written word, raising the question of how best to use the freedom that the Internet offers to improve student writing without neglecting

the skills traditionally privileged in the academy, all the while working within constraints of the limited access and technology skills common to basic writers. If I ask students to write about a YouTube video rather than a journal article, I may get more interest and thus more time on task and better thinking, but am I preparing them for the next level of assignment, which will require them to work with text-based, scholarly articles? If I ask students to present their ideas in pictures and bullet points on a PowerPoint slide, will I be taking away another needed practice opportunity for expressing themselves in grammatical sentences and fluent paragraphs? How do we define the "writing" part of "basic writing" in this multimedia age? I find myself still limiting student writing primarily to words and keystrokes, and I worry that I am doing a disservice by thus narrowing the "composition bandwidth." We need much more research describing the kinds of non-print-based learning experiences and writing assignments BW teachers might successfully integrate into web-enhanced courses.

Even if writing is still defined narrowly, however, web-based instruction has multiplied immeasurably the ways we can choose to teach it. One of the main advantages the Internet offers is a wealth of new ways to involve students in different types of learning and accommodate a fuller range of learning preferences. Researchers from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, for instance, have developed a course model comprising eight different ways of learning that they call OctoPlus: connect, reflect, share, learn, practice, personalize, experiment, apply (Kelly, "Adaptive" 7). Teachers planning an online course could productively use this framework to ensure that they are providing comprehensive, well-sequenced learning activities, offering students the chance to learn in many different ways. In a basic writing course that includes grammar review, for instance, students might first take a pre-test to connect with their past understanding of a topic like sentence boundary errors, then *reflect* in an online journal about what they know and don't know. Once they have clarified their thoughts by this personal reflection, they can *share* their conclusions with others through a blog or discussion posting, following this up by viewing a PowerPoint or video or reading a chapter in a textbook to help them *learn* any aspects that they have identified to be problems. Next would come *practice* in the form of exercises, followed by another discussion posting commenting on what they have learned *personally*. At this point students could be asked to *experiment* with their knowledge by developing brief explanations and examples to teach their classmates one new thing they have learned. Finally, students could *apply* their understanding by writing papers free of that grammar error,

and/or reviewing classmates' drafts for grammatical correctness. Not all assignments need to move through all eight processes, of course, and not all students need to work through all eight steps even if available, but the model offers a good lens through which instructors can re-view their learning tasks before moving them online.

Christina Matas and Cameron Allan found asking students to keep short-answer learning portfolios helpful in improving their generic writing and thinking skills. They require their students to write a sequence of three short essays. Viewing this process in terms of the Octoplus framework, the student writes a first draft (*practice*), sends it to a peer for review while reviewing another student's draft (*sharing*), revises the essay based on peer review (*personalizing*), and then writes a *reflection* on the learning experience involved. Matas and Allen found that a series of small, repetitive assignments like this reduces student anxiety and improves writing, technology, and cognitive skills, while guiding the students toward more critical self-reflection. While this repeated sequence of learning experiences could prove useful in any writing class, such built-in opportunities for building community, receiving positive reinforcement from peers and teacher, and gaining control over the technology through repetitive activities would be especially valuable in an online BW class where anxiety levels run high and metacognition levels low.

Catherine Green and Rosie Tanner provide additional advice on accommodating online students' varied intelligences: intrapersonal, interpersonal, linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical, naturalistic, bodily-kinesthetic. Many of their suggestions call for activities that require students to get away from the computer to perform some action; such an activity provides the buy-in on a topic that makes students willing to come back online to process it. To describe what an ideal writing teacher might be, for instance, Green and Tanner first ask the students to make a metaphor that expresses their ideal, allowing them to choose among sculpting, poetry/song, dance, listing/rank ordering, finding something in nature that represents the ideal and photographing it, observing a good teacher in action and writing a summary, or finding a representative archaeological artifact on the Web. Students post descriptions, videos, or photographs of their results, and then reflect and comment in writing on their and others' choices. Instructors must, of course, make sure that technology problems do not limit students' abilities to complete the assignment. Will basic writing students already know how, for instance, to digitalize a photo or video and post it to the class website if they want to choose that option? If not, how will they learn those

tasks, and will the results be worth the time taken away from other learning activities? My promise to the adult, generally technophobic students in my hybrid course has always been that I will not ask them to do anything at their home computers that we have not practiced together in our face-to-face class; this has necessarily limited the number and the complexity of the technology-based assignments I can require, not wanting my onsite class periods to be devoted solely to practicing computer tasks. How do basic writing teachers best reconcile what we *could* do with all the new teaching options available online with what our students reasonably *can* do?

Even when all the decisions on assignments and technology have been made, online course planning is not finished. Teachers still need to determine how best to present the online assignment directions. A study of the usability of an online first-year composition course for community college students (Miller-Cochran and Rodrigo) found that students missed important information when it was located in large blocks of text. The researchers thus recommend using shorter text blocks, color, and headings to make important information stand out, advising instructors to simplify the course design by putting all major links in a navigation bar, make the sequence of activities clear, and allow for multiple points of access. Other design tips include placing important information in the center of the screen, highlighting and using headings to focus the reader's attention on critical information, providing explanations of why students must do something to accompany explanations of what they should do, and including links to simpler and more difficult material so that the each student can relate at his or her knowledge level (Anderson & Elloumi 10).

Teachers moving online cannot, therefore, simply upload old assignment directions as a .pdf file. A typical set of print directions, for instance, might contain several double-spaced pages of text organized chronologically, beginning with the assignment topic, purpose, and audience and then providing specific suggestions for how to plan, organize, draft, edit, and proofread. For online use, such an assignment is best redesigned as a brief "front page" summary of directions, containing hyperlinks to different screens with additional advice for moving through the stages of the writing process. Students viewing the assignment from the monitor can thus read the main points easily without being confused by screens dense with text. They are also guided into more goal-directed, active reading habits by the fact that they can choose to follow various hyperlinks for additional information.

THE BASIC TOOLS: CHATS, WIKIS, BLOGS

Chatrooms

In the traditional classroom, much of the energy and the learning emerges from face-to-face discussion, with students and teachers focused on the same issue at the same time. Course management systems attempt a simulation of such real-time communication with chatrooms and whiteboards. Although acknowledging potential problems such as lack or misunderstanding of affect and difficulties posed by the text-intensive nature of the interaction, Beth Hewett has found these tools useful for online tutoring, arguing that the language of instruction more nearly resembles oral dialogue, with the whiteboard offering a chance to teach by "doing" rather than just by talking, along with the added advantage of a record of the proceedings available at the end. For basic writing instructors considering this option, though, I would draw attention to one potential concern that Hewett notes:

> [S]tudents who are uncomfortable with the act of writing in instructional settings may find synchronous conferences more challenging or challenging in different ways from asynchronous instruction because synchronous interactions require real-time participation. Not only do such conferences ask the students to write about their own writing, but they ask students to do so using writing with sometimes instantly visible texts. (7)

Here again, BW instructors will have to weigh the pros and cons carefully as they consider the option. Can we get our students past the initial fear of expressing and exposing their weaknesses and make such a conference into an empowering situation, or will we lose the power of the student/teacher interchange if we force it online? What sort of supports can we build into the communication process to make sure that student discomfort leads to learning rather than leaving? I have not yet had much success using chatrooms for instructional purposes with my adult students—busy lives make finding a common meeting time difficult, and, more importantly, reluctant writers find it difficult to formulate thoughts, come up with the right words to express these ideas, and quickly "publish" them for all to see without a chance of editing—but students in my classes have sometimes used chatrooms as social gathering places, agreeing on a day and time for those

interested to "drop by" and talk about how their week is going. The tool is probably a useful option to consider in a basic writing course even if not as an essential part of the instruction itself. How/if basic writing instructors are incorporating synchronous communication options into online classes is an area in which more case studies are needed. Also needed is research on more technologically rich (and costly) real-time communication tools like Wimba, which allow students to see and hear one another rather than being limited to written text on whiteboards and chats. Do the visual/oral advantages such tools offer make enough difference to basic writers to justify the cost to institutions and students? Are there comparative studies looking at this sort of cost/benefit in the research pipeline?

Wikis

Much has been written about wikis with respect to collaborative writing and learning, and the inherent democratization involved in providing all members equal opportunity to revise a piece of writing. Rebecca Lundin argues that wikis have the potential to help change pedagogy and expand the options for peer review by allowing students to edit one another's writing directly, post a response, or post a link to outside resources. She describes a successful activity in which students are offered the chance to post drafts voluntarily on the wiki for review by teacher and classmates, with the "price" of such review being the requirement that the poster respond to the drafts of two other classmates. Her perception is that online review via wiki is less threatening and more anonymous than face-to-face peer review groups. Basic writing teachers will have to consider carefully whether the benefit of using this tool, one that adult students may not be familiar with, is extensive enough to warrant its cost. In addition to possible technical problems, I suspect that many basic writing students will be reluctant to make use of the main function of a wiki—deleting someone's words and substituting one's own—because of their insecurities about knowing the "right" thing to say, a problem that arises frequently in in-class peer review groups. How best to mix wikis and basic writers is yet another issue absent from our scholarly literature.

Blogs

Blogs are a more familiar tool for online learning and, on the surface, seem ideally suited to the needs of basic writing students. Cheryl Smith,

in an article discussing blog use with her first-year composition students, notes that blogs provide:

> an online arena where error, language play, and invention are not only accommodated but actively incorporated, blogs are a surprisingly straightforward way to negotiate the tensions of error. They add a new platform for writing that increases opportunities for student-driven expression, facilitate and energize the processes of collective brainstorming and peer review, stimulate creativity and class community, and supplement more traditional platforms for writing without supplanting or detracting from them. (37)

Smith sees blogs as democratic spaces, arguing that by allowing "participants equal access to a public voice in a forum that is familiar to many young people, blogs create a safe place for risk-taking and error" (38). Those of us who teach older students, however, students for whom blogs are just as unfamiliar a writing space as the formal academic essay, will have to think carefully about how or if we can make blogs a familiar place where they too can feel that important element of play that "lowers the emotional stakes of failing" (West 597). Another issue to be aware of is that students tend to associate blogs with informal writing style (Ellison and Wu), so instructors must be explicit about what style they expect students to use in their blogs.

A variation on the blog that basic writing instructors interested in enhancing students' metacognitive skills might consider is the public learning diary. Learning diaries involve more extended responses than blogs, and normally are shared with only a small group rather than posted publicly for all to read, so they may be less threatening (Nückles, Schwonke, Berthold and Renkl). The goals of blog and diary, however, are the same: improved critical reasoning and enhanced self-understanding. Teachers will have to decide what sort of writing environment best meets the needs of their students and their course goals—a private online diary accessible only to the writer and perhaps the teacher, an in-class discussion forum accessible to some specified group of students, or a blog on the Web open to all.

ENCOURAGING STUDENT REFLECTION

The most valuable and widely used tool for online learning, judging from its prominence in the literature, is the online discussion forum. Scott

Warnock, in *Teaching Writing Online: How and Why*, a concise and accessible how-to manual for teachers who want to migrate their courses online while maintaining the integrity of their personal instructional philosophy and pedagogy, sees discussion boards as almost "the holy grail of writing instruction" (69). Different from a public blog, discussions are generally limited to members of a particular class group. They can be moderated or un-moderated, expressed in more or less formal language, and comprised of shorter or longer responses. Whatever the parameters set, the discussion forum, with its capacity to expand, enhance, and elevate the level of students' reflection on course content and on their own cognitive style, is the tool most often invoked when discussing online learning as a promising venue for composition instruction, active learning, and community building. Students engaged in writing for discussion forums are writing frequently, writing for communication rather than just for grading purposes, and writing in situations that more closely simulate authentic, everyday situations, thus increasing student investment.

The potential for basic writing instruction is clear. Any potential benefits, however, arrive trailing a number of potential problems. The first is the general difficulty of maintaining student presence. Students sitting alone at their home computers are invisible. Instructors need to think carefully about how they will ensure four factors essential to social presence online (Dow): *effective dialogue*, *well-structured interactions*, *ease of use of media tools* (such as orientation to use course management systems like Blackboard if students are not experienced with them), and *transparency of computer-mediated communication*. Effective dialogue and transparency of communication are connected: students need to learn how to talk about relevant topics using "netiquette," and, because it is difficult to know what other people are thinking and feeling when they are invisible, teachers must consciously create the kind of social engagement that happens automatically in face-to-face classes. To ensure well-structured interactions, instructors may want to establish small groups in which students can build relationships with one another. These relationships can be supported with clear time frames, goals, and well sequenced learning tasks, with large topics broken down into small chunks and ample time for discussion of the steps and how students are managing the goals.

Few basic writers tend naturally to define and express themselves through writing, so enticing them into discussion-based learning requires conscious, informed, sustained instructor efforts: ongoing positive reinforcement, such as personal e-mails to students who have written especially good

posts; interesting, relevant topic choices, so that students want their ideas to be heard (I survey students at the end of the term to determine which topics they most liked and disliked and change the following semester's discussion accordingly); relatively brief prompts, so that students don't spend all their efforts just getting through the initial question; a reasonable enough percentage of the overall class grade for busy students to want to take it seriously (in my course, 15% of the final grade); and quick notification, in person or by e-mail, any time students are not meeting the requirements, so that they know the teacher is always reading even when that teacher is not participating in the discussion. Letting small groups of students choose the topic and moderate the discussion during part of the semester has proven to be another good way of stimulating engagement.

Although in theory discussion boards are assumed to produce higher level thinking, allowing students time to work their way from mere understanding toward synthesis and evaluation, the second difficulty BW teachers must consider is that in practice this does not occur on its own (see for example Hou, Chang, and Sung). Kay Lehmann recommends that teachers end each of their postings with a question, so as to keep the discussion going and encourage student response (11). Her general facilitation rules are to ask thought-provoking questions, summarize discussions so as to validate the views of those who have responded as well as inspire others to jump into the conversation, review points made to encourage students to contribute additional similar or opposing viewpoints, save time and encourage community by providing general group feedback rather than responding individually to every student post, and ensure that no one is being ignored (20).

Students have to create their own status within the new "space" of online learning. Bill Anderson suggests that much jockeying for political control takes place in the discussion forum, as students decide what to read, when to read it, how honest to be in their postings, whom to respond to, and how long they are comfortable waiting for answers to something they have posted. Instructors must be alert to negative patterns that may develop, such as students who stop contributing because they do not get reinforcement, students who only reply to "friends" they agree with, and students who only send out too brief or too "safe" responses. Research shows that students who post early tend to control the discussion, derive more satisfaction from it, and do better overall in grades. To stimulate early and active discussion, Scott Warnock (qtd. in Kelly, "Adaptive") suggests using simple prompts (so that students don't have to log off and think awhile before responding), making the discussion fun (like posting a controversial

claim that students can debate), making discussion responses valuable to the overall course (asking students to use posts as evidence in subsequent papers), allowing the students to moderate some of the discussions, giving students choices (by having a variety of forums available but only requiring a specific number), and building students' metacognitive skills by having them review what has been written and explain why a particular post (or poster) was their favorite.

In my own hybrid classes, I find online discussions essential to encourage both pre-thinking and re-thinking. One assignment, for instance, asks the students, all of whom are adults working in helping professions, to respond to the following posting:

> Everyone who works in the field of human services has to deal with the problem of poverty to some extent or another. In this week's posting, I'll be interested in hearing your views on (1)what puts people into poverty, (2) what keeps them there, (3) why poverty seems to affect minorities and women disproportionately, (4) what the effects of poverty are on the consumers with whom you work, and (5) why it is so hard to break out of the cycle of poverty and dependence when the U.S.A. is supposed to be a land where all people are created equal and have equal opportunity to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Give specific examples where you can from your professional or personal experience. What can we as individuals do to begin to solve the problem? What must the country as a whole do to address it?

This posting, purposely broad, typically sparks a heated online discussion, as students express their personal views in an initial posting and then agree or disagree with at least one classmate's response in a second posting. Unlike in oral discussions, everyone has the chance both to reflect on the topic for as long as is necessary to focus their ideas before "speaking" and to have their opinion be "heard." In the following face-to-face class, we talk about the different causes listed, seeing how they fall into two categories, the liberal (*it's the government's fault and we can best help the poor by changing the economy and the educational system*) and the conservative (*it's the individual's fault and we can best help poor people by teaching them other ways of thinking, parenting, and living*). Having now clarified and labeled their own views and heard the opposition, students read with more understanding an article describing an educational reform project designed to appeal to both sides and then write

an essay about how their workplaces might collaborate in that project. The initial on-line discussion provides the buy-in and the incentive, and students tend to write with a much more authentic voice than they would have for a typical "summarize this article and use it in an essay" assignment.

Discussion forums also can be used to help students explore their own strengths and weaknesses as learners. Alfred Rovai presents a model for predicting persistence among distance education students (9), looking at student characteristics (such as age, gender, ethnicity, academic level), student skills (e.g., facility with technology, reading/writing skills, time management), external factors (job, family, life crises), and internal factors (commitment, goals, social integration, interpersonal relationships, learning and teaching styles, etc.). Online basic writing teachers might profitably share this or a similar model with students in an early discussion forum and suggest that students use it for self-assessment, with the goal of identifying strengths, weaknesses, and group strategies for dealing with weaknesses.

Ideally, interaction in an online community involves students in essential academic skills: learning to listen to one another respectfully, trying to identify other students' assumptions, challenging unsupported opinions, building on other students' ideas, and assisting each other in drawing inferences from what was said (Shen et al. 19). Simply adding a course component that requires students to reflect on their learning, unfortunately, does not in itself ensure better understanding of the topic or improve students' meta-awareness. As Edward Taylor cautions (Merriam 5-16), students only gain the ability to reflect through continuous and guided practice over time. The teacher needs to be present in the discussion to model appropriate behavior, focus the discussion when it strays into non-productive areas, encourage and reinforce postings that show reflective thinking, point out areas of agreement or disagreement in order to ask students how to reach consensus or understanding of difference, insert new information from opposing viewpoints when students do not do so on their own, request clarification or elaboration as needed, and diagnose and correct student misunderstandings of issues when they occur. Just winding a discussion up and letting it run, no matter how carefully worded the questions and directions, is not enough.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Nothing that I found in my review of the literature on the pros and cons of online education has changed my overall conviction expressed in

my 2004 *JBW* article (Stine) that a hybrid course provides a better learning experience for the adult basic writers I teach than either a pure distance or face-to-face option would. The hybrid environment allows an exploration of the new world of online teaching and learning opportunities while, at the same time, retaining the structure and personal connection that adult developmental students tend to need and value. Betty Collis and Jef Moonen (25) suggest that teachers must explore the "four E's" when considering the fit between online learning and their individual course: *environment* (the institutional context such as equipment and technical support), *educational effectiveness* (perceived or expected), *ease of use* (where the students will be accessing the course, with what kind of equipment, and with what level of prior knowledge), and *engagement* (the student's personal sense of engagement and self-confidence with technology.) Their research found *environment* and *engagement* to be most important of the four with respect to learners in general. I have found *ease of use* more important to my students, adults who tend to exhibit low self-efficacy in the academic domain and limited skills in the technology domain, students who have to struggle against a tendency just to give up on academic (or technological) tasks they do not understand. A hybrid course stimulates growth by pushing students beyond their comfort level, but not so far that they are lost.

Nevertheless, given the right students, the right teacher, and the right structure, it is clear that wholly online basic writing courses can be successful. One of the few published studies focusing specifically on basic writing instruction in an online environment compares outcomes from 256 developmental writing students who self-selected online instruction with those who opted for face-to-face classes (Carpenter, Brown, and Hickman). The online classes had a significantly greater withdrawal rate but also had a higher success rate for those students who stayed on and completed the course. Distance learning seems to present the typical entrepreneurial dilemma: the potential for significant benefit but also for significant harm.

Terry Anderson concludes that the challenge teachers face when they contemplate web-enhanced instruction is "to create a mix of learning activities that are appropriate to student needs, teacher skills and style, and institutional technical capacity" (Anderson and Alloumi 279). Meeting that challenge will require research on how best to maximize the benefits while accommodating the barriers that online education presents for developmental students. These students make up an already sizeable and growing population, one too easily ignored in the literature.[3] President Obama recently announced a proposed twelve billion dollars in new support for community

colleges, with the goal of producing five million additional graduates (Fischer and Parry). If the typical community college student takes even one remedial course, this will mean a host of new basic writing students waiting on the horizon. Many of them can be expected to self-select, or be advised into, online courses because of accessibility issues and/or perceived educational benefits. Unfortunately, it is still far from clear at this point what factors are most likely to make that online experience a successful one. We need more descriptive case studies and more comparative research specifically focused on how developmental writers of all ages fare in a variety of online learning situations. We do our students, the field of basic writing, and the richness of our professional composition discourse a disservice by remaining on the sidelines of the online education debate. Our questions, our experiences, and those of our students must begin to shape that conversation.

Notes

1. "Internet-based learning, or "online learning" as it is interchangeably called, covers a wide spectrum of instructional delivery methods. On one end of the spectrum is web-enhanced learning, the traditional brick and mortar course in which all class meetings are held face to face, but for which the instructor provides an online component, often through a course management system like Blackboard or Moodle, to supplement the classroom interchange. Further along the spectrum is hybrid, or blended, learning, in which the course has been designed for some specified mix of face-to-face activity and online instruction, from courses designed to spread the in-class requirements evenly throughout the semester, meeting perhaps one week online and one week onsite, to others that require only a brief, initial period of face-to-face meetings and then move online for the remainder of the term. At the far end of the spectrum is true "distance learning," instruction delivered completely online, with no face-to-face component.

2. Teachers working from a constructivist philosophy may find Snyder's table (54-56) in which she outlines goals, values, methods, and situations for a sample online course, a useful guide.

3. While a recent Department of Education meta-study (Means et al.) on the effects of online education found that "the effectiveness of online learn-

ing approaches appears quite broad across different content and learner types" (xv), and while the age range of the learners studied did include more adults than children (13 to 44 years, split evenly between students in college or earlier and students in graduate or professional programs), none of the studies included targeted adult developmental writers per se.

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Expanding Definitions of Academic Writing: Family History Writing in the Basic Writing Classroom and Beyond

Sherry Rankins-Robertson, Lisa Cahill, Duane Roen, and Gregory R. Glau

ABSTRACT: Narrow definitions of academic writing often do not serve students well because they ignore the rhetorically situated and social bases for writing and the potential role of writing to span the personal, professional, and civic areas of students' lives. Broadening school-sponsored writing to include writing about family can help students to see the relevance of writing to their lives outside of school. Further, writing about family can encourage students to reflect critically on their conceptions of family, often coming to see family as a more complex construct. Using the topic of family in writing courses provides opportunities for students to engage in non-threatening primary and secondary research and involves students in writing that is multimodal, cultural, academic, and public. This article describes some activities and assignments that help writers to explore the concept of family.

KEYWORDS: family writing; basic writing; community service; first-year composition; multimodal composition; academic writing

Regarding postsecondary writing expectations, we see an underlying problem of viewing academic discourse and academic literacies as transparent and generalizable. We propose a more rhetorical, contextualized view. Looking at conventional frameworks for academic writing paints a rich picture of assumptions about writing instruction. Joseph Petraglia identifies the result as general writing skills instruction (GWSI), with its "objective of teaching students 'to write,' to give them skills that transcend any particular

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content and context" (xii). In particular, GWSI characterizes the approach most commonly employed in first-year writing courses and consequently shapes, in part, how professors in other disciplines think writing can be taught and what skill sets their students should already bring with them. Petraglia explains that "at its core" GWSI has:

> the idea that writing is a set of rhetorical skills that can be mastered through formal instruction. These skills include the general ability to develop and organize ideas, use techniques for inventing topics worthy of investigation, adapt one's purpose to an audience, and anticipate reader response. (xi)

Petraglia argues that this approach to writing instruction does not take into account much of what writing theories explain about the act of writing as being complex, context-specific, rhetorically situated, and socially rooted. The GWSI approach contributes to producing a false set of expectations about the simplicity of learning to write. It also reduces the teaching and learning of writing to a finite number of courses (often a sequence of first-year writing courses) that, rather than continuing throughout a student's undergraduate and graduate education, are contained in one year and taught without the involvement of that student's major-specific professors.

David Russell further complicates the postsecondary approach to writing instruction when he argues that GWSI relies on a fictional discourse of academic writing, what he calls a universal educated discourse (UED). This discourse complicates the teaching and learning of writing because it constructs writing as a transparent, generalizable skill that students are supposed to learn once and for all. More so, students are often expected by their instructors to be able to broadly apply a set of general, a-rhetorical writing skills—the kind implied by GSWI—in their college course work despite the variety of rhetorical situations and audiences that they may encounter.

Viewing academic writing and literacies as transparent and generalizable can negatively influence the teaching and learning of writing because such a view has the potential to under-prepare students to meet the dynamics of changing rhetorical situations, diverse disciplinary conventions, and varied purposes for writing (Jones, Turner, and Street; Prior; Street [*Social*]). For example, the more variable the rhetorical situations of class assignments are, the less useful students may find their repertoire of learned generic writing skills. Further, such a view can result in unfairly labeling students' writing skills as deficient in some way if their writing does not demonstrate

discursive practices expected by their professors (Berkenkotter and Huckin; Greene and Nowacek).

First-year composition classrooms, particularly basic writing classrooms, offer a starting place for helping students to develop a more robust understanding of academic discourse and academic literacies. When writing assignments are designed with this goal in mind, instructors have the opportunity to challenge and socialize students into academic ways of knowing that can transcend the classroom. In support of this framework is James Moffett who, in his influential, comprehensive theory of discursive practices, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (1968), argues that we, as writing instructors, need to change our thinking about writing assignments:

> In many of our writing assignments, I see us feverishly searching for subjects for students to write about that are *appropriate for English* (emphasis in original); so we send them to the libraries to paraphrase encyclopedias, or they re-tell the plots of books, or then write canned themes on moral or literary topics for which no honest student has any motivation. Although asking students to write about real life as they know it is gaining ground, still many teachers feel such assignments are vaguely "permissive" and not as relevant as they ought to be. Once we acknowledge that "English" is not properly about itself, then a lot of phoney assignments and much of the teacher's confusion can go out the window. (7-8)

"Asking students to write about real life" has gained even more popularity in the decades since Moffett drew attention to the ways in which writing instructors often feel conflicted when students craft writing that seems to transgress the "accepted" borders of academic discourse. Such writing assignments, perceived to transgress academic borders, are still at issue today, particularly in many basic writing and first-year composition classrooms because of pressure to have students demonstrate writing that can fit within traditional norms of academic discourse. Implicit in Moffett's description is his encouragement for instructors to find other forms of writing that will not only help students to see academic writing in a larger context but will also engage them in writing about topics that are personally meaningful to them.

We propose family writing as a viable and effective option to engage basic writing students in "real life" topics while expanding the definition of academic discourse. Broadening school-sponsored writing to include writing about family can help students to see the relevance of writing to their lives outside of school. Further, writing about family can encourage students to

reflect critically on their conceptions of family, often coming to see family as a more complex construct. Using the topic of family in writing courses provides opportunities for students to engage in non-threatening primary and secondary research, involving students in writing that is multimodal, cultural, academic, and public.

Inventing the University to Include Family Writing

Students can benefit from an expanded definition of what counts as suitable writing in academic settings—definitions that "allow students to create a place for themselves and their own history in the curriculum" (Murie, Collins, and Detzner 74). As David Bartholomae suggests, making meaning via writing spans a wide spectrum of disciplines and pedagogies and provides students with a variety of challenges for which they need support. Bartholomae's 1985 description of how students must constantly re-invent the university still has relevance today, specifically in his descriptions of the ways that students must constantly re-adjust their literate practices to fit the knowledge and conventions recognized and supported by the various disciplinary instructors for whom they are writing. Bartholomae's metaphor of inventing the university through writing highlights the demands that university writing tasks place on students:

> The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy or an historian or an anthropologist or an economist; he has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other hand. (135)

The problems cited in Bartholomae's depiction are often sources of unstated assumptions or expectations. For example, students are expected to use the language of the academy, e.g., that of their professors or of the discipline of composition. Students are assumed to know how to balance the complexity of not only writing in a postsecondary environment but also for a particular discipline. Implicit in Bartholomae's metaphor of students having to generate or invent an understanding of the university's specific ways of communicating is that students are held accountable to a set of standards that may not have been explicitly imparted to them and that they may not

recognize. Students often need instruction about how to apply discursive standards to their writing and opportunities to contextualize the expectations that professors have of their writing, as with research and citation practices. They need help in negotiating their simultaneous and multiple positions of academic insider and outsider. Basic writing classrooms can address students' "disconnect" by providing writing assignments that enable students to simultaneously affirm what they already know (e.g., by allowing students to write about topics of personal, civic, professional, or academic importance to them); engage them with a real, rather than an artificial audience; and encourage them to learn new processes (e.g., rhetorical analysis or using primary versus secondary research), genres, and media.

Sherry Rankins-Robertson's recent experience in course development, along with graduate-level work in Writing Program Administration, have highlighted family writing as an exciting way to engage first-year students in meeting global outcomes, such as those outlined by the Council of Writing Program Administrators ("WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition"), while providing students with assignments in which they can become personally invested. The family writing program at Arizona State University was started in 2005 when Duane Roen, Rankins-Robertson, and several others designed the English degree in the School of Letters and Sciences to offer courses in several disciplines besides writing—communication, history, and digital technologies—with courses that included: Recording Oral Histories, Introduction to Writing Family History, Introduction to Researching Family History, Editing Family Writing for Public Audiences, Travel Writing, Writing a Personal History, Introduction to Digital Photography, Digital Publishing, and Immigration and Ethnicity in the United States. As this list of courses suggests, students are encouraged to develop interdisciplinary skills and experience to help them explore, research, and write about family from diverse perspectives. As the list further suggests, the degree is also designed to help students develop many 21st century literacies, from "reading online newspapers" to "participating in virtual classrooms" that, according to NCTE, are "multiple, dynamic, and malleable" ("The NCTE Definition").

Defining Family Writing: A Workspace for Growth

Rankins-Robertson and Roen have elsewhere identified family history, broadly defined, as an area of wide student appeal ("Investing Writers"). Before examining more closely what constitutes family writing, it is important to look at the concept of family, which can be difficult to define.

We can compare the notions of "family" to that of "technology": Just as the term "technology" is used to define many objects for a variety of purposes (e.g., pencil, toaster oven, cellular telephone, automobile), "family" is used to define various roles and relationships in terms of emotional, physical, and other ties, toward common purposes. However, its categories are not stable ones; family is not a "concrete thing responding to a concrete need" (Cheal 12-13) and neither is family a fixed term; rather, the concept of "family" is often defined according to an individual's perceptions of what that concept means or represents.

In purpose and concept, it is therefore necessary to resist the "meta-narrative" of family. In *Post-Modern Condition*, Jean-Francois Lyotard discusses the notion of a construct that has been centrally agreed upon (xxv). For example, family carries a meta-narrative of individuals linked together by legality or lineage. In "The Challenge of Family History," Stephanie Coontz suggests that teachers also must be aware of how the concept of family has been "mythologized" in the sense that no family can live up to traditional, decontextualized images of the "typical" American 1950s "family." Against the backdrop of such common cultural constructions of "family," when writing instructors ask their students to discuss their families in class discussions or in writing, students might then feel awkward sharing details about their own familial oddities or perceived shortcomings. While Coontz's students "treasure the role of family as a support and mutual aid," they too often tend to "filter both their own complicated family histories and their personal aspirations through the lens of 1950s family and gender properties" (28). Classroom discussions of the myths surrounding "perfect" families often can alleviate student concerns, especially if such concerns are acknowledged in open forums that allow the meta-narrative of family to be shattered. To begin a discussion with students about family writing is to productively engage "who gets to be family" and "what constitutes family," with students deciding the criteria and means toward locating an underlying definition.

Digging deeper into family history also contextualizes people's life stories in specific places at particular times. Texts on family examine, define, and construct the nature of a family's history often through stories and research. Such exploration focuses the events of a life within the context of a place and time while also discovering the social, cultural, and historical influences of the individual within a larger, connected unit. Many scholars agree that individuals are socially constructed beings with language that they have inherited (Gergen). For example, in *The Elements of Autobiography and Life Narratives*, Catherine Hobbs observes, "our identities emerge from

within a community . . . the language we use to speak and write is not at first our own. It comes from our cultures" (5). With this context in mind, family writing then presents reasons and contexts for basic writing students to explore the language, culture, and influences of the family unit and society. Students can explore the social construction of individuals, sometimes themselves, by looking at issues that influence the family within a historical and social paradigm. Like personal writing, which Rebecca Mlynarczyk notes as being a very complex and complicated construct ("Personal"), family writing serves the classroom community and the individual learner. However, family writing goes beyond the personal by offering students a lens through which to see social, cultural, and historical influences on individuals.

Transgressing the borders of academic and personal assignments, family writing affords basic writers the opportunity that Deborah Mutnick advocates for "students on the social margins," which is "the opportunity to articulate a perspective in writing on their own life experiences" as a "bridge between their communities and the academy" (84). Donald McCrary has recently noted that students can enhance their literate practices and critical thinking if they are encouraged to bring their private discourses into academic spaces. McCrary's case is aptly made by referencing students' religious beliefs, often among the most private of all discourses. Likewise, family experience can be thought to fall into another highly private realm. This is the case even as students' experience of family encompasses a range of modalities, both direct and indirect (e.g., written, oral, visual, and audio-visual), genres (e.g., personal letters, stories, obituaries, and tweets), and media (e.g., newspapers, Twitter, Facebook, Geni.com, podcasts, and video recordings). As personal writing assignments afford students the opportunity to bring their private discourses into the academic space, personal writing, according to Donald Murray, "makes it possible for us to explore the complexity of human experience, discover our response—intellectual and emotional—to that experience and share it with readers" (19). Murray argues that personal writing isn't private, as it must be contextualized to have "significance beyond your life" (20).

The theories of personal experience and literacy, as they concern the writing classroom, intersect in the New Literacy Studies. In *Cross-Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, Brian Street argues for the association of the two, examining "the creative and original ways in which people transform literacy to their own cultural concerns and interests" (1). Such interests, Kate Pahl notes, can include family narratives and the identities of family members ("Ephemera," "Habitus"). Similarly, Street argues that educators need to

recognize the difference between autonomous and ideological models of literacy. While the autonomous view holds that literacy itself will affect cognitive and social processes, the ideological view holds that literacy practices "are always rooted in a particular world-view and the desire for that view of literacy to dominate and to marginalize others" ("Autonomous" 2). For example, academic literacy practices that are too focused on discipline-specific knowledge have the potential of marginalizing students' personal experiences; therefore, assignments that ask students to write on the family engage students by providing opportunities to integrate academic, cultural, multimodal, as well as public and private, connections. Stuart Greene and Rebecca Schoenike Nowacek emphasize the marginalization of students' experience when expectations for academic writing dominate learning and instruction. They write:

> As instructors we need to adjust our angle of vision in order to focus on our students. Students can write forcefully, even elegantly, especially when they have something to say. However, our students do not always know what our expectations are, despite our efforts to design seemingly clear and cogent assignments. Unfortunately, our expectations are often merely tacit, even when we think we have made them explicit. (341-42)

In making this point, their goal is to "complicate educators' understanding of how students struggle to assume these [disciplinary] roles and how students negotiate a fundamental tension between adhering to the conventions of academic writing on the one hand and the conventions of academic inquiry on the other" (342). Thus, one way to address students' struggles to assume the disciplinary and discursive roles expected of them is for instructors to analyze their own tacit understanding of academic literacy practices, including its purposes and practices.

A basic writing curriculum with structure and projects that include both specific goals and flexibility for students' decisions will afford students with a workspace for growth. As Thomas Newkirk points out in *The Performance of Self in Student Writing,* composition should "serve students by providing a writing workspace where they could grow as writers and readers, and it would also serve the larger academic and public realms" (7). Similarly, other theorists (Spigelman; Bishop; Belenky, et al.) have also discussed the use of personal writing for public and academic discourse. The classroom, then, must be a space that supports multiple purposes—a space that allows for students'

individual and intellectual growth not only in terms of their academic selves but also for their personal, professional, and civic selves. Family writing allows students to derive their primary content from the self while also providing them with opportunities to learn about the influences of community, heritage, society, and history on family. Because family writing involves both self-writing and research, it is one way to answer Newkirk's call.

Variations on Family Writing

Family writing can serve as a chronicle—producing a list of events in chronological order—and can result in a manifesto—a public position paper on the author's stances. Memoirs—descriptions of events or people—can also result from family writing research. Travel writing—narration outwardly describing personal reflection on setting and culture—is also a possibility when students engage in writing about family. The author does not necessarily need to be connected to the experiences or to the family being examined because family writing can be crafted by an outsider who chooses one of the genres described above and who uses similar methods for research, invention, and production. While family writing offers students opportunities to engage with topics that they may already be comfortable with, it also accommodates research and argument, as students may explore the relevance of a political issue to their family or community, or social definitions of the family unit.

In "Remembering Great Ancestors: Story as Recovery, Story as Quest," Stuart Ching tells of how he and his family "recover and construct our history" (44). Ching revisited the island of his family to trace their oral traditions. For Ching, recollection of family stories serves the purpose of translating "oral into literary discourses" to "comprehend his ancestors' experiences, express gratitude for their dreams of a better life, and bear their struggle" (42). Members of cultures who have rich oral histories sometimes run the risk of losing the details of their histories or the stories that define and describe their customs; and telling stories preserves the memories and events for generations to come. For example, one student whose family had lived in the American Samoa islands has a culture predominately passed through oral history. For a class project, he developed a blog about his island, the community from which he comes, and outlined the positions of leadership as high chief that have been in his family over the past five hundred years. A portion of the project included interviews with his male relatives (father, uncles, and grandfather) to preserve his heritage. This writer was empowered

by being the collector of his family's and community's stories and wrote in his metacognitive reflection about the issues and family discussion surrounding his choice of making public and permanent the family's oral history. Six months after the student developed this course project, a tsunami devastated his community and many lives were lost. His collected stories of his people and land form a heritage that can now be passed on as lives are being rebuilt in his community. No one could have anticipated how monumental this class project would turn out to be for this particular student and his community. Family writing, within first-year composition and basic writing courses, offers recovery of "cultural and historical pasts" as support for "cultural identities in the present" (Ching 43). Exploring family stories not only allows for gathering and understanding the past, but it also gives family members an explanation of why and how their lives have come to this point.

Teachers can consider diverse assignments, modalities, and materials that can help basic writing students to become independent thinkers not only as a means of meeting the outcomes for composition but also as a way of engaging them in the technological world in which they live. Some resistance may come from teachers and administrators who have not considered other forms of composition beyond the traditional, text-based academic essay and who work within a more limited rhetorical pedagogy. In "The Challenge of the Multimedia Essay," Lester Faigley asks teachers to "think about rhetoric in much broader terms. We have no justification aside from disciplinary baggage to restrict our conception of rhetoric to words alone. More important, this expansion is necessary if we are to make good on our claims of preparing students to engage in public discourse" (187). Students often find that multimodal composition supports the genres and media of real-world audiences. These genres lend themselves to more public writing, beyond the scope of a classroom.

Multimodal student projects can include images, audio, and video, "exceed[ing] the alphabetic" so as to help students "think in increasingly broad ways about texts" (Takayoshi and Selfe 1-2). Many basic writing students have not experienced the possibilities that multimodal projects can present. These projects expand the range of what students can produce and learn. As Pamela Takayoshi and Cynthia Selfe recommend, students "need to be experienced and skilled not only in reading (consuming) texts employing multiple modalities, but also in composing in multiple modalities . . . because this type of instruction is refreshing, meaningful and relevant" (3-4). For example, if a student is producing a project on the element of home, the student may struggle in an essay to bring in the sensory details

of sounds; a soundscape, on the other hand, allows the student to capture the sounds of a busy home and to incorporate narration about the location. In another type of project, a student may be creating an informative piece on what American life was like for her Irish ancestors who immigrated to Boston. She can build a Web page that links to information on the potato famine, a common reason why many Irish settlers came to America, and also include information about American life in Boston during the late 1800s. An essay requires this student to include a summary of this historical material, while a Web page provides her with the flexibility to incorporate more layers including images, videos, and sounds of her ancestors' life in Boston.

Public literacy endeavors such as the National Writing Project (NWP) also support the goals and advantages of family writing, as they invite basic writers to explore their families and communities through exposition. The National Writing Project was founded in 1974 at the University of California-Berkeley as a movement of "teachers-teaching-teachers" ("History of NWP"). This project has spread to more than 200 sites in all fifty states. Founder James Gray states in his memoir of NWP, "Teachers at the Center," that his goal was to improve high school graduates' writing levels; the summer workshops of the NWP provide space where teachers of all levels can learn from the expertise of other teachers and work together as partners and colleagues. NWP supports a teacher-research approach where teachers of various disciplines and backgrounds come together to engage writers at any level. A common NWP assignment, "Mapping Your Neighborhood," asks writers to visually explore the space of a childhood home using drawing as an invention strategy. Writers then develop a list of memories within this space and freewrite on one of the memories.

Another NWP project that offers a community-based approach is "Viewfinders: Students Picturing Their Communities." In this project, students look at historical photos of their communities; they are then asked to depict the historical significance and community icon of the image (Hajduk 22). This encourages students to learn about the history of the space they have grown up in; this is important because the spaces are so familiar to them that they may have overlooked the significances of these spaces. For example, Sherry Rankins-Robertson grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, just miles away from Central High School; the location was commonplace so it was not until much later that she explored the space as the site of the well-known desegregation battle in 1957. Family writing invites students to discover the historical significance of the communities in which they grew up and the influences of this history on the family unit.

National Public Radio offers public literacy projects that can also be included under the family writing umbrella. In *This I Believe*, writers develop a 500-word statement about the core values and beliefs that guide them through life (*This I Believe*), while *StoryCorps* is an interview project where a writer conducts primary research on a significant person in her life, family, or community (*StoryCorps*). Students in our Introduction to Family Writing course complete a biography that is based on the *StoryCorps* project that incorporates both primary and secondary research.[1] Some students include audio so that the voice of the interview subject is imbedded in the project; other students elect to use wikis or blogs as the format of an assignment so that family members can add their stories as well.

Most students find that family-centered course projects build bridges within their family as well as from the family to the community. For example, one student used YouTube as the mode for sharing the biography she developed on a family member who was a World War II veteran. To her surprise, one of the interviewee's comrades, who now lives in Germany, contacted her about the electronic interview. This project allowed the student to grasp a strong sense of audience-appropriate content and develop a purpose-driven product.

Family Writing and the Stretch Connection

Family writing assignments leave room for students to match their purpose for writing to the amount and type of research needed or specified by the assignment. In this sense, students can be challenged to expand their notions of research as more than consulting books and articles. For example, basic writing students can see the value of additional research practices: where interviewing a family member about family history is research; where calling a distant relative to ask a question about the grandparents' long-ago move from one state to another is research; where e-mailing an elderly aunt to query her about some family legend is research; and where drawing on one's own reflective journal is also research (Mlynarczyk, *Conversations*). What makes these projects even more exciting is that students begin with what they already know and can then move as far and as deep with their family research as an assignment warrants. In addition, family writing is often seen as work that can be continued over a long period of time. Of course, at some point any college writing assignment has to be turned in and graded. However, students will often continue to develop and expand on what they initially wrote for a college

class, and getting started with writing family history can lead to a lifetime pursuit.

As we examine the kinds of basic writing approaches currently operating in this country, it is easy to understand why family writing fits so well. We know from William Lalicker's 1999 survey of the structure of basic writing programs that most of the current models—prerequisite, stretch, studio, directed self-placement, and intensive—involve allowing students more time to develop as writers. Like many other colleges and universities, Arizona State University offers a "stretched out" version of first-year composition. In such stretch programs, students are seen as capable of doing college work; they use the same textbooks and do the same assignments as students in more traditional first-year composition classes. But they often spend two semesters with the same teacher and the same group of students as they work to fulfill their first-year composition requirement (Glau). Consider the extra writing and research that can be done on a family writing project over two semesters—the extra depth and breadth of the work students can do.

These "stretched out" programs can serve as ideal locations for family history projects, as students have more time to conduct research—especially extended interviews with family members—and gain more chances for peer review and revision. A stretched-out version of composition also provides students with more time to do visual research, looking for family photographs which can serve as wonderful resources for student writing, adding a richness and visual dimension to the texts they construct. The extra time also allows students to focus and follow up on those intriguing or unusual details they uncover when conducting family history research.

Greg Glau, for instance, learned that his paternal grandfather had difficulty gaining approval to receive Social Security payments when he had turned sixty-five. What happened was not atypical—a government mistake in the records—but further research found that the mistake *was* unusual: the government somehow thought that Grandpa was a female! More digging uncovered his birth certificate, which showed his name Joseph was listed as "Sophia." And further exploration revealed that, because his great-grandparents were recent immigrants from Germany, their German accents must have sounded like "Sophia" when they were asked the name of the new baby, even though they were saying "Joseph." Such extra research, often required when something unusual comes up in family history research, takes additional time, and the stretch model allows students to have more time for their research and writing.

Family Research: Where to Begin?

When teachers incorporate family writing into basic writing courses, students survey the family's history to determine what area and time they would like to study. To begin the exploration of a family's story, students can contact family members and examine family artifacts. Families have access to a variety of household items that have historical significance to the family, including letters, photographs, jewelry, dishes, or specialty artifacts like military service awards. Students can hold conversations with family members as a way to start collecting stories and can also rely on artifacts to bring additional details to life.

Family writing teaches students that locating and examining artifacts, or "tradition-bearing archives," can "open a family's connection with the cultures that define it" (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater 363). While various types of writing can be encountered in a course employing family writing, students can be encouraged to think about why they may want to capture the stories. Family writing accommodates many starting-points: including, but not limited to, auto/biographical work on family members; researched materials that look at the family's lineage; location of immigration patterns and/or family records; collections of oral traditions and tales; analysis of journals/memoirs/diaries about and/or by family members; and visual family rhetoric, such as photographs, maps, and pedigree charts. One of our students used a combination of letters from her father to her mother during World War II and recorded interviews with her father to construct his biographical narrative. This project presented the opportunity for the student to assemble the love story of her parents through research and artifacts. Another student reconnected with her father after thirty years of absence from her life. The course projects provided a "reason" to interview him; she wrote about their first encounter:

> I'm now 43 years old. That is a long span of time to have no contact with such an important relation. I had put away thoughts of him over the years. Having no idea where, or whether, he lived caused me too much sadness. He was dressed in a t-shirt and jeans made of a blue material unknown to me. The material was smoother than denim. He was about the same height as me. His skin is light like mine. He even has the same color and texture of hair, though his has more grey and there's a little less in the back. He walked up to me and smiled hesitantly. I decided that it was "all or nothing" and I hugged him. He hugged me back, and I was gratified.

These students were able to come to a better understanding of significant family events through the collection of the stories.

Family records located in libraries and online will be there long after the family members are gone and the artifacts have been sold off. Therefore, it is helpful to begin with what is most accessible—family members and artifacts in the family's home, which might one day be lost. In family writing, students work to "persuade readers of the truth of a life, an experience or an insight" (Hobbs 18). Family stories reconstruct the past, so students can see what it was like for the family's ancestors.

Through a combination of primary and secondary research, students can learn about the historical, social, and cultural lives of a family. Assigning family writing projects to students presents an opportunity to contextualize the need for effective research skills and to then easily introduce those skills to students by having them conduct family interviews or search newspapers in databases for articles on places or events that were of significance to a particular family. Teachers can help students use library sources with contexts that are interesting and meaningful to students. In this way, research may not seem as intimidating when students are searching for family records or talking to family members rather than searching for authoritative sources to support an arbitrarily assigned topic such as "why recycling is important."

Moving Beyond the Classroom

Although the focus of most family history research and writing centers on individual students and their own family stories, the approach can also extend into the community. One way to encourage this is to ask students to interview, research, write about, and publish stories about anyone in the community. People in senior living homes are, of course, obvious possibilities for making such a connection, but it is also useful to ask students to consider researching and writing about people who were founders in the community or who, locally, were historically important; are current community leaders, especially those who do a good deal of social work for the community; or have a road, street, or building named after them. All of these kinds of writing help to establish links between a college or university course and the community, making connections that serve both students and the community. And when such texts are published (in print, on the Web, on CDs or DVDs), they add to the historical research that future generations will examine and consider—an important audience for our own students to think about as they write any family history.

In addition to involving students in family history writing and the aforementioned degree program, we also engage the general public in such writing via the Project for Writing and Recording Family History, supported by the School of Letters and Sciences at Arizona State University. The Project, which is consistent with the university's initiative called ASU in the Community (Jung), offers a variety of services for people who wish to write about their families. For example, Sherry Rankins-Robertson, Duane Roen, and other colleagues offer workshops throughout the metropolitan Phoenix area and in other parts of Arizona on topics such as the following: Writing about Family Members, Writing about Family Places, Writing about Family Events, Publishing Family Writing, Collecting Oral Histories, and Culturally Contextualizing Family Histories. These workshops not only benefit community members who learn how to write about family history, but also help to forge solid relationships between the university and the surrounding communities.

Although we schedule workshops that are advertised to the general public, we also receive invitations to conduct workshops for community groups (e.g., local family history societies) and retirement communities. These workshops provide us with opportunities to talk to the general public about our programs and about our university. Participants in these workshops have shown us their subsequent publications, including those that they have submitted to the National Gallery of Writing. The project leaders attempt to emulate some of the model community writing practices offered by the Salt Lake Community College Community Writing Center (Rousculp and Malouf). Such practices emphasize facilitating over teaching and coaching over tutoring. They also focus on a text's potential rather than on what might be lacking in a text. As evidence that community members feel that they benefit from these engagements with texts, we note that groups invite us back repeatedly. In one case, we were invited back nine times during a three-month period.

"Stories Worth Telling"

Students come to family writing with a common knowledge and language for thinking about family, in addition to personal experiences within familial structures. Students are interested in the topic of family because they are curious about their origins and would like to deepen their understanding of the family stories they have heard since childhood. If writing teachers and administrators can tap into these interests, we have an opportunity to com-

bat the problem of apathy that Michael Dubson describes: "A student writing a paper with minimal interest for ownership may experience the composition equivalent of an exam cram" (96). Drawing on students' interests and personal knowledge can also move our classes toward more learner-centered spaces where learners' interests and motivations are key.

When educators encourage students to write about topics rooted in family history and to draw on their home-based identities, schools can become more welcoming places that allow students to see the connection between who they are inside and outside the university setting. As illustrated by Shirley Brice Heath's ethnographic study of students in Piedmont area communities during the 1970s, students sometimes experience a disjuncture between school and their homes: "unless the boundaries between classrooms and communities can be broken, and the flow of cultural patterns between them encouraged, the schools will continue to legitimate and reproduce communities of townspeople who control and limit the potential progress of other communities and who themselves remain untouched by other values and ways of life" (369). Thus, assignments that ask students to explore concepts of family can help students to stay engaged in schooling by providing them with opportunities to learn more about who they are and how culture, history, and society affect their particular family or families in general.

Providing an opportunity for students not only to complete assignments in various classes but also to take courses in family history can make a significant difference in their lives and voices as writers. One student reflected on his particular oral history project by saying, "A project like this makes you realize that we don't know as much as we think we know about people even when they are our family." Another student, after returning home from class one night, commented on the importance of collecting family stories:

> I realized that every person in this world has a story. Everyone has a story worth telling, no matter how much or how little you have gone through, or how long you have lived. We all have something to share and something to learn from one another. It made me sad and happy all at once to come to this realization. I was sad because I realized that some of us will never have our stories heard, and some of us are unwilling to listen to the stories being told around us. I was glad though that I realized the power in listening, the comfort of hearing another's struggles, someone else's happiness.

Students respond positively when they are challenged to not only research and construct a family's history but also to use a variety of media and genres throughout the course. One student said in her portfolio reflection, "In summary, I want to say that of all my classes, I have learned the most—both technologically and in writing skills—in this class." She also said that, even though she was excited about each assignment, she still "approached [those assignments] with a certain amount of trepidation as it was something new to do or learn."

Family writing projects can present students with ways to use their critical thinking skills by asking them to determine how best to respond to the rhetorical situation in which they are composing. We know that "[t]eachers who compose the most effective assignments, then, don't outline a step-by-step procedure for students to follow; instead they craft assignments that prompt writers to think in new ways" (Hess 29). Therefore, it is most powerful when students make decisions about the types of document they want to produce based on their conceptions of a particular purpose and audience. Teachers must be aware of (and open to) all available modes of representation and have resources ready to aid students in not only essay writing, but also other forms of composition that incorporate multiple genres, media, and modes. Family writing provides such opportunities.

For most college students, the academic arena of life spans the years from about age five to about age twenty-two, with some students taking more time, including those who enroll in graduate programs. Further, some students enroll in life-long learning courses offered by colleges, libraries, or community centers. However, for most students the other arenas of life have a much longer span. That is, a person's professional life typically spans from age twenty-two to age sixty-five. The civic arena can begin in childhood and continue until the end of life. Given these spans, we think that writing in college needs to equip students with skills and knowledge to mine writing's potential throughout life. Whether basic writing teachers are working with community members or students (who also are community members), asking individuals to write about family and family history can spark a lifelong interest in writing. Such writing, as Murie, Collins, and Detzner note, is writing for "real purposes" (71).

Our experience with writers is that once they begin writing about families, they are often committed to crafting and sharing projects that fulfill their needs to maintain connections with other people. Writing about family in academic spaces provides writers with the research and rhetorical

skills to collect stories of family and community that otherwise might be lost. It also empowers writers to make a difference beyond the walls of the classroom.

Acknowledgments

Note

1. Further information on the projects described in this article may be obtained by contacting Sherry Rankins-Robertson at Sherry.Robertson@asu.edu.

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Realizing Distributed Gains: How Collaboration with Support Services Transformed a Basic Writing Program for International Students

Mutiara Mohamad and Janet Boyd

ABSTRACT: *As part of a broad, campus-wide Writing Initiative designed to improve student-writing skills, Fairleigh Dickinson University opened a new campus writing center in fall 2006. Concurrently, a separate component of this initiative was launched to replace the English for General Purposes instruction offered in the traditional English as a Second Language program with English for Specific Purposes, which provides non-native English speakers with discipline-specific instruction to improve their English proficiency. The newly appointed directors of these programs—the authors of this article—found themselves in a fortuitous collaboration that organically shaped the services each delivered. This collaboration eventually resulted in a basic writing model permutation that speaks to current trends in the field. This article (1) provides the developmental history of our collaboration, (2) describes the model of basic writing that emerged at our institution, which although specifically designed for students who are non-native English speakers has practical implications for all basic writers; and (3) demonstrates how campus support services provide students with the means for sustainable success beyond the classroom by extending the learning community.*

KEYWORDS: *basic writing models; non-native English speakers; collaboration; writing centers; English for Specific Purposes; distributed resources; support services; mandatory support*

A strategic planning survey put before the faculty of Fairleigh Dickinson University's Metropolitan campus[1] in 2003 determined that student writing proficiency was the faculty's number one academic priority. In the absence of a Writing Across the Curriculum program, the administration responded to this concern by developing a campus-wide Writing Initiative—a multi-phased, wide-ranging plan to improve student writing skills.

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Among the projects of the Writing Initiative was the establishment of a writing center that would make one-on-one tutoring available to all students. Another part of the plan was to revamp the multi-level, English as a Second Language (ESL) program that provided instruction to undergraduates only; from this emerged the new Programs in Language, Culture, and Professional Advancement (PLCPA) unit that provides one level of English for Specific Purposes instruction to both undergraduate and graduate international, non-native English speakers. Coincidentally, the new center and the new program, each with new directors hired to develop and implement these services, opened their doors to students in September of 2006. Because the Writing Initiative was not centrally coordinated, little did we—these new directors and authors of this article—anticipate that we would find ourselves in a fortuitous collaboration of support and that the services we delivered would come to be informed by but not dictated by each other's practices. Mutiara Mohamad, who has both teaching and administrative experience in English for Specific Purposes in Malaysia, was hired to direct the fledgling PLCPA, and Janet Boyd, a new assistant professor in the Writing Program with academic administrative experience, was hired to be the first Coordinator of the Metro Writing Studio. This article traces the developmental history of our collaboration and describes the model of basic writing that emerged at our institution, which although specifically designed for students who are non-native English speakers has practical implications for all basic writers.

Basic Writing Model Permutations

In their article "Re-Modeling Basic Writing," Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel provide an overview of the main models of basic writing, as identified by William Lalicker in 1999, that were emerging to replace the "increasingly maligned non-credit baseline model": the self-directed model, by which students choose their placement; the mainstreaming of basic writers by the elimination of remediation courses; and the studio model and the stretch model by which mainstreamed basic writers are given extra time and support to complete credit-bearing composition (50). Rigolino and Freel find the "success of the various permutations of basic writing models that have evolved since the mid-1990s a testament" to all those who wish to help at-risk students (49), including ESL students. Aiming for "a more thorough re-modeling of the traditional remedial approach" at their institution, the

State University of New York at New Paltz, Rigolino and Freel implemented what they call an intensive "seamless support" model by integrating an extra workshop hour into the regular composition course (taught by the same instructor), and by requiring students to complete weekly tutoring hours (51). This is not unlike the model developed and implemented at John Jay College before it begin phasing out both Associate degree programs and remediation in 2006 (see McBeth). We found ourselves most intrigued by Rigolino and Freel's description of their Seamless Support Program, for the basic writing permutation developed by Fairleigh Dickinson's PLCPA mirrors aspects of their design and intent. However, our model differs in notable ways while at the same time sharing aspects of the "distributed resources model" articulated by Ryuko Kubota and Kimberly Abels; our model, like theirs, requires students to seek academic and non-academic support campus-wide, which we find integral for building learning communities and promoting sustainable success for the international students at our institution. Before we examine our new model more fully, however, we must first describe the permutations, some planned and some fortuitous, that occurred in the delivery of our basic writing instruction.

Developed over the 2005-2006 academic year, the Programs in Language, Culture, and Professional Advancement unit accepted its first class in the fall of 2006. The new unit replaced our more traditional ESL program, which had placed undergraduate international students only, based upon error analysis of their written diagnostic essays, into one of four different levels of non-discipline specific classes (i.e., English for General Purposes); these classes were accompanied by a non-credit, grammar-oriented lab taught by a staff member from the academic resource center. Graduate students could be urged to take these courses but ultimately were not required to do so (and so, in most cases, did not). Undergraduates with the lowest level of proficiency would typically have to complete three to four semesters, or up to two years, of ESL course work before they could take most of the general education courses required of them (however, they could take courses in their major while enrolled in ESL). While some programs allowed students to apply the two upper-level ESL courses towards general elective credit, even so, upon exiting the ESL program, students could still be deemed as having insufficient skills for entering freshman composition courses and could be placed in additional, non-credit developmental courses with native English speakers. The end result for many ESL students was a long delay as they worked to complete their degree programs, which frustrated students and resulted in high attrition rates.

These factors drove the administration to revisit the delivery of ESL instruction as part of the Writing Initiative, and as a result the PLCPA was born to replace the previously existing ESL courses with English for Specific Purposes courses for both undergraduate and graduate international students. English for Specific Purposes first gained some popularity in American universities among ESL practitioners in the 1980s at about the same time the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement was achieving eminence (see Spack), although it has always tended to be more prominent abroad than in the United States. The philosophy behind English for Specific Purposes is to provide non-native speakers of English with language instruction relevant to a specific discipline or occupation. ESP courses at the university level typically place a greater emphasis on writing with the goal of familiarizing students with the discourse of the academic discipline they intend to study. Specific content is not taught so much as it is used to teach English, with the pragmatic advantage of providing the rudiments necessary for basic writers to hit the academic ground running, so to speak. While some critics of English for Specific Purposes voice concern that this form of instruction could result in undue pressure on ESL instructors, who teach English for General Purposes, to teach as if they were specialists and beyond their abilities (see Spack), and others fear such instruction could work more to produce technocrats (see Coffey), we have found at our institution that the English for Specific Purposes class provides distinctive benefits for international basic writers—when coupled with an English for Academic Purposes lab and support services.

Each year, Fairleigh Dickinson's two New Jersey campuses enroll between 500 and 550 new international students, with a total enrollment of about 1,200 international students. They typically come from between twenty to twenty-five countries but are predominantly from India, followed by China, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. Most of the undergraduates and all of the graduate students are attending an American institution for the first time. The graduate students form the majority, the most popular majors being Engineering, Computer Science, Business Management, Pharmaceutical Management, and Pharmaceutical Chemistry. According to the statistics published by the Institute of International Education in the Open Doors report of 2009, the trend of international student enrollment at Fairleigh Dickinson aligns with the national trend in terms of countries of student origin, popular majors, and first-time attendees at American institutions. Furthermore, Jessica Williams observes that "most graduate L2 writers are international students at any institution whereas undergraduate populations

vary more widely from one institution to another" (112) in terms of their L2 breakdown, an observation that is also true of our population.

All of the international students accepted to Fairleigh Dickinson (except native English speakers) take the PLCPA placement test prior to registering for classes; those who take the PLCPA course also take a similar post-test at the end of the semester. The placement test and the post-test consist of an essay question that solicits an opinion based on a brief reading passage taken from a major newspaper; care is taken to avoid articles that presume familiarity with American culture. The essays are then read by two scorers, who use a rubric with a maximum possible score of eighteen points. Students who score fourteen or lower are deemed in need of PLCPA support, while those who score fifteen or higher are exempt, though students who place out occasionally opt to take the course as an elective. The test is not a "gatekeeper exam" in that it does not prevent students from attending the university or pursuing their major, and it does not sort the students into various levels of instruction, which would mean more course work for some than for others. The PLCPA course post-test, which is also the final exam, is not the sole determiner of a student's final course grade or of his or her ability to exit the course; all told, the post-test/final exam constitutes one-ninth of the final grade.

Those undergraduate and graduate students who place into the PLCPA are considered to be international basic writers. Paul Matsuda argues that "defining basic writers has always been a tricky business" but now "the distinction between basic and second language writers is becoming increasingly untenable because of the increasing diversity among second language writers and basic writers" ("Basic Writing" 67, 83). According to the most recent data, the attendance of international students at American universities is currently at an all-time high (Institute of International Education).[2] In line with Matsuda's inclusive definition, we have observed that international graduate students for whom English is not a first language and who enter programs of study in the United States for the first time share many of the basic writing needs as their undergraduate counterparts in terms of English proficiency and need for acculturation into the academic community. Nonetheless, as Paul Matsuda gleans from the arguments of Angela Dadak and of Kubota and Abels, institutions court international students in greater numbers "because they bring foreign capital . . . , increase visible ethnic diversity . . . , and enhance the international reputation of the institutions even as they reduce or eliminate instructional support programs designed to help them succeed" ("Myth" 641).

At Fairleigh Dickinson University both undergraduate and graduate PLCPA basic writers work towards proficiency in English in their first semester by taking a class specific to the discipline they have enrolled to study along with a co-requisite lab taught by the same instructor (for a total of sixty contact hours); while different sections are created for undergraduate and graduate students, the course curriculum and objectives remain the same in terms of number of papers and exams with one exception: undergraduates ultimately produce a three-page research paper and graduates a five-page research paper. To meet the curricular learning objectives and exit the program, students must average a "B" or higher in the variously weighted requirements or repeat the course. These factors constitute a student's final grade: the final exam, which is the post-test mentioned earlier, and two oral presentations count for one third; class participation, class work, in-class quizzes, and online discussions count for another third; and four major written assignments, including the research paper, count for the last third.

The curriculum of the English for Specific Purposes class focuses on teaching English for Occupational Purposes, with an emphasis on writing and speaking. Course work is designed to familiarize students with the discourse of their future occupations; for example, engineering students learn how to read and write technical reports as a means to improving their overall English proficiency. The lab component is designed to teach English for Academic Purposes and thus prepare students for their academic pursuits. As Vivian Zamel and Ruth Spack have pointed out, international students "may struggle as they try to negotiate unfamiliar literacy practices and new classroom expectations in a language they are still in the process of acquiring" (127). Accordingly, the lab places its focus on academic writing, information literacy, proper citation, and avoiding plagiarism. This is where students tackle the brief research paper on a general point of interest in their field.

Based on the majors most popular among the international students, the PLCPA developed five different class/lab tracks: (1) Business and Hotel and Restaurant Management and related majors; (2) Engineering and Computer Sciences; (3) Nursing and Allied Health, Natural Sciences, Psychology, and related majors; (4) Criminal Justice, Pre-Law, Political Science, and History; and (5) Still Exploring, which also includes declared majors in communications, education, and art. Undergraduates receive three institutional credit hours for the class and none for the lab, and they can either apply the course as a free elective or in partial fulfillment of a language and culture requirement. As Mark McBeth tells us of the literacy-themed basic writing courses once offered at CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice, "the addition

of a content-rich topic justifies giving the students three credits" (83). The content-rich PLCPA courses bear credits for the same reason. Our graduate students, however, receive three developmental credit hours (towards their enrollment status only) for the class and none for the lab; thus, undergraduates pay regular tuition while graduate students pay a nominal fee to take the course.

While some American institutions create distinct levels of instruction based on student-proficiency within their English for Specific Purpose courses, Fairleigh Dickinson does not. Pedagogically, the single-level system benefits students because they get instruction that not only improves their written and spoken English at an accelerated rate but also reinforces and supplements what they learn in their major courses, which they take concurrently with the PLCPA course. Undergraduates can also take those general education courses required of them that do not have English composition as a pre-requisite. Psychologically, the major-specific track system benefits students because it lessens the stigma of being placed in a strictly ESL course that traditionally is viewed as remedial instead of developmental (see Kubota and Abels 85), especially the lowest level courses that bear no credit. Additionally, when undergraduates complete the PLCPA course they are placed into the three-credit, first-year composition courses required of all freshmen, not the remedial, non-credit composition course. Because the PLCPA is an entirely separate entity from the first-year Writing Program, this sequencing was achieved through the coordination of the learning outcomes objectives of the Writing Program's non-credit composition course and the PLCPA courses.

One of the drawbacks of the PLCPA single-level system, however, is that there can be large discrepancies in student proficiency in any given class that must be accommodated. In order to deal with this problem, Mohamad looked to resources outside of the classroom by at first recommending and later mandating that students utilize the academic support services already available to them on campus; as a result, students would have more contact hours with the various support services designed to insure sustainable student success. This solution, it turns out, is also the premise of the "distributed resources model" of basic writing as proposed by Kubota and Abels, who, as part of a small faculty committee at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, assessed the services the University provided to its international students in order to make recommendations to its administration for change. While they proposed three different models for consideration, they believed the "distributed resources model" to be the most economical and

advantageous because it took advantage of "existing intellectual resources, particularly the expertise in the writing center, ensuring academic quality of tutorial services" (89); in other words, it would tap into the various support services already in existence at the University with respect to writing. Because these resources are distributed, the committee also called for the hiring of an ESL coordinator, which would be an added expense, to facilitate cooperation and prevent fragmentation among services. The article closes with the authors wondering which, if any, of the models they proposed would be adopted by the University. In August 2009 we e-mailed Kubota to learn the outcome of the proposal. She replied that UNC-Chapel Hill did in fact adopt the distributed resources model and that two coordinators were hired to design workshops for international students.

In essence, the first steps in the collaboration between the PLCPA and the Metro Writing Studio can be understood as an unintended but fortuitous realization of the "distributed resources model." While Mohamad also included from the outset our Center for Academic Student Services as a resource where students could receive tutoring in writing by appointment, the PLCPA students overwhelmingly visited the newly created Writing Studio for various kinds of writing support. The implementation of the campus Writing Initiative ensured that some of the various resources were in place, but it did not call for any kind of coordination of services. Nonetheless, the PLCPA and the Writing Studio, in their desire to improve support to international students, forged an alliance that put into practice from the bottom up the type of extended collaboration the faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill conceived of and asked for from the top down. We take you now to the origins of the Writing Studio so that we can trace how its collaboration with the PLCPA formed the template that would generate future collaborations by design with other resources on our campus.

The Metro Writing Studio

During the spring semester of 2006, a long narrow room once used for processing new books in our campus library was transformed into what is now known as the Metro Writing Studio. Janet Boyd was charged with designing and implementing the comprehensive writing support services the Writing Studio would provide to students, faculty, and staff. She designated the space a "studio," rather than the more traditional "center" or "lab," to articulate the emerging ethos of a flexible learning environment (see Ferruci and DeRosa) and to reflect that writing is both creative and a process. This

is not to be confused with the actual "studio" model of writing instruction as articulated by Grego and Thompson that pairs workshops with composition classes. That said, the Writing Studio is very much a decentralized "thirdspace," as Grego and Thompson define it, where students can choose to work on their written and spoken English, whether through tutoring or workshops, outside of the typically hegemonic teacher/student script (18-23). The primary service provided at the Writing Studio is individualized, face-to-face tutoring whereby tutors review papers with students and discuss higher and lower order writing concerns. Tutors do not edit or proofread student papers; in fact, they do not even hold a pen to help them resist the temptation to make corrections for students. Most of our tutors hold Master's degrees in a writing-related field, and all have experience as adjunct instructors of college writing and/or as writing tutors.

One tutor, out of a staff that averages between nine and eleven tutors in any given semester, specializes in English instruction for non-native speakers. However, we urge PLCPA students to choose the tutors they prefer and to work with a variety of tutors. By so doing, the students benefit not only from a range of expertise but also from learning to interact with different individuals. We do provide the tutoring staff with paid professional development workshops that offer practical strategies for working with non-native speakers of English (such as how to recognize the difficulties particular to writing in English as a second language and how to recognize the various patterns of errors in English typical of different language groups). Ultimately, PLCPA students can opt to work with the specialist or with the tutors who have general ESL training, but they do not have to work exclusively with one or the other.

Boyd decided that tutoring would be on a drop-in basis so that all students could see tutors on demand at their convenience; no referrals are needed and no appointments were taken until fall 2009, when demand dictated that we supplement the drop-in hours. All tutoring sessions are limited to forty-five minutes to encourage students to enact for themselves the advice they receive before returning for further guidance. Boyd also planned for free, drop-in, writing-related workshops to commence in the Writing Studio just after its grand opening, and she gradually expanded and varied the offerings as she became more cognizant of the campus culture and the needs of students in specific programs across the University. The majority of these ninety-minute workshops focus on academic writing and professional communications, such as APA and MLA citation formats, how to write business memos and technical reports, and strategies for writing a

Master's thesis. They are typically taught by adjunct faculty who have expertise in these particular areas. In addition, and somewhat of a departure for a writing center, Boyd also initiated a series of six "casual conversations in English" workshops per semester for the non-native speakers on campus so that they could practice their speaking skills in a welcoming, thirdspace environment. In the case of the conversational workshops, the facilitator develops thematic activities to generate informal group discussion during which she assists participants with usage and pronunciation as well as answers questions about colloquial and idiomatic English. Not surprisingly, these workshops, though not intended specifically to do so, primarily attracted the international students from the campus's new PLCPA.

Fortunately and coincidentally, the types of services that Boyd was independently developing could accommodate the numbers and needs of the PLCPA students, and their attendance in turn helped foster and shape the growth of the new Studio even before Mohamad began requiring students to seek academic support. Our relationship grew more symbiotic when Mohamad began developing stand-alone PLCPA workshops that complemented those of the Writing Studio but whose emphasis prepared students for academic success in a broader context than writing. While our collaboration at first began as a coincidence, it gradually evolved into a collaboration by design and formed the template for the basic writing model now in place at Fairleigh Dickinson for international students. For while Mohamad only recommended during the PLCPA's first year that students utilize the services available at the Writing Studio in her desire to narrow the discrepancies among students placed in the various PLCPA tracks, in the following fall she began to require that the least proficient students in each track seek fifteen hours of tutoring in writing each semester. The result was a dramatic jump in these students' PLCPA test scores from the initial placement test to the post-test, which led her to suspect that all of the PLCPA students would benefit to some degree from such support.

Compelling students to seek academic support might seem a counterproductive proposition, for the prevailing notion is that students view the requirement as punitive and so do not invest much in such sessions; the preference is, of course, that students seek support of their own volition. However, we subscribe to Irene Clark's observation that "with the right encouragement, even the most recalcitrant horse, aware of his thirst and standing at the water's edge, might bend his stubborn neck and take a drink" (34). Likewise, we came to agree with Rigolino and Freel, who "felt strongly that if [they] were to offer individual tutoring" as part of their basic

writing model, "it should be mandatory" for those students who need tutoring often do not seek it (56). A survey recently conducted by Barbara Lynn Gordon of students at her institution who were required to visit the writing center suggests that both our presumption about student attitudes and the efficacy of requiring tutoring are correct. Gordon discovered that while 69% of composition students initially felt either "annoyed or indifferent" when faced with the requirement to visit the writing center (even though a full 59% held a positive opinion of the center before their visit), as a result of their experience, 91% of the students indicated that they would "definitely or maybe" return voluntarily (155-56). In the surveys given to our students when they exited the PLCPA course in the fall 2009, they overwhelmingly expressed similar sentiments; all of the students surveyed indicated that they would return to the Writing Studio for tutoring and half would attend future workshops. The many e-mails and comments our students have communicated to us and to their instructors also confirm anecdotally that students do recognize the benefits of our comprehensive approach to academic support. While Mohamad's impulse to mandate tutoring was originally focused more on enabling student success in the PLCPA course, given the span of proficiency levels, the residual and now cultivated effect is that students, in coming to recognize the benefits of this support (in being brought to water and made to drink, to echo Clark), are now cognizant of the resources available to them for sustainable academic success beyond the PLCPA classroom and are likely to continue to use them.

The Fortuitous Beginning of the Collaboration

While we did initially meet just before we opened our respective doors to students, at the suggestion of the dean, to inform each other about what services we would be providing, our first meeting was not about collaboration; each of us was then most focused on successfully launching our own program. It was only after the first academic year, when both of us could reflect on what goals we had and had not achieved, that we began to fathom that we had unwittingly already begun to shape the delivery of our services to fulfill each other's needs—Mohamad was recommending that PLCPA students seek tutoring and Boyd was monitoring their attendance. However, in the fall of 2007, when Mohamad decided to mandate fifteen hours of academic support for the least proficient PLCPA students, she neglected to inform Boyd of this significant change in part because she thought the impact on the Studio would be inconsequential. The steady stream of PLCPA

students at the Studio puzzled Boyd, and when they started asking her to report their attendance at workshops in addition to tutoring to Mohamad, she picked up the phone. What resulted was our acknowledgment of the inevitability of our evolving, collaborative relationship, one that would benefit from some element of design. Accordingly, we agreed that (1) the least proficient PLCPA students could fulfill the majority of their academic support at the Studio; (2) we would work together to track the hours of support that all of the PLCPA students received, and (3) the Writing Studio would provide workshops responsive to international students' needs while the PLCPA would create its own complementary workshops.

With regard to the reporting of student attendance at the Studio, within a month of its opening, Boyd developed a simple intake form for every student who sought tutoring to complete upon arriving at the Studio, which served her immediate and long-term planning purposes. In addition to collecting the student's name and identification number, as well as his/her major and class for which the paper was being written, the form also includes a record of the date, the arrival time of the student, and the start and stop time of the tutoring session; at the bottom of the form, students communicate their expectations for the session to the tutor, and when the session is complete the tutor records what was accomplished. When Boyd learned that Mohamad was mandating the least proficient students in the PLCPA courses to attend the Writing Studio regularly, Boyd developed a second, similar form for all PLCPA students who came to the Studio to complete, whether for workshops or for tutoring. This new form became instrumental in tracking the students' learning outcomes—and in fostering our collaboration. The form was printed on orange paper to distinguish it from the other form, and included, at Mohamad's request, an "ID checked" box for tutors to initial, as well as a student signature line and a list of the five English for Specific Purposes tracks for students to check. Copies of these reports are forwarded to Mohamad weekly so that she can record the attendance of PLCPA students at the Studio, whether they are mandated to go or not, in the individual student files she keeps.

While initially we independently collected and analyzed our data for purposes of improving our own services, in bringing our information together we took the first step from stand-alone programmatic assessment to a more collaborative assessment. Boyd's reporting of the hours and types of support PLCPA students fulfilled at the Studio, when brought in tandem with Mohamad's placement and post-test data, began to reveal that use of the Writing Studio contributes to successful student learning outcomes in

the PLCPA program—a significant finding for writing center research and the topic of a future article. For as Jessica Williams writes: "in spite of their visibility at WCs [writing centers], L2 writers have received very little attention in WC research" (109) despite the fact that "it has been suggested that the WC is an ideal place to address the problems and challenges of L2 writing" (110).

And while the tutoring and workshop reports Boyd forwarded to Mohamad were originally not of specific interest to Boyd, it was this small step that formally changed the nature of her collaboration with Mohamad from casual to purposeful. Further still, she set about from that semester forward to offer more workshops specifically conceived to suit the needs of PLCPA students. For example, while the Writing Studio regularly offers a "Recognizing and Avoiding Plagiarism" workshop (originally implemented at the request of campus faculty and open to all students), receptive to the concerns she heard both faculty and international students express, Boyd added a different version of this workshop called "Is It Common Knowledge, or Should I Cite It?," which is a question that might confuse native-born students but often completely baffles international students who are not yet acculturated. This workshop is an example of the new services developed to support international students' needs while remaining open to and appropriate for all students.

As for the PLCPA workshops, they are created to supplement the content covered in either the English for Occupational Purposes class and/or the English for Academic Purposes lab. Although these workshops are specifically designed for PLCPA students, all students are welcome to attend, and some non-PLCPA students do. Each semester, Mohamad and the class instructors jointly decide what workshops to offer, and they project which should be retained, deleted, and/or added the next semester based, in part, on information collected via questionnaires given to PLCPA students the semester before. For instance, in the spring 2009 semester, the top five topics (in order of preference) suggested by the students for the fall 2009 were: (1) developing a cohesive essay; (2) developing business and personal conversation skills; (3) developing American English pronunciation skills; (4) building vocabulary and reading comprehension skills; and (5) understanding U.S. culture in the classroom. Through further collaboration by design that still promotes programmatic autonomy, Mohamad finalizes the PLCPA workshop topics only after Boyd determines what the Studio will offer in order to provide as broad and complete an array of workshops as possible without redundancy.

New Collaborations

When Mohamad saw the positive effect that academic support had on the ability of the least proficient students to pass the PLCPA class in fall 2007, beginning in the spring 2008 semester she mandated that students seek at their convenience either five, ten, or fifteen hours of academic support respectively based on their performance on the placement test. This time she called Boyd first so that they could put some thought into the design. Concurrently, student enrollment in the PLCPA program climbed steeply that spring when the business school, coming to recognize the many benefits the PLCPA provides international students, began to require that students in their program who placed into PLCPA take the course. These developments led Mohamad to reexamine the relevant types of support already available at the institution in order to determine what else might benefit PLCPA students, in part so as not to overwhelm the Writing Studio, which became her next step in the direction of institutional collaboration. Boyd concurred with Mohamad's decision for, as Muriel Harris points out, the risk of writing centers in institutions such as ours that do not have a Writing Across the Curriculum program can be over-extension. Harris calls attention to Stephen North's caution that a "Writing Center's mission should match its resources and should not 'be seen as taking upon its shoulders the whole institution's (real or imagined) sins of illiteracy'" (qtd. in Harris 91).

In the fall of 2008, Mohamad brought two additional departments on board to offer support: the Frank Giovatto Library Reference Desk to offer research and information literacy tutorials, and the Career Development Center to prepare students for entering the professional workforce through resume and cover letter writing and business etiquette workshops. In fall 2009, the Student Counseling and Psychological Services commenced participating as well to provide personal development workshops that promote academic success such as handling time management, coping with test anxiety, and dealing with negative feedback. While the Career Development Center was the first non-academic support unit to collaborate with the PLCPA, its services reinforce the English for Occupational Purposes content of the PLCPA just as the non-academic Student Counseling Services helps to acculturate students to academia.

It is noteworthy that even with the increasing number of options, and the changing distribution of support each unit provides, students still self-select to utilize the Writing Studio's services in significant numbers;

additionally, the impact of this distribution was not detrimental to the Writing Studio, which has seen a steady increase each semester in the number of domestic students (who are not mandated to attend).

While the Center for Academic Student Services, the Library, the Career Development Center, and the Student Counseling and Psychological Services all record and send to the PLCPA the number of hours students complete, to date additional sharing of data has not been pursued, as it has been with the Writing Studio, in part due to the smaller proportion of PLCPA students who seek those services. While the PLCPA and the Writing Studio were initially maintaining separate records and sharing paper reports in our respective collection of data, we desired a means to coordinate our information so as to avoid redundancy and increase efficiency. Fortunately, we now benefit from the recent creation of a shared database application housed on the same dedicated, web-based server so that we can access, with limits, each other's information; this development reflects the University's recognition of our collaboration and the campus's growing commitment to student learning outcomes assessment.

Ultimately, it was both practical and pedagogical factors that contributed to the decision to provide PLCPA students with more support options. Towards the practical end, as enrollment in the PLCPA increased so did the need for support. Fortunately, apart from the workshops developed by the PLCPA, other support services already existed for the PLCPA to call upon, which is not to say that cooperation was guaranteed or imposed. Collaboration between the PLCPA and the support services grew organically out of a shared commitment to sustainable student success. The pedagogy driving the decision to provide PLCPA students with more support options is that students will receive the maximum benefit from the services if they are empowered to choose those which best suit their needs, interests, and schedules. This flexibility further ameliorates the negative perceptions sometimes associated with compulsory supplemental support because, although students are required to complete certain hours, their ability to self-select the services they find most relevant remains.

And while we did not, as Rigolino and Freel did, "from the outset" fully conceive of our model as one that would not only "provide students with extra time but also . . . weave together specific resources into a cohesive course design," that is, in retrospect, what we have accomplished. The basic writing model at SUNY New Paltz (described by Rigolino and Freel), much like ours, provides undergraduate basic writers (including ESL writers), with a three-credit composition course accompanied by a co-requisite,

non-credit workshop taught by the same instructor for continuity, and an extracurricular tutoring requirement of one hour (two for ESL students) per week to be completed in a writing center. They aimed to "incorporate both individual tutoring as well as workshop sessions into [their] program," workshops that are akin to our PLCPA labs, "in such a way that these elements, while distinct from time spent in the classroom, were part of a holistic pedagogical approach" (51). This desire for a coherent pedagogical approach is the principle that informed the organic permutation of the PLCPA basic writing model.

Although we did not intend to create a program of seamless support, as did Rigolino and Freel, notably many of our students do not recognize that our support services are provided by distinct units; rather, they see the separate support services as a cohesive extension of the PLCPA. However, because our students receive instruction in English for Occupational Purposes as well as English for Academic Purposes, our model easily lent itself to the principles of a distributed resources model, one that draws upon existing support services, both academic and otherwise, while remaining part of a holistic pedagogical approach.

Concluding Remarks

Because English proficiency cannot and does not occur all at once nor solely as a result of a class devoted to English instruction for non-native speakers, it must be perpetually reinforced beyond the classroom. Zamel and Spack point to the emerging body of scholarship that "testifies to the growing acknowledgement across the curriculum that finding productive ways to teach linguistically diverse learners is necessarily a shared responsibility" (136). They quote from the comments of students who are non-native speakers of English "who make clear that they do not expect to be given less work—or less demanding work. But they do ask for assistance in finding effective ways to manage the workload and to gain access to the knowledge and strategies that will ensure success in their courses" (130). Zamel and Spack's article urges faculty not to be like those found in Ilona Leki's studies ("Coping," "Narrow") who often leave students who are non-native English speakers to fend for themselves, which suggests that not all faculty members are willing or able to assume the added responsibility; they add that "all faculty—not just those who teach courses devoted to speakers of other languages—are responsible for contributing to multilingual students' acquisition of language and literacy" (126).

Calling upon faculty across the curriculum to heed the concerns of students who are non-native English speakers is one way to address the needs of this population; another way is to call upon, in a parallel and perhaps more feasible fashion, the range of existing support services at the university, as we do at our institution, to help provide the support and strategies students need to succeed. At Fairleigh Dickinson, offering students who are non-native English speakers instruction in English for Occupational Purposes in the class they take specifically for English language acquisition lays a solid foundation for pursuing their major course of study, and the English for Academic Purposes lab prepares them for the academic demands expected of them more generally. Our PLCPA students become accustomed in their first semester to grappling with discipline content while they continue to increase their proficiency in English, which is a transferable skill they can apply throughout their academic and future careers. The requirement that these students also concurrently seek existing support beyond the classroom, thirdspace support that is decentralized, is a crucial step for their sustainable success. PLCPA students are given the freedom to self-select which support works best for them from a group of academic and non-academic support services, which facilitates their integration into the larger academic community and primes them to continue to utilize varieties of support after they have exited the PLCPA course. Support services are uniquely poised to share in the responsibility of providing students access to effective ways for sustaining their academic success.

It is not only the students who benefit from such collaboration, of course; the tangible benefits ripple throughout the institution. The benefit to Fairleigh Dickinson is not only that the faculty encounter better prepared students, both in terms of their English proficiency and preparedness to succeed academically, but also that the institution realizes the effectiveness of maximizing existing services without added cost. In fact, the University gets a better return on the funds it does invest in support services when these services are more fully utilized. Collaboration by design eliminates the potential for redundancy in our offerings. Furthermore, the University earns a reputation of being sensitive to rather than neglectful of the needs of the international students it admits.

We, ourselves, have become more effective administrators because we now focus on more than just the immediate concerns of our own programs, and through our reciprocity we have found ways to deliver more consistent and complementary services while still maintaining our autonomy. A related but less tangible benefit is that we do not feel isolated; we feel situated in a

network and can rely on each other for collegial support. From this experience, we have also learned that administrators need not wait for directives from the top down but can take the initiative to effect gradual institutional change. Because the changes we make to our individual programs play out on a larger scale as a result of our collaboration, we have found it prudent to keep our adjustments small but regular in response to the data we collect and share. We also acknowledge, however, that for such collaborations to work the administrators involved must be dedicated and cooperative. In the absence of a central coordinator, such collaborations run the risk of being discontinued should an individual support services administrator cease participating or should there be personnel turnover.

While the collaboration between the PLCPA and the Writing Studio at first emerged fortuitously and organically through the desire to support our international basic writers, it evolved into a collaboration by design through the process of collecting and combining naturally occurring data and through making small adjustments in our programs based on our action research. Our initial collaboration also formed the template for PLCPA's collaboration with other units. While the model we have adopted is still only four years young, we are happy to report that on average 85% of PLCPA students do successfully complete the course in their first semester, and the majority of the students progress appropriately through their degree requirements. To date, the retention data is not yet robust enough for us to report the impact of this curriculum change upon retention, but we can report that undergraduate students are now progressing more rapidly through their programs than those under the previous configuration. Furthermore, in the exit surveys we give, PLCPA students say that they feel better prepared to meet academic demands, and they overwhelmingly convey their intent to continue to utilize university-wide support services, particularly those of the Writing Studio. And we observe that they certainly do continue to use these services. In sharing the developmental history of our collaboration, we aim to contribute to the conversation about more effective basic writing models and to offer a permutation that may prove useful for others who wish to tap into the support resources and expertise at their institutions.

Notes

1. Founded in 1942, Fairleigh Dickinson University is New Jersey's largest private, independent university with two New Jersey campuses, one in

Teaneck/Hackensack (known as the Metropolitan campus) and one in Florham, as well as a campus in Wroxton, England, and one in Vancouver, British Columbia. It offers Associate's, Baccalaureate, Master's, and Doctoral degrees and typically enrolls 8,000-9,000 undergraduate and 3,500 graduate students; roughly 1,200 are international students.

2. As reported on the Institute of International Education's website: "The number of international students at colleges and universities in the United States increased by 8% to an all-time high of 671,616 in the 2008/09 academic year, according to the Open Doors report, which is published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE_ with support from the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. This is the largest percentage increase in international student enrollments since 1980/81, and marks the third consecutive year of significant growth (with increases of 7% in 2007/08 and 3% in 2006/07). The total international student count exceeds by 14.5% the prior peak enrollment year (2002/02). Open Doors 2009 data also show the number of "new" international students—those enrolled for the first time at a U.S. college or university in fall 2008—increasing by 16%, following two years of 10% increases. The largest growth was seen in undergraduate enrollments, which increased by 11%, compared to a 2% increase in graduate enrollments."

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More Talk about "Basic Writers": A Category of Rhetorical Value for Teachers

Pamela VanHaitsma

ABSTRACT: *This article recuperates the notion of "strategic value," but to new ends: rather than arguing whether or not basic writing should continue, this case study looks to one institution where it does, asking what value the category "basic writer" holds for teachers at this site. On the one hand, they confirm the existing scholarship's critiques of the category's strategic limitations. At the same time, they maintain its potential value when leveraged as a tactic to argue for resources for students, attempt to understand students, and articulate a view of teaching as in service of social justice. Given these tensions between problematic and productive uses of the term "basic writer," debates about basic writing's existence would be better served if they shifted away from wholesale critique or defense and instead grappled with more rhetorical questions about value for particular institutions or programs at specific moments in time.*

KEYWORDS: *basic writing; strategic value; rhetorical value; remediation; student identity*

The existence of basic writing has been contentious since its inception, but scholarly debate over whether basic writing programs and courses should continue to exist at all reached a high point during the 1990s. In his 1993 essay, "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum," David Bartholomae introduces to this debate the notion of "strategic value,"[1] questioning the role basic writing has come to play in the curriculum and social order of higher education. He advances that, originating as part of the liberal project of the 1960s and 1970s, basic writing once served a strategic function, as a way of marking and staking out a contested space within the curriculum for students whose differences had been deemed signs of their unfitness for higher education. Yet basic writing has since become naturalized, he argues, functioning instead to sort bodies deemed "Other"—these are the "normal" or "mainstream" writers; they are the "basic" ones—while erasing rather than engaging productively with class and race differences,

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with the tensions around those differences, and with the challenges they might otherwise make to the social order of higher education. Calling for a more productive engagement with such differences, Bartholomae concludes, "I'm not sure more talk about basic writing will make that happen" (21).

Directly responding to Bartholomae, Karen Greenberg defends the value of basic writing, arguing that its sorting of students is in service of preparing them to succeed, that most basic writing programs effectively enable rather than hinder students' progress in higher education ("Politics"). Both Greenberg's defense of basic writing and the questioning that inspired it are fairly representative of the field's debates in the 1990s about the existence of basic writing. For critics, basic writing only reproduces society's inequalities, because some students are included in freshman composition while others are excluded, tracked instead into basic writing courses that slow down and impede their graduation and thus the socioeconomic power a degree might allow (Shor, "Apartheid"). But for defenders, basic writing challenges such inequality, empowering students by providing the instruction they need in order develop their language skills and ultimately succeed in college coursework (Greenberg, "Response"; Collins). Central to this debate are questions about basic writing's politics and ethics, about whether it is in service of or an impediment to social justice for students marginalized by systemic forms of classism, racism, and ethnocentrism in which the academy is implicated. Also central are questions about the practice of mainstreaming—about whether and how to eliminate basic writing and place all students in "mainstream" freshman writing courses (DeGenaro and White; Gleason; Gunner; Lamos; McNenny and Gunner; Rodby and Fox; Shor, "Illegal Literacy"; Soliday; Soliday and Gleason).

What seems to have dropped away from this debate is attention to the question of basic writing's "strategic value." That is, until 2000, when Deborah Mutnick offers another defense of basic writing. Mutnick positions herself as responding not only to leftist scholars like Bartholomae and Shor, who critique the politics of basic writing from within the field, but also to conservatives, who attack basic writing from the outside in order to "reverse affirmative action, end open admissions, eliminate academic support programs, and thus resegregate higher education" (78). Mutnick argues that basic writing needs to be understood within its socio-historical context: as part of movements for social justice, including for open admissions and accompanying academic support programs. She concludes that it "can be seen as a strategic means of keeping the doors open for students" (79), especially for "working-class African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans" (69).

Mutnick's conclusion that basic writing *can* be viewed as serving a strategic function is compelling. Important, though, is her emphasis on this function as possible, not inevitable. While her case for the strategic value of basic writing at City University of New York (CUNY) is persuasive, it does not follow that basic writing always functions in similar ways, across institutional locations and historical moments. Indeed, Terence Collins, in also defending basic writing, pushes critics to consider varied local iterations of basic writing pedagogies, programs, and structures, rather than arguing wholesale against one homogeneous entity of basic writing (95). It is of course equally important that scholars maintaining the potential value of basic writing do so for specific locations and moments, rather than arguing for a single, homogenous basic writing.

Here I follow Mutnick by recuperating Bartholomae's notion of strategic value, but to new ends. Rather than arguing whether or not basic writing maintains strategic value, or whether basic writing programs *should* continue or be replaced by mainstreaming, this case study looks to one institutional and programmatic location at which some form of basic writing *does*[2] exist. I engaged practicing teachers at this institution in "more talk about basic writing" (Bartholomae 21), and I analyze their teacher talk by asking what value the term "basic writer" holds for them, specifically in relation to their particular institutional settings as well as the field as a whole. While this analysis offers needed perspective on the debate about the existence of basic writing, including basic writing programs and courses, my emphasis is on the value of the category "basic writer." Such value is not located in the category itself, or even in its general circulation through educational and social systems, which is often problematic. Rather, value is produced in the category's use, in how the term is leveraged by specific individuals and groups, at a moment in time, in a particular location, and with certain goals.

This research also seeks to further existing scholarship in at least two other ways. First, in focusing on one site of basic writing, my case study responds to repeated calls for attention to local rather than generalized conceptions of composition in general and basic writing in particular (Collins; Gray-Rosendale; Keller and Weisser; Ritter; Wright). It responds as well to demands for research that, rather than taking as its object students deemed basic writers, turns critical attention to the field of basic writing and its knowledge-making practices in relation to students (Gray-Rosendale; Horner and Lu; Lunsford and Sullivan; Reagan). While I ask critical questions about the "basic writer" construction that resemble those posed in this scholarship, my work departs from and develops it by exploring them

through analysis not of textual representations, but of data collected by interviewing teachers.

Not unexpectedly, the teachers I interviewed confirm the existing scholarship's critiques of the category "basic writer" and its limitations. In particular, these teachers point to the ways in which the category holds limited value for making generalized knowledge claims about students—about their struggles and proficiencies with language, as well as their cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds—especially when such claims are made across local institutional contexts. But at the same time, the teachers interviewed maintain that the term "basic writer" does hold some value. Utilizing Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic, my analysis points to the rhetorical value of the term when leveraged by teachers in order to argue for resources for students, develop knowledge about students, and articulate a view of teaching as in service of social justice. Given these tensions—between the potential tactical value of the term and its strategic limitations, involving the varied meanings of the term across time and space—I conclude with the assertion that debates about basic writing would be better served if they shifted away from wholesale critique or defense and focused instead on the more rhetorical question of value for a particular institution and program at a particular moment in time.

THE CASE STUDY

Setting and Participants

The particular institutional setting for this case study is an urban university, a public university in California, which I will refer to as California Urban University (CUU). The basic writing program at CUU is called the "Integrated Reading/Writing Program," or "IRW" for short. The decision not to name the program "Basic Writing" is of course significant, especially for this study of the term "basic writer," and thus I will refer back to it as the analysis proceeds. Here it is important to explain that the title "Integrated Reading/Writing" refers to a philosophy informing the program's design which teachers are trained to enact in their classrooms. In short, the IRW program, implemented in 2001, puts into practice what research has shown to be effective by integrating reading and writing instruction for students placed into "remedial" courses (Ackerman; Nelson and Calfee; Salvatori; Spivey and King).

The move to integrate reading and writing instruction at CUU was made not only in response to research, but also in the face of statewide threats to eliminate remediation. Although remediation has existed within the state university of which CUU is a part since the mid-1970s, attempts to eliminate it have existed for just as long. As Sugie Goen and Helen Gillotte-Tropp explain, one of these attempts, a 1997 plan mandated by the state university system's Board of Trustees, required that all universities in the system "reduce the number of incoming students in remedial courses to no more than 10% by 2007. This plan immediately limited remedial instruction to one year and instituted the hefty penalty of 'disenrollment' from the university for any student failing to complete the remedial requirement during his or her first year" (91).

Because this 1997 mandate meant that students would have only one year to complete remedial courses before being disenrolled, the IRW program was designed to be completed within one year. Basically, incoming CUU students take a placement test used throughout the state university system and, if they are assessed as needing remedial writing instruction, they are encouraged to take an IRW course rather than Freshman Composition. Whereas Freshman Composition is a three-credit course taken in one semester, the IRW program most often consists of a sequence of two four-credit courses, taken over two semesters. Students enrolled in these courses receive full college credit for the eight units in which they are enrolled and, once they complete the sequence, they have fulfilled the equivalent of Freshman Composition, only in more time and with extra support. With this support, and the integration of reading and writing instruction, most students have been able to complete "remedial instruction" within one year.

This success of the IRW program holds political significance as the elimination of remediation at CUU would greatly affect access and equity. Although the student populations that make up basic writing courses vary by region, institution, and time, those that make up the IRW program are culturally and linguistically diverse. For example, at the time of the 1997 mandate, of the students deemed basic writers at CUU, 80% spoke a native language or dialect that was not so-called standard English, 50% were immigrants, 89% were people of color, and just over 50% were first-generation college students.[3] Across the state university system, African-American students have been placed in remedial courses at relative percentages higher than any other group of students for the last decade. More recently, in 2007, two-thirds of African-American and Latino students admitted were placed into remedial English courses. At CUU, the IRW program was designed in

part to protect access to the university for these students, to maintain the rich diversity of CUU.

The faculty involved in the IRW program at CUU thus have a history of responding creatively to the perceptions of literacy "crisis" that so often surround remediation—in ways that involve rethinking the enterprise of basic writing: They teach reading and writing together as part of the same meaning-making process and within the same course, and have renamed these courses to reflect their understanding of what the courses actually accomplish. They have made these changes in response to research as well as their local situation, structuring the courses to address the specific threats to students being deemed "remedial" on their campus. So teachers at CUU have a lot to offer to conversations about how basic writing might proceed in the future.

I interviewed five CUU teachers, whom I will introduce in the order that they appear in the analysis to follow. (All names are pseudonyms.) Of these teachers, the most experienced with basic writing are Laura, Zinnia Mae, and Karen. Laura has 17 years of experience teaching at CUU, Zinnia Mae has 13 years of experience teaching at both CUU and community colleges, and Karen has 19 years of experience as a tenure-track professor, "many more not counting that," in both city college and university settings. All three have taught basic writing courses; Laura and Karen have also participated in basic writing program administration, as well as published on basic writing pedagogy and the history and politics of remediation. The two other teachers interviewed—Sadie and William, who have 14 and 18 years of teaching experience—reported less experience with basic writing but nonetheless offered their perspectives, as composition teachers, on how the term "basic writer" circulates both at CUU and in the field of composition more broadly.

In addition to undergraduate teaching experience, William, Laura, Zinnia Mae, Karen and Sadie have all taught graduate courses, largely at CUU and to future teachers of reading and writing. In many cases, this graduate teaching has included an emphasis on preparation for teaching so-called developmental or basic writing courses in community colleges and IRW courses at CUU. More so, this graduate instruction is often highly informed by the philosophy of integrated reading and writing instruction that drives the design of the IRW program and its curriculum. Not surprisingly, then, a philosophy of integrated reading and writing instruction informs many of these teachers' perceptions of basic writing and especially of the limitations and values of the term "basic writer."

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to discuss with these teachers their perceptions of the category "basic writer"—its uses, purposes, and effects—I collected data primarily though in-person interviews, with each interview being about one hour or more in length. I used semi-structured interview techniques (Merriam 78), which, as defined by Bogdan and Biklin, are "open-ended"; the participant is encouraged "to talk in the area of interest" and the researcher may "probe more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiates" (95).

To analyze the data, I used the constant comparative method, which involves comparing one segment of the data with another to determine similarities and differences (Merriam 159). Based on such comparisons, I grouped together data on a similar dimension, and then gave this dimension a name, making it a category. The overall objective of such analysis is to seek patterns in the data, arranging them in relationship to each other in order to develop the analysis.

In response to the patterns identified, my analysis is informed by Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* and the theory of rhetoric embedded in his distinction between strategy and tactic.[4] For de Certeau, a strategy comes from a position of relative power, an established place, and operates within a rationalized system, functions as part of a strategic logic that maintains control of interactions within and through that place as well as its relationships to others. A tactic, in contrast, is more fleeting, less systematized; it originates from points without established place or relative power, seeking to in some way make use of the existing places, logics, and systems without having much control over them. De Certeau makes this distinction, in part, in order to turn attention to the tactics of everyday practices, indicating as well that, if strategies are best understood through science, tactics are best realized through rhetoric.

Though the phrase "rhetorical strategy" is generally used to refer to a range of symbolic actions, both those de Certeau calls strategies and those he considers tactics, a rhetorical action that is strategic can be differentiated from one that is tactical. To avoid confusion within my own analysis, I avoid the phrase "rhetorical strategy" entirely, focusing instead on how various uses of "basic writer" seem to operate strategically and/or tactically. In the case of the term "basic writer," it operates strategically when used by established educational institutions and programs that, from their locations and positions of power, maintain those locations and the relationships between

them and others, including students. Bartholomae's description of the sorting and othering involved in institutionalized basic writing, then, refers to what de Certeau would call strategic action. In this sense, the term "basic writer" may have lost its value precisely because of the degree to which it has become part of a strategic logic.

De Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic is most useful, though, in that it enables one to both acknowledge the limitations of "basic writer" as part of a strategic logic and, at the same time, not dismiss its potential rhetorical value when tactically used by teachers in their everyday lives. In the case of broad programmatic actions across institutions and time—and at the level of abstraction and sweeping argument—the term "basic writer" probably has lost much of its value. But the participants interviewed in this case study recognize such limitations and, at the same time, reported finding the term valuable in at least some situations they encounter as teachers, including in their participation in program administration. Whether the term holds value in their view depends on the rhetorical situation in question, factors of that situation including those of space and time. Thus de Certeau's work enables a complicating of Bartholomae's notion of strategic value, including a more thoroughly rhetorical understanding of value. It is also useful for attempting to make sense of the everyday practices in teachers' lives and, even more importantly, for making decisions about whether, when, where, and how to leverage the term "basic writer."

LIMITED VALUE: PROBLEMATIC USES OF "BASIC WRITER"

Not surprisingly—and particularly given the history of IRW at CUU—these teachers both share many of the same critiques of basic writing leveled in existing scholarship and push those critiques further. Teachers at CUU see the category "basic writer" as having limited value for constructing knowledge about students, telling teachers very little about students. As Laura put it, we "continue to think of [basic writers] in ways that are less than useful, to theorize . . . who they are in ways that obscure more than they reveal." Laura and the other teachers interviewed pointed to a number of problematic uses of the category "basic writer." Here I highlight a couple of these limitations to the value of the category, especially when it is used as part of what de Certeau theorizes as a strategic logic, before moving on to the potential rhetorical value of the category when used tactically.

One problematic use CUU teachers pointed to is the emphasis in "basic writer" on student deficiency. Here participants echoed critiques of deficiency commonplace in the field of basic writing (Bizzell; Gray-Rosendale, "Investigating"; Halasek and Highberg; Harris; Horner and Lu; Stygall). In part, a deficiency model gets in the way of knowing about students because it overemphasizes the ways in which students struggle with academic writing and, in doing so, obscures their proficiencies with a range of literate practices. All of the teachers in this case study granted that basic writers struggle with writing, and most saw attempts to understand and describe those struggles as an important part of knowing students, but most also cautioned against an (over)emphasis on deficiency. They were especially critical of the tendency to interpret problems with academic writing as representative of larger problems with thinking and/or college readiness.

Most interestingly, these teachers extended existing critiques of the deficiency model by pointing to the ways in which its overemphasis on student difficulties with writing tends to overshadow their difficulties with reading. Zinnia Mae explains,

> "Basic writer" . . . leaves out the reading piece. I know the term "basic writer" is more prevalent than "basic reader." But my own experience is that students at all of these levels, if they're struggling with writing, they're struggling with reading. . . . There are a few instances where that's not the case, but more than 90% of the time it is. So I feel, on the one hand, it labels whole students as deficient, and on the other hand, ignores a place where they actually may be. I want it both ways.

Zinnia Mae wants descriptions which accurately and fully capture how students labeled "basic writers" *do* struggle, and at the same time, which avoid overextending deficiency to apply to all of the students, their experiences and abilities.

The potential value of the category "basic writer" is also undermined when it is used to make generalizations about the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of students deemed basic writers. For example, Laura discussed how the category "basic writer" is often assumed to overlap with certain other identities in ways that essentialize and overlook the diversity of students within the category. She stated that these "essentializing ways of looking at these students" include "overly conflat[ing] the basic writer with the ethnic minority student in ways that do a disservice to

them both, [to] our understanding of both basic writing as a construct and our understanding of ethnic diversity as a construct." Here Laura echoes Jacqueline Jones Royster and Jean C. Williams' caution against conflating basic writing with race and ethnicity (570), as well as Steve Lamos' analysis of the ways in which basic writing students are "discursively coded as non-white" in spite of larger numbers of white students being basic writers (22). Laura went on to say there is also "some conflation of basic writers with linguistic minorities," and a tendency to think of basic writers as "fitting a certain demographic," as being "first-generation college students, of lower socioeconomic background." Her point, of course, is not that the category "basic writer" does not often include all of the above students, but that "for every student who does fit" the above demographics, "there's one who doesn't." She emphasized, "It's just so much more variable than that, it's so much more variable." And, when the category is used in ways that ignore such variation, its value for understanding students is limited.

More importantly, conceiving of students in ways that ignore the complexity of their cultural backgrounds, of both their difficulties and proficiencies with language, affects the students themselves. When asked to describe a particular basic writer that stands out in her memory, Laura answered that "the kind of student who springs immediately to mind" is "less an example of who I consider to be a basic writer and more an example of what I think that label can do to a student." The student, from Vietnam, has "seven different languages in her repertoire," "is a student who came to the U.S. when she was young, had gone to U.S. schools, had never been in an ESL class," but when she "gets to college that linguistic bundle gets tagged as 'basic writer.'" Laura conceded that, as the student's teacher, she could see on paper why the student was "labeled . . . 'basic writer,'" and wasn't "saying this is ridiculous." Still, the student "had such a rich linguistic mix that the way the program was designed at the time could not tap into it. She had this competency in language," but in terms of "both the label and the instruction the label entitled her to . . . Her language background was a deficit, instead of . . . rich resources to tap into." For Laura, as well as others whose research focuses on multilingual students, a linguistic background that includes knowledge of seven languages is not a deficit, and concep-tualizing it as such gets in the way of understanding student proficiency with language (Canagarajah; Matsuda; Roberge, Siegal, and Harklau). Such misunderstanding impacts students. As Laura indicated, students are "en-titled to" forms of instruction that cannot "tap into" their "rich linguistic mix" and thus can have only limited effectiveness. Moreover, students are

affected by an awareness of how they are being misunderstood and labeled as linguistically deficient. Laura explained that this particular student was "keen to that," and as the student's teacher, Laura saw how such awareness affected the student: "It's heartbreaking."

While the value of the category "basic writer" is obviously limited, this limitation is in part because the meanings assigned to the term are highly localized—specific by region and institution, as well as to any moment in time. All of the case study participants made this point. Even Karen, who most strongly insisted that the concept "basic writer" has "some universal dimension to it too," conceded that what it means is "local" and "institutional." Sadie compared different institutions at which she has taught, cautioning against making generalizations based on local assumptions:

> Basic writers here [at CUU], for example, have a pretty different set of needs than those at [a public university in Pennsylvania], and it's important to be responsive to those, and that's the main thing actually. It can be problematic when people are at different places and assuming that because they're using the same term they're talking about the same issues. . . . I guess what's . . . dangerous about the term . . . is that any time a term gets reified . . . it loses that dimension of local specificity.

In conversations across institutional contexts, use of the term "basic writer" may involve assumptions about shared meaning, when in fact, a student deemed a "basic writer" at one institution may not be at another institution, much less during another moment in time. Sadie's point about generalizing across institutions thus echoes Bartholomae's concern that basic writing obscures differences among students rather than engaging with difference productively.

While talking with Laura about both differences among students and different meanings of the term "basic writer," I asked her, "What do you think the term does tell us? If it's so variable, what is it saying?" She responded, "That's the 64 million dollar question. I think . . . that question is only answered locally." Indeed, the term "basic writer" probably has lost its value as Bartholomae suggests, if judgments regarding "value" are made in sweeping ways that themselves erase differences across space, between local institutions and programs. Yet, if questions about value are asked locally, attending to the specificities of space and time, then the term "basic writer" may hold some tactical value for teachers in particular rhetorical situations.

POTENTIAL RHETORICAL VALUE: "BASIC WRITER" AS TACTIC

While the teachers interviewed for this case study echoed and developed critiques in the scholarship on basic writing by articulating many of the limitations of the category "basic writer," they also maintained that the term holds some value, both for the field in general and for them at their local institution(s). In particular, analysis of their teacher talk suggests that the category "basic writer" holds value when used tactically to advocate on behalf of their students; attempt to understand those students; and articulate a view of teaching as in service of social justice. That this particular group of teachers maintains the term's potential rhetorical value is especially significant given that they are working at an institutional site where "basic writing" is not even the official name of the program or its courses and where, in practice, students are almost never called "basic writers."

"It'd Be Lovely If We Could"

Some teachers at this location echoed Mutnick's claims about the value of basic writing to advocacy efforts on behalf of students. These teachers claimed rhetorical value for "basic writer" by describing it as a central term within arguments that groups of students belong at colleges and universities. Laura, for example, maintained that the term "basic writer" can be leveraged in order to advocate for students, to create space for them within higher education:

> I think it's created a space on college campus for students who need it. . . . I still think we need . . . advocacy on those students' behalf. And so . . . to the extent that it gives us [such advocacy], I think it's still . . . a useful construct.

Similarly, Zinnia Mae implied there is a continued need for such advocacy at CUU by pointing to recent attempts to deny students admission and disenroll already admitted students:

> Here there's been sort of a threat to being developmental, or basic, or whatever, because . . . there's the Executive Order, so now it's like get through . . . or get out . . . which is all housed under this long term plan to get rid of remedial education here at the university.

. . . So it's definitely about not wanting to let people come in, or if you don't finish in a year, sending them away.

In the face of this immediate threat, the term "basic writer" may indeed maintain the "usefulness" Laura assigned it.

Karen claimed, however, that the term has lost its value. She acknowledged that, historically, the term "basic writer" has been used to advocate for students, but asserted that the term itself is no longer needed in order to continue such advocacy. Focusing on the history of open admissions at CUNY and contrasting CUNY with CUU, she explained as follows:

> Now there are alternative models, and . . . open admissions is over. . . . There is a difference between basic writing and admissions policies, and that's what I have to think about. I wasn't an advocate for basic writing, you know, but I was always an advocate for open admissions. I think you can have open admissions, you don't have to have basic writing. . . . But maybe, at some point . . . in a sense, those two things were much closer than they are now. It certainly is true, people who said, if they get rid of basic writing, they'll get rid of the basic writers. That is true. At CUNY it was true. But I don't see that that's true here [at CUU], because the history of [this state university system] is different than the history of CUNY. The students are different. So that may have something to do with it too.

In contrast to Laura, then, Karen insisted that teachers and program administrators can advocate for students, open admissions, and student support programs without leveraging terms like "basic writer." Yet Karen did acknowledge that, at least in some institutions and at certain moments in time, the term "basic writer" has been central to arguments for open admissions. She recognizes, then, that even if the term has lost its strategic value, it has at times been, and may even still be, used tactically.

Basic writing teachers and program administrators have leveraged the term to argue not only that students deemed basic writers be admitted into the space of higher education, but also that, once those students are admitted, they be provided with resources to help them succeed. Case study participants discussed this use of the term often and at length. For example, although Karen does not completely agree, she conceded, "some people I know at CUNY would say it's been very powerful and helpful because it has . . . helped students to get . . . small classes and teachers who care about

them." Sadie shared her view that the term has been used to get access for students to smaller classes that meet for "twice as many hours" and offer "a different type of support," including "more focused instruction."

Laura also insisted on the value of the term "basic writer" for arguing that students should be provided with needed resources. She described basic writing as an "enriched experience" that is "not remedial," but that provides "additional resources" for students transitioning from high school to college work, including "smaller classes" and other forms of support:

> What basic writing can be is a container for students. It can be a place where students feel seen, and heard, and known—where they can be all those things, where they're not just a student in a class, where their educational histories, just their histories as humans on the planet, are seen as part of what we're doing in this classroom, what's going on in the university. It's not seen as having nothing to do with it, or something they have to confess in an office hour when they're in trouble. . . . It's part of the business of what we're doing here, [an] understanding that, yeah, I came from somewhere, and I'm moving here, and let's translate. And this is kind of the place to do that, and there aren't a lot of places on a college campus where that happens. . . . It serves as emotional as well as academic support for them.

Laura went on to state that, "I'm not ready to dismiss or do away with . . . the concept . . . the protections that it offers." These "protections" include the range already mentioned: smaller classes, longer amounts of time in those classes, enriched emotional and academic support, and at least some protection from disenrollment. Laura concluded, "I worry if we do away with that concept then we do away with the protections. . . . I mean it'd be lovely if we could have those protections without the . . . term." Thus for Laura and others, the term "basic writer" is limited and conflicted, but still one to be held onto in situations where it maintains rhetorical value for tactically advocating on students' behalf.

"If People Keep Talking Long Enough"

These teachers also pointed to the potential rhetorical value of the category "basic writer" within attempts at invention, at developing knowledge about students. Admittedly the results of such attempts have been less

than perfect: all of the teachers interviewed for this case study recognized limitations to the value of the term "basic writer," *especially* for constructing knowledge about students. In fact, rather than claiming that the term has value in pointing to propositional knowledge—something that can be known about students termed "basic writers"—teachers see the term as one they may use tactically when faced with what they do *not* know about their students.

William explained the emergence of the term "basic writer" as "a response to unexpected performance," to the "writing of students not previously in college." In other words, when teachers confront student writing they do not expect, and thus do not know how to understand much less respond to, they make use of terms like "basic writer" in the process of trying to make sense of the unexpected performance. While such attempts at understanding can be accompanied by a range of affective responses, for William, "basic writer" is one of a "vast array of labels teachers use to deal with being overwhelmed" by the unexpected. Zinnia Mae further explained the same sort of teacher frustration:

> I feel like sometimes the conversations that happen around a basic writer are born out of a teacher's frustration about not being able to help that student. . . . So when the teacher talks about it, it's about what the student didn't do, or couldn't do, and it often feels . . . very aggressive. But I really think it's the teacher's frustration because they don't know what . . . to do to help that student accomplish whatever they're trying to get them to accomplish.

In exploring the ways teachers sometimes use the term "basic writer" out of such frustrations, Zinnia Mae made clear not only that the label points to what teachers do not know, but that this lack of knowledge is often due to a lack of preparation for teachers themselves. Indeed, teachers may at times be no more prepared for their basic writing classrooms than their students are presumed to be, and a developing body of literature uses the term "basic writer" to acknowledge this need for improved training of teachers (Goen-Salter; Troyka and Goen-Salter).

Yet, in the face of not knowing how to effectively assist students, many teachers use the category "basic writer" to attempt to better understand their students by identifying patterns among students. William, in answering a question about what he sees as the purposes of the term, included this function: "Every label is a strategy for understanding patterns. So when we

categorize students as basic writers, we're saying they have some things in common, and it's useful to look at those patterns. That is why comp instructors and researchers [use the term]." For William, the term "basic writer," like any category, is a way of grouping together different objects—in this case, people, or more specifically, students—based on similarities. The point of such categorizing of students is to improve teacher understanding of patterns in student writing. William recognized the dangers of such categorization, stating, "Again, [it's a] potentially useful term to talk about patterns, but if you become too wedded to the term, and use it to hide from rather than look at the students in front of us, then it's useless." In spite of this caution that the term "basic writer" becomes "useless" once it becomes part of a strategic logic, William made clear that individual teachers may use it tactically in order to develop understanding of patterns in their own students' writing.

The term is also used as an approach to invention by the larger field of basic writing, by teachers and researchers attempting to understand patterns across students in different locations. In this way, basic writing teachers and researchers have categorized themselves as much as they do students: to the degree that they have participated in the creation of basic writing as a subfield of composition, they have designated themselves as basic writing teachers, scholars, and, in some cases, programs—have grouped and organized themselves together with the intention of advancing their understanding of students. While participants in this study recognized the problems with generalizing across institutions, as previously pointed out, they also acknowledged the value of generalized terms for organizing areas of study. Zinnia Mae explained as follows:

> Because I'm doing research the past couple years, I'm really beginning to understand why it's important to have uniform terms, so you can look at all research in an area. When there's this variety of terms, it's really hard because [you] may not know a term means the same thing, so you miss a whole area of literature or knowledge that's come before. So I can appreciate getting a term and sticking with it. . . . I'm beginning to change my orientation to some of the terms. Like [with] "basic writer," I pointed out some of the ways that it's lacking, and it's not even a term I use—I would never describe my job as working with basic readers and basic writers. And even though it's not something I've taken into my heart, it can help us to learn more about our profession, and what other teachers are doing, and our students.

While she may not use the term "basic writer" to conceptualize or describe her own students and teaching, she sees how the term helps to organize a subfield of study in order in order to develop and locate knowledge about students, teaching, and learning.

Other teachers went further in assigning value to the term "basic writer" for organizing a field and developing knowledge. For instance, echoing George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk's account of basic writing's influence,[5] Sadie stated that use of the term "basic writer" to organize the subfield of basic writing has been one of the most important developments within the larger field of composition:

> I think the basic writer has actually allowed the field to develop in one of the most important ways it has. You know, paying attention to student writing as central to what we do comes out of thinking about how to better help basic writers. So I really see the trajectory of composition emerging out of that. . . . That's the orientation that I have. . . . What's important to me is student writing and paying attention to it. So I think [basic writing] has actually enabled the field, and made the way for more issues in a lot of ways, [made it] much richer, [with] much more going on. [There's] always a danger of getting away from what students are doing in the class. So in some ways basic writers sort of ground or give center to the field.

I asked Sadie how this focus on basic writers grounds and gives center to the field any differently than a focus on student writers in general would, and she answered that the difference is "because their needs are more pressing, the demands are more visible . . . and they need to be accounted for. I think also it's humbling in a way, for people to think how hard it is to write, for everybody, and how hard it is to teach people to write. Even if you're good at writing, it's still very difficult to teach people how to write." Sadie's response points to the ways in which basic writing teachers, when faced with the difficult and humbling task of teaching writing, have responded by using the term "basic writer" to organize a field within which the focus is on improving teaching by learning from student writing.

Yet the creation of such professional spaces is not without problems for, as previously discussed, the term "basic writer" *is* of limited value for making generalized knowledge claims about students. Teachers actively engaged in the field of basic writing, therefore, need to be creative in their uses of the term to address this limitation—for example, by continuing to

develop new local descriptions that attend to the ways in which its meanings are varied and specific by region, institution, and time. I have noted Sadie's caution against people from different institutions assuming they mean the same thing simply because they use the same term. More importantly to my point here, though, she followed this caution by clarifying, "But I think if people keep talking long enough, they'll get to the differences and be able to deal with that." In contrast to Bartholomae's questioning of whether "more talk about basic writing" will lead to more productive engagement with differences (21), Sadie seemed to say that, so long as basic writing teachers keep their professional conversations going, they will be able to attend to localized differences.

"Champions for the Underdog"

Further, professional conversations around advocacy for students deemed "basic writers" invoke the term as teachers and administrators articulate an internally persuasive view of themselves as heroic figures. (Del Principe 76; Gunner 31). Zinnia Mae commented directly on this view of teachers, stating "in other institutions, faculty see themselves as like champions for the underdog, teaching basic writers." Teachers at CUU like to see themselves in similar ways, according to Zinnia Mae, so much so that they will hold on to outdated misinformation about changing student populations in order to not disrupt that view of themselves: "But the other part of it is who we see ourselves as, not only [CUU] but as faculty members. We see ourselves as serving this nontraditional student population, supporting these working adults, lots of things that we are proud of. [We are] resistant [to] letting go because we like that picture of ourselves and our institution." In a sense, then, the term "basic writer" has value for teachers who use it to argue for a view of themselves as serving and advocating on behalf of educationally, socially, and/or politically marginalized groups of students.

Laura also pointed to this value of the term "basic writer" in relation to movements for social justice:

> I have mixed emotions about the term. We've re-termed it. At first, it was a revolutionary term, a movement, born out of social movement, along with other student protest movements for social justice. And so it has a social justice [element] in the term itself. And I'm really, as a field, proud of that. We've come to critique it

now . . . we're no longer innocent. But we certainly have that history, and it's a proud history.

On the surface, teachers using the term to create this internally persuasive view of themselves may seem questionably self-serving. Yet, considering the ways in which teachers at CUU discussed their struggles and the struggles of the field in attempting to better understand and teach students, another way to view such a rhetorical move is as a necessary form of self-maintenance. Perhaps teachers have needed to persuade themselves that they are "champions for the underdog" in order to persist and remain committed to difficult work in the face of institutional, disciplinary, and even societal pressures to turn their attention away from students designated as basic writers. In this way, the construction "basic writer" holds value for teachers who have used it in order to continue the work of teaching.

TOWARD THE FUTURE OF BASIC WRITING: CONTINUING TO THEORIZE

Ongoing conversation is central to maintaining the work of teaching in service of social justice and for attending to the problems with using the term "basic writer" in the process. As Sadie pointed out, teachers and scholars who "keep talking long enough" arrive at and have the opportunity to "deal with" differences in their uses of "basic writer." In fact, continued use of the category "basic writer" to organize a subfield with its own conference, journal, listserv, etc. may be what allows such conversation. Laura explained how the term still serves the field in this way:

> I also think it has its usefulness in our professional discussions to continue to theorize. I think we still need a conference on basic writing, journals dedicated to basic writing. I still think we need to talk about students. . . . We still need descriptions like Shaugnessy gave us in *Errors and Expectations*. She began to describe a new population of learners. . . . They're not so new anymore, but they're new every year. I think we continue to need local descriptions. . . . You know, twenty years ago, we were about the universal descriptions, and now I think what we really, really, really need is, to be pointed out in our journals, and to be pointed out in our conversations, how variable the description is.

Use of the term "basic writer" to create professional spaces—a conference, journal, and listserv—may seem more strategic than tactical and, in a sense, it is. Yet this move to create space must be understood within the larger context of the field of composition. For instance, in what is often presumed to be the field's flagship journal, *College Composition and Communication* (*CCC*), research and scholarship focused on basic writing is rarely highlighted. In fact, when Kelly Ritter's "Before Mina Shaughnessy: Basic Writing at Yale, 1920-1960" was published in September 2008, it was the first *CCC* abstract since December 2002—and the first title since May 1996—containing the words "basic writing." I do not mean to suggest that the field of composition as a whole has become hostile to scholarly work on basic writing, but rather that the field as a scholarly space is one in which the concerns of teachers whose everyday lives are focused on so-called basic writers are not prioritized. As such, "more talk about basic writing" is less a strategic move to maintain power and more a tactical one to find room within and navigate the field's own power dynamics. By holding the tension between the limits and the possibilities of the term "basic writer" suggests a more productive way of engaging debates about basic writing's existence for programs and as a concept. Rather than focusing our energies on sweeping arguments for or against its existence, we might instead think rhetorically about when and how to locally leverage the term "basic writer" so as to highlight the need for advocacy on behalf of students or even teachers, and deliberate when and how it might better serve our purposes to complicate and qualify the term or avoid it entirely.

For example, in conversations within the field, we might ask: When and how can scholars and researchers use the term to continue developing and questioning our understanding of the range of students to whom it is applied and how to most effectively teach them? As teachers within graduate training programs, how can we use the term to introduce existing scholarship and research, while also acknowledging its limitations and encouraging critical thinking about its use? As program administrators and teachers advocating for support programs and other resources for students, when and how should we leverage the term when arguing within the field for one form of change or another? Of course, asking questions like these, which emphasize varied and local uses (or not) of the term "basic writer," raises another set of problems to grapple with. As Otte and Mlynarczyk caution, the conclusion to Michael Apple's *Cultural Politics and Education* is "tellingly titled"—"It Ain't All Local"—and attending only to the local is a mistake made especially by educators and scholars who, like those interviewed for this study, want to

view their work as in service of social justice (74). The challenge facing such teachers and scholars is to ask when and how to tactically deploy the term "basic writer" in local rhetorical situations while also taking into account the broader social, political, and educational concerns that shape and are shaped by local situations and uses.

Especially challenging are the conversations that extend basic writing beyond the spheres of teachers' scholarship and agency. When and how, for instance, do we leverage the term "basic writer" to defend or revise programs faced with university and/or state-wide budget cuts, threats to change admissions standards, and calls for the elimination of "remedial" programs (Goen-Salter; Rose)? Here, too, we meet the need for caution with our language and definitions. We recognize that the field's hesitation to generalize has "militated against the development of a united front in defense of [basic writing]" (Otte and Mlynarczyk 70). Though I am not suggesting a united front in defense of basic writing at each turn, in every situation—quite the opposite—the point stands. As the teachers in this case study acknowledge, the term "basic writer" is ripe with definitional limitations. Yet, even as the term should not be used in strategic ways that problematically generalize, there may be situations, moments in time, when it makes sense to tactically use it in order to enter public conversations in hopes of impacting institutional and policy decisions. Susan Marie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner rightly assert, "Our internal debates about the nature of basic writing are exciting, but political exigencies challenge us to formulate a clear statement of purpose" (8). Suggestively, though, Harrington and Adler-Kassner found themselves unable to develop such a statement.

I suggest that, instead of working toward a united front, or a clear statement of purpose, we ask of each exigency—within or beyond the field—the questions raised here about when and how it makes sense to tactically leverage or not leverage the term "basic writer." How we answer such questions will necessarily vary based on the local rhetorical situation—who we are, whom we address, with what purpose, and in what context, including the broader contexts that we must also attend to. But in each case, our tactics should be more rhetorically effective if we at least ask them.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Bartholomae earlier questions basic writing's strategic value in 1992, in a keynote speech at the Fourth National Basic Writing Conference (Mutnick 76).

2. Here I hope to echo Lisa Delpit: I speak not of how I believe things should be, but of how they are.

3. All of these statistics are from published sources, but I avoid citing them to protect the anonymity of research participants and in accordance with Institutional Review Board protocols for the M.A. thesis research on which this study is based.

4. For other uses of de Certeau's work on strategy and tactic, see Paula Mathieu's *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in English Composition* and Linda Adler-Kassner's *The Activist WPA: Changing Stories about Writing and Writers*, both of which have informed my own understanding of de Certeau.

5. See, for instance, their discussion of the influence of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* as going "well beyond basic writing to composition, English studies, WAC, pedagogy, literacy, and language studies" (11).

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News and Announcements

**How to Access *Basic Writing* by George Otte
and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk**

Framed by historic developments—from the Open Admissions movement of the 1960s and 1970s to the attacks on remediation that intensified in the 1990s and beyond—*Basic Writing* traces the arc of these large social and cultural forces as they have shaped and reshaped the field. The book provides a comprehensive overview of important developments in basic writing, circling back on the same general story, looking for different themes or seeing the same themes from different perspectives. What emerges is a gestalt of basic writing that will give readers interested in its history, self-definition, pedagogy, or research a sense of the important trends and patterns.

The book is available in paperback for $30 or as an Adobe eBook for $16 from Parlor Press, 816 Robinson St., West Lafayette, IN 47906. For ordering information, go to http://www.parlorpress.com/basicwriting. The book is also available free online at the WAC Clearinghouse. It is part of the series of Reference Guides to Rhetoric and Composition edited by Charles Bazerman. To download part or all of the book, go to http://wac.colostate.edu/books/basicwriting/.

**Call for Papers
Special *TETYC* Issue on English as a Second Language
in Diverse Genres and Voices**

Teaching English in the Two-Year College is pleased to announce a special issue devoted to second language learning and teaching in the context of the first two years of college, community college, and intensive academic ESL programs. We are also interested in hearing from those involved with international education/EFL programs. The issue, to come out in September 2012, will be guest-edited by Natasha Lvovich and Martha Clark Cummings (Kingsborough Community College, CUNY). **All submissions are due by September 1, 2011.** Please conform to *TETYC* regular submission guidelines as outlined in all issues of the journal, and send manuscripts via e-mail attachment (.doc or .docx) to tetyc@wcupa.edu.

We welcome traditional research studies (empirical and quantitative, as well as qualitative/ethnographic/phenomenological) and nontraditional forms of inquiry and creative work (narratives/essays, case studies, teacher diaries, interviews, poems) focusing on second language learning and teaching. We will also accept artwork relevant to the theme of this issue (photographs and drawings, high-resolution graphics files, etc.).

Suggested topics may include but are not limited to:

- studies related to second language acquisition emphasizing the integration of theory and classroom practice
- adult second language learners and the academic process
- immigrant experiences and sociocultural identity in the academic context
- EFL experiences
- curriculum and teaching methodologies
- memory and language performance
- writing in a second language
- affectivity and language learning
- teacher training and professional development

Call for Participation
Council on Basic Writing Workshop
April 6, 2011, Atlanta, Georgia

Each year, the Council on Basic Writing (CBW) holds a day-long workshop the day before the opening of the national CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication). The theme of next year's CBW workshop is **"We Are Not Alone: Strategic Coalition Building Across (Contested) Spaces Serving Basic Writers."** In this time of dwindling resources and lack of public support for "remedial" programs, basic writing programs, long committed to serving writers otherwise denied admittance to college, draw their very existence from increasingly contested spaces.

We are not alone. In fact BW's very survival may depend on an ability to recognize and build strategic coalitions across the same programs and services with which a great many of us now compete—student support services, TRIO programs, adult literacy programs, ESL programs, and others

across area colleges, schools, universities, and communities. Like many BW programs, these services identify with core objectives including:

- serving the literacy needs of first-generation and under-represented students, including under-represented minority students;
- offering personalized instruction that both recognizes students' existing strengths and promotes intellectual and literate growth;
- offering individual and small-group support designed to improve student retention and graduation rates;
- helping students to meet linguistic "standards" even while recognizing and cultivating linguistic and literate diversity;
- making campus environments, especially during the first two years of instruction, more friendly, welcoming, and supportive to students from diverse backgrounds.

At the 2011 CBW workshop in Atlanta, Georgia, we encourage participants to consider—invoking the CCCC conference theme—"all our relations." We have invited proposals for panels and individual presentations contributing to the CBW workshop theme as described above: presentations that describe key issues affecting local programs, classrooms, universities, and communities, while placing those practices and issues in the larger context.

Please join us at the Council on Basic Writing conference in Atlanta, Georgia, on Wednesday, April 6, 2011. We welcome those not currently associated with BW: writing program administrators for college composition and advanced writing classes; adult literacy educators/program administrators; ESL/ELL writing instructors/program directors; WAC coordinators; international student coordinators/program administrators; adult-oriented college degree program instructors/program administrators; policy-makers and activists. For more information about CCCC 2011 and the CBW Wednesday workshop, go to http://www.ncte.org/cccc/conv.

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