JBW

Journal of Basic Writing

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JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

EDITORIAL BOARD

CALL FOR ARTICLES

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

We prefer that contributions be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: hopekcc@aol.com and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. 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

These are exciting times for basic writing. Less than two years ago, the Executive Board of the Council on Basic Writing (CBW) sensed an "increasing invisibility" of the field at the convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). In response to the perceived invisibility, the Board drafted a "sense of the house" motion: "Be it resolved that basic writing is a vital field and its students and teacher scholars a productive force within composition; is under attack by exclusionary public policies; and therefore must be recognized publicly and supported by CCCC as a conference cluster and with featured sessions" (Executive Board). The motion got widespread support and was unanimously passed at the 2011 CCCC business meeting. As a result, a surge of presentations dedicated to basic writing enlivened the 2012 conference schedule.[1]

At the same conference, Mike Rose won the Exemplar Award and spoke with Lynn Quitman Troyka and Peter Adams on a featured session, "Should Basic Writing Be Placed on the Endangered Species List?" Rose talked about the lifelong orientation to school that privileged children generally receive, both at home and in the classroom, where they are routinely given the sense that they belong in college, that they will thrive there and enjoy it. Less privileged students may not be given this sense of belonging, and if they get to college and are identified as underprepared, instructors tend to focus on techniques, skills, and strategies with them. But such students need something more than techniques, Rose insisted: They need an orientation to school and the support to cultivate a set of beliefs related to their intellectual abilities and rightful belonging in higher education.

Not unlike our students, those of us working in the field of basic writing have faced marginalization and misunderstanding within our institutions and departments. We were even beginning to feel invisible among our peers at one of our most important professional gatherings. The resulting CBW motion gave voice to these feelings, just as Rose gave voice to many of our students' experiences with their own invisibility at school. Basic writing and its teachers—and, most importantly, its students—share a common struggle with their sense of belonging in academia. Our current, exciting moment in basic writing is proving that our energies have not flagged. We are still advocating for increased visibility for ourselves, out programs, our students, and our research.

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1 This Fall 2011 issue goes to press in the summer of 2012 and thus marks events that occurred in March of 2012.

This issue of *JBW* captures the spirit of the moment through personal and historical accounts of our field, stories about programs, and tales from the classroom that theorize the work of basic writing and imagine future iterations of programs, pedagogies, and research. To preface the accounts you will read, we wish to briefly gesture to this journal's history. In the introduction to the very first issue of *JBW*, Mina Shaughnessy wrote about the experience of basic writing teachers encountering new kinds of students, maybe for the first time: "They [the teachers] will be alternately exhilarated and downcast, and almost always vulnerable. But if they stick with their decision to teach, they will slowly begin to discern a 'logic' to their students' difficulties with writing, a path that leads inexorably back through all the schoolrooms where these students did not learn to write but learned instead to believe that they could not write" (2-3). To say that students learned to believe they could not write is not far from saying they learned to believe they did not belong. Sadly, this belief extends far beyond the "vulnerable" teacher and student struggling together to re-imagine the terms of success: of what it means to write, to fail, and to learn. Since *JBW* was launched in 1975, deep-seated beliefs about who belongs in school—and who doesn't belong—have contributed to the dissolution, simplification, or shrinking of countless open admissions policies, assessment procedures, and programs.

Bruce Horner puts these kinds of losses in perspective in "Relocating Basic Writing," adopted from his presentation at the annual CBW workshop at CCCC 2012. Horner tenders a hopeful narrative of basic writing's struggles, which he locates in a history of resistance, reform, reversals of reform, and repetition. Horner is not discouraged by the fact that we may need to fight (or feel like we are fighting) some battles again and again. With each effort at change, we alter the ground, culture, and history of our field and our programs, *relocating* basic writing through the "struggle over literacy: its geography, its boundaries, its residents," as well as through our local teaching practice, "itself a site for producing and revising knowledge about reading and writing." Horner pushes us toward a complex definition of basic writing that emphasizes its commitment and responsibility to those identified as outsiders, to democracy, and to justice.

Shawna Shapiro picks up on Horner's claims about how change is done and undone by looking at one program's resistance to reform, "despite substantial evidence that its curriculum and policies were ineffective." In "Stuck in the Remedial Rut: Confronting Resistance to ESL Curriculum Reform," Shapiro explores why an ESL program might cling to the traditional, remedial model—in spite of all the research and evidence in support of alternatives—

and offers an explanation that looks beyond instructional modes. Writing programs, Shapiro argues, are more than sites of instruction; they take on a specific role and identity within the institution, which has its own beliefs about language difference. Programmatic reform, therefore, cannot happen by looking exclusively at instructional and assessment methods. Speaking of the particular program she studied, Shapiro says, "In order to move forward with curricular revision, the program needed to develop an alternative understanding of its function within the institution. This was an arduous and risky process." She tells the story of this process and its risks, and draws out the lessons for curricular reform efforts in basic writing.

Reform is hard, not only at the programmatic level but also in the individual classroom; teaching practices, like program structures, can become ossified and resistant to change. Ronna J. Levy looks at the challenge of changing how and even *what* we teach. What happens, for instance, when focused reading instruction drops out of the developmental English equation? Can students learn to write better if they do not have the tools or confidence to read their own and others' texts? And how can a basic writing instructor with little recourse to methods for teaching reading bring it back into the equation? For Levy, these questions lead to Literature Circles, an approach developed for teaching younger students to read that emphasizes reading as a collaborative process. In "Literature Circles Go to College," Levy shares her experience in transferring Literature Circles to her urban community college classroom, where students quickly became more active, engaged readers because they "had to collectively construct knowledge for an audience of their peers and, as a result, their acts of reading moved beyond the space where texts are vessels from which students extract, spew, and promptly forget information and became acts of dynamic composition." By theorizing reading as a dynamic and creative act, Levy's research provides valuable insight into the reading-writing connection and its importance to basic writers.

With our final article, Matthew Pavesich returns us to a broader focus on basic writing and its programs, taking up Horner's call to look closely at our history, the meaning and impact of our struggles, and our relationship to democracy and justice. In "Reflecting on the Liberal Reflex: Rhetoric and the Politics of Acknowledgement in Basic Writing," Pavesich tackles the uncomfortable conflict between the liberal tradition and educational justice: "while liberalism's supporters equate with justice its commitment to the equal treatment of all people, clear-eyed accounts tell us something different: that for many liberalism offers only the injustice of assimilation."

In response to the problem he identifies, Pavesich advances a "renewed politics of basic writing" informed by political theory, particularly Patchen Markell's *politics of acknowledgement.* Pavesich grounds his political vision in the story of one basic writing program's radical reform, during which he and his colleagues confronted the "inevitably liberal" institution and the limitations of "alternatives." As Pavesich makes clear, the resulting program and its corresponding politics demand, "contextualized rhetorical action in constant need of revision."

When Pavesich emphasizes the importance of action and politics subjected to constant revision, he evokes the idea of having to continually "relocate" our research, programs, and teaching practices. Horner "claim[s] basic writing. . . as part of a tradition of refusing to settle for fixed designations of what is and isn't literacy, or illiteracy, fixed designations of who is and isn't educable or worthy of education, and fixed designations of what we do and don't know about literacy and its learning and teaching." The articles in this issue suggest that, as we resist invisibility for ourselves and our students, we must also resist stasis and stale paradigms. The energy of our current moment in basic writing is infused with the language of change: reform, redefinition, revision, the refusal to settle for fixity. The "sense of the house" motion helped ignite this energy, which continues to transform the work we see presented at CCCC. Howard Tinberg frames the 2013 call for proposals as a "call for expansiveness" and puts unprecedented emphasis on basic writing, suggesting how quickly revision can happen and how current, resonant, and potentially far-reaching are our concerns. Yes, Horner cautions that the elation of success may be short-lived, that change can be reversed and transformation is cyclical. But having to return to the fight is no reason to lose hope.

—**Cheryl C. Smith** and **Hope Parisi**

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Relocating Basic Writing

Bruce Horner

ABSTRACT: I frame the continuing value of basic writing as part of a long tradition in com-
position studies challenging dominant beliefs about literacy and language abilities, and I
link basic writing to emerging—e.g. "translingual"—approaches to language. I identify basic
writing as vital to the field of composition in its rejection of simplistic notions of English,
language, and literacy; its insistence on searching out the different in what might appear to be
the same and the familiar; and its commitment to work with students consigned by dominant
ideologies to the social periphery as in fact central, leading edge. These positions enable basic
writing teacher-scholars to learn, and re-think, along with their students, what it can, does,
and might mean to write. They thus help to maintain the intellectual, pedagogical, and ethical
integrity of composition as a field committed to working and reworking language and literacy.

KEYWORDS: academy; basic writing; ideology; language; language relations; literacy;
translingual

My title[1] is meant to draw on the notion advanced by Alastair Pen-
nycook of language as a local practice. In his recent book by that name, he
argues that each utterance, no matter how conventional or repetitious it
might seem, produces difference insofar as it operates in, and on, a different
temporal and spatial location. Invoking the proverb that we can never step
into the same river twice, Pennycook observes that even an apparently exact
repetition of an utterance produces difference insofar as it takes place in a
temporally as well as spatially different location and thus carries a different
significance (*Language* 35). We, and the river, are simultaneously the same
and not the same with each step we take.

I'll have more to say about Pennycook and language generally below,
but here, I simply want to sketch this notion for the help and, I believe, the
hope that it offers for the struggles of those of us committed to basic writing.
That hope comes from the perspective it gives us on the recurrence of what
appear to be the same struggles, its argument for the necessity of engaging
in these struggles, and the difference that these efforts make despite appear-

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Min-Zhan Lu; and* Cross-Language Relations in Composition, *co-edited with Min-Zhan
Lu and Paul Kei Matsuda and recipient of the 2012 Conference on College Composition and
Communication Outstanding Book Award.*

ances. From such a perspective, basic writing must be, and is always being, re-located, and basic writing itself represents a re-location of earlier and other struggles. In short, the field now known as "basic writing" is part of a long and ongoing tradition in composition studies and beyond of challenging dominant beliefs about literacy, language, and students.

I admit that, on the one hand, this perspective on the location of basic writing can produce a debilitating sense of having to keep fighting the same fights, making the same arguments, over and over again, like Sisyphus, with those who seem impervious or indifferent to us, and to do so just to stay in the same place and keep from losing ground. I'm thinking here, for example, of a three-year effort my colleagues and I made, at a school where I used to work in my WPA days, to allow students in our school's basic writing (BW) courses to earn graduation credit for taking these courses, partly by creating a one-credit studio course for the students to take. After a long, difficult, and often exasperating struggle, we seemed to have achieved success.

But our sense of elation was short lived: first, we came to realize that up until the last decade or so, our school had already been granting graduation credit for these courses, so our achievement simply reinstated a policy that had been in place in the past. The ground we'd gained, in other words, was a place that we used to occupy that had been lost for awhile; hence the basic writing course was, in a simple, crude way, re-located right back where it had been before. And second, the studio courses for which we'd fought proved so popular with all students—not just those identified as basic writers—that the school administrators felt they had no choice but to eliminate them, so that our apparent progress in their creation was wiped out.

But if it seems from this example that we're simply and constantly reinventing a wheel that keeps getting broken, or going off track, there is another sense in which something different is produced. Recalling Pennycook's argument that an iteration of the ostensibly "same" is also always simultaneously different in meaning by virtue of changes in its temporal as well as spatial location, I see that in the example just cited, the basic writing course itself, though it carried the same name and number, had been redesigned, and the justification for allowing students to earn graduation credit for it was not the same as the original justification. In fact, in making our case, my colleagues and I could draw on a significant body of scholarship that had not been available previously.[2] Thus the ground we had seemed simply to regain was itself different than before. And of course, the students who were affected were different, and our temporary success at developing studio courses is now part of the history of the institution and, perhaps, a

precedent for reiteration, however different, in the future.

The pattern of seeming to fight to gain ground, only to find that we ourselves and the ground gained is not what we had thought—neither entirely new nor entirely the same as before—is a pattern that we can see repeated in the history of basic writing. Way back in 1973, for example, Mina Shaughnessy was writing that it was difficult to tell whether she and her colleagues were in "a rear or a vanguard action" ("Open Admissions and the Disadvantaged Teacher" 104). And the history of basic writing itself is part of a larger history of struggle with and on the contested terrain of literacy, of which composition is one small field, evincing similar patterns. From this perspective, the successful effort at the 2011 convention of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) to recognize the vitality and importance of basic writing to the field of composition—an effort by the Council on Basic Writing itself —is part of a much larger historical struggle over literacy: its geography, its boundaries, its residents.

In saying this, I am claiming a tradition of and for basic writing that is inevitably partial in every sense, so let me be clear about my claim. I am claiming basic writing—"relocating" it, if you will—as part of a tradition of refusing to settle for fixed designations of what is and isn't literacy, or illiteracy, fixed designations of who is and isn't educable or worthy of education, and fixed designations of what we do and don't know about literacy and its learning and teaching. That tradition insists on searching out what is different in the seemingly same. Along these lines, the tradition I identify with basic writing is a tradition that takes the difficulties teachers and students experience with reading and writing as an occasion for rethinking what reading and writing do, and might, entail, and of what people might attempt in their reading and writing, and how (cf. Slevin, *Introducing* 44).

Within this tradition, teaching courses called basic writing and students called basic writers does not call for transmitting a fixed body of knowledge, skills, or practices but, rather, for engaging in collaborative inquiry with students. Instead of using the experience of difficulty to dismiss the writing, or the students producing such writing, from the course and the academy, basic writing has taken that experience of difficulty, as James Slevin put it, as "an invitation to think and get to work" (*Introducing* 13) by developing the most pedagogically and intellectually productive and responsible interpretations of that difficulty possible. Against the temptation to use teachers' and students' experience of difficulty in reading and writing to dismiss the students as illiterate or ineducable, basic writing takes their experience of difficulty as in fact the norm, both statistically and culturally: to be expected

and even sought out as a resource for intellectual work. Again, in what seems to be the familiar and settled, we look for what is in fact different.

One direct and important corollary to this approach to difficulty as an essential part of literacy work is that teaching, in basic writing, is not the site for applying knowledge about reading and writing produced elsewhere but, instead, is itself a site for producing and revising knowledge about reading and writing. This is of course amply documented by the landmark scholarship for the field of composition studies as a whole, and for literacy studies more generally, arising out of work with students identified as basic writers (e.g., scholarship by David Bartholomae, Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Mina Shaughnessy, and Marilyn Sternglass, among many others). In saying that teaching basic writing is itself a site for producing knowledge about reading and writing, I don't mean teachers don't need time and support to do research outside the classroom; we do. But it does mean that such research exists in conjunction and dialogue with, rather than instead of, research conducted through teaching, in collaboration with students, and that at its best the research conducted outside the classroom takes up questions initially emerging from the site of teaching.

In fact, when basic writing teachers get into trouble, as they sometimes do, it's frequently because they've tried to apply a theoretical framework developed elsewhere, from other sites, "to" basic writing: I'm thinking here, of course, of Mike Rose's critique of such efforts and his caution against a tendency to "drift away from careful, rigorous focus on student writing" ("Narrowing" 294), to "strip and narrow experience" (296) and "avert or narrow our gaze from the immediate social and linguistic conditions in which the student composes: the rich interplay of purpose, genre, register, textual convention, and institutional expectation" (295). Rose casts this as a problem in making unsupported leaps "to" theory, but I think his critique can also be read as a strong caution against making leaps "from" theory in ways that erase variability, difference, and complexity.

To guard against this danger, teacher-scholars of basic writing have learned to put aside the presuppositions and analytical frames that would seem to explain away students' difficulties, or our difficulties with students, as reiterations of familiar phenomena, or examples to be labeled. While guarding against this danger is of course important for all disciplines, it is especially the case with basic writing because of the power, pressure, and pervasiveness of beliefs about literacy, and about basic writing students' literacy in particular, that would have us explain away, literally, these students and their literacies. And this is why I believe basic writing has such a central role

to play in the ongoing struggle over literacy, and hence why I believe in the importance of CCCC reaffirming its commitment to basic writing.

From an institutional standpoint, basic writing courses, students, and teachers have always been located on the periphery of the academy. This does not mean that they are, in fact, peripheral to the academy; rather, their location on the periphery is ideological, obtaining even in institutions where basic writers constitute the statistical norm: as basic, they are by ideological definition peripheral. But this is a perversion of the strategic intention behind the term *basic writing* to contest this peripheral location, a strategic intention that we can recover. In that strategy, the word "basic" does not represent "simple" but, rather, fundamental and profound, the site for open inquiry, as in the "basic" research in which scientists engage. It is possible, in other words, to understand the peripheral location of basic writing and basic writers as, in fact, not the site for preliminaries but, rather, leading edge work addressing the most fundamental questions about literacy and its learning.

Of course, that understanding of basic writing is decidedly not the prevailing, dominant view of the course, its students, or its teachers. The dominant view—dominant not only in the sense of being prevalent but also in the sense of being in the service of social dominance—holds literacy to be singular, uniform, and stable, and a cognate for intellectual ability, social and civic maturity, merit, even morality. Those in positions of dominance invoke this notion of literacy as a trope for themselves and people like them, and illiteracy as a trope for those they deem unlike themselves and hence unworthy to be in, well, positions of dominance. Such beliefs—and they are often unconscious and (therefore) operate all the more powerfully—justify the restriction of literacy schooling to those presumed to have the right and ability to benefit from literacy—that is, those who are, in effect, to literacy born. Or they define literacy schooling as a means of gatekeeping, social sorting, or brutal assimilation and indoctrination: the banking education of which Freire wrote so eloquently.

As crude as these notions of literacy are, it's worth reminding ourselves that they are both longstanding and still dominant, and they are dominant in part because of the asymmetrical social relations they help to sustain. As Brian Street has observed (*Literacy in Theory and Practice*), if one adopts a view of literacy as autonomous, then the low social and economic conditions of the dominated can be explained away as a simple consequence of their lack of literacy. Their lack of literacy is taken as an explanation and justification for their irredeemable, if lamentable, fate (they being deemed congenitally

incapable of literacy), or it presents their difficulties as a situation to be remedied by simply gifting them with literacy and all the blessings presumably attendant upon its possession.

We can see the prevalence of these ideas in the terms that have been and continue to be all too commonly used to talk about students, or prospective students, as either "college material" or "remedial," "skilled" or "unskilled," "bright" or "slow," "college ready" or "underprepared," even "literate"—or "truly literate"—or else illiterate. These are terms that make up what Mike Rose identified, back in 1985, as the "language of exclusion": a language that assumes difficulties students have with reading and writing are at best transient, and hence to be either ignored or addressed in minimal fashion until the difficulties, or more accurately the students, disappear ("The Language of Exclusion").

Against such ideas, we can see, in the work of innumerable teacher-scholars of basic writing, demonstrations of the intelligence, abilities, and potential of those that such language excludes from consideration. Further, that work demonstrates that literacy, far from being a single, internally uniform, and stable entity or even set of practices, is plural, and its varieties both unstable and not discrete but intermixing. Thus, even those well-intentioned efforts to simply transmit to students the literacy purportedly necessary to their subsequent academic and socioeconomic success have misfired—not just because the relationship between educational credentials and employment opportunities has been shown to be at best tenuous, but also because those efforts have posited a false singularity, uniformity, and stability to the literacy to be learned and maintained, as well as a problematically uniform, linear model for the development of such a literacy.

Let me now introduce two terms that, until this point, I have made almost no reference to in my discussion: *English* and *language*. I have relocated basic writing as part of a longer and broader tradition of struggle about literacy, arguing that basic writing teaching and research has offered a more complex view of literacy and indeed is the site for basic research on literacy. Now let me extend that relocation to consider teaching and research on basic writing as also the site for basic research—and work—on language and English.

As a preamble to this extension of my argument, it's worth acknowledging that in line with dominant views of literacy as uniform, singular, stable, and autonomous, there is also a dominant view that treats English, language, and writing as coterminous, hence the equation of writing teachers with English teachers, and English teachers with a reduced notion of language

practices as reiterations of syntactic conventions, identified by the term "grammar." In that view, to teach writing is to teach English is to teach a conventional grammar for English; English, language, and writing are seen as names for the same stable, uniform entity, also known as literacy.

Early research in basic writing complicated this view most obviously in recognizing the plurality of languages and language varieties students brought with them to college, a plurality that seemed to help explain the difficulties some students had in producing the kind of writing that some faculty seemed to demand, at first by suggesting language difference as a cause of that difficulty. According to some versions of this response to students' linguistic heterogeneity, students' difficulties with writing, at least with writing in English, were attributed to the interference of other languages. To accommodate this model to students identified as native English speakers, the ESL label was modified to ESD—or speakers of English as a second dialect. While some versions of this line of thinking have led to equating basic writers with ESL students and vice versa, the best of them recognized students' fluency in a variety of languages, and fluency in writing in other languages, as, in fact, a resource on which students, and their teachers, might draw, rather than a barrier they had to overcome.[3]

In a somewhat different response to recognition of the diversity of students' languages, teachers and scholars drew on research in second language acquisition to understand students' difficulties with error as evidence of students' production of the equivalent to what applied linguists termed an "interlanguage" that learners of a new language develop as they learn that language, with its own set of shifting and idiosyncratic rules. I'm thinking here, for example, of David Bartholomae's landmark study of error, tellingly called "The Study of Error," and some of the work by Glynda Hull and Elaine Lees (see Hull, "Acts of Wonderment"; Lees, "Proofreading as Reading," "'The Exceptable Way.'")

Because I'll be arguing against some of these responses, I first want to make clear that the identification of basic writers with learners of an additional language has had several productive consequences. First, insofar as the difficulties experienced by learners of additional languages are taken as normal rather than evidence of cognitive or other deficiencies, the difficulties basic writers experienced could now be defined as themselves normal rather than signs of cognitive immaturity or other defects. Indeed, when seen as evidence of a kind of interlanguage, errors represent writers' intelligence, rather than their deficiencies, an intelligence that Mina Shaughnessy persuasively demonstrated through her analyses of students' errors (in *Errors*

and Expectations). Indeed, it was a short step from understanding students' difficulties as a manifestation of language differences to raising the possibility that the difficulty could be attributed as much to limitations in teachers as to limitations in students—recall that the errors and expectations that Shaughnessy's book *Errors and Expectations* refers to are those of teachers, not students. This has certainly spurred the humility, and intellectual curiosity, of teachers that are requisite to basic research on writing.

Second, the identification of basic writers with learners of an additional language foregrounded the notion of language as a countable noun, and this has helped to chip away at the ideology of English-only monolingualism dominating composition itself, as well as U.S. culture more broadly. Put simply, recognizing the fact of writing in languages other than English has helped challenge the dominant tendency to equate writing with English by rendering language visible as a factor about which we can pose legitimate, basic questions, such as which language students can or might write in, and what relation fluency in writing in one language may have to fluency in writing another. Students might well be quite fluent speakers, and writers, of languages other than English, or of other Englishes, and this might well affect their writing in English for school.

Third, and relatedly, alternative writing practices in traditions of writing in other languages have made visible the mediation of language by writing that the conflation of writing with English elides. In other words, in place of the equation, and conflation, of writing with English and English with language, work in basic writing has been asking basic, in the sense of crucial, questions about which language, even which English, and which way of writing, we are to be engaged with. In place of treating English, language, and writing as coterminous and as noncount nouns, basic writing assumes a plural, and potentially fluid, view of languages, Englishes, and ways of writing.

I have found this state of relations between languages, Englishes, and ways of writing almost impossible to represent graphically, at least in two dimensions. I take this difficulty as an illustration of the complexity of these relations. And in practice in the field of composition studies generally, there has been a tendency to follow the path of reducing that complexity by settling for what I've termed elsewhere an archipelago model ("'Students' Right'"), rather easily represented graphically (see Figure 1).

Such a model, while explicitly acknowledging and legitimizing difference in languages, ways of writing, and even Englishes, has at the same time retained four key tenets of monolingualist ideology: that languages,
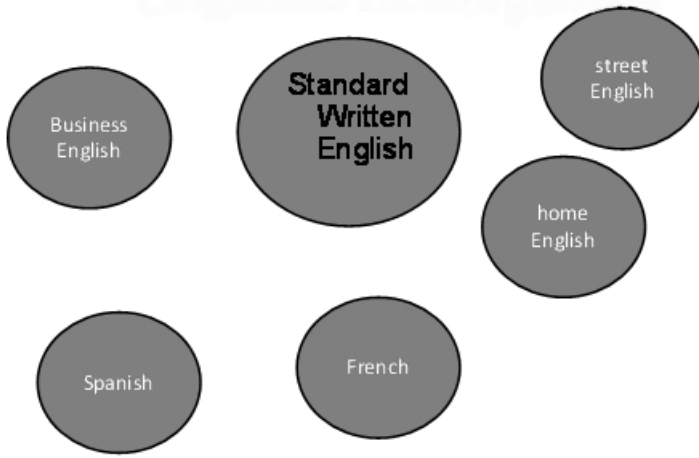
Figure 1. Archipelago Model of Linguistic Heterogeneity

and ways of writing them, are 1) stable and 2) discrete from one another; 3) internally uniform; and that 4) each has its specific, fixed, and appropriate sphere of use: French in France, English in the U.S., academic writing in school, texting for cell phones. The model of language and literacy development based on this is an additive model: individuals are imagined as adding more and more discrete languages, and even ways of writing them, to their repertoire. There is an equivalent to this model in some versions of writing in the disciplines, whereby writing for history class is seen as discrete from writing for chemistry or writing for sociology. Each is seen as legitimate, but only in its own sphere, and as stable and internally uniform. That is to say, while languages, Englishes, and ways of writing are seen as plural, they are understood to consist of conflated sets, and, further, they are identified and conflated with specific sociogeographic locations. Invoking a notion of a variety of language and writing practices, each appropriate in its own sphere, elides the political question of who determines what is appropriate, and what a particular language practice might be appropriate for.

I'll make two more important, and related, points about this archipelago model: first, it overlooks the possibility of what critics have named "traffic": that is, the interdependent relationships and interchanges among the language and literacy practices of specific sites.[4] Language users, including writers, are instead imagined as either fixed in their locations, or as trading in one set of practices for another as they move from one location to another, or at best as having the equivalent of dual language and literacy citizenship—individuals who can switch from one set of practices to another

as the occasion appears to demand it: academic vs. nonacademic, chemistry vs. sociology, French or Chinese or English, and so on. Second, the archipelago model evacuates writer agency. Writers are posited not as active participants in the production of languages and writing practices but, instead, as necessarily followers of those practices somehow deemed appropriate to given sociogeographic locations: French in France, business writing for business class, and so on. Pedagogies following this model are thus inevitably pedagogies of transmission and acquisition, despite differences in how that process of transmission, and acquisition, is imagined.

I mentioned above that it is difficult to represent graphically the relations between different language and literacy practices that their pluralization seems to demand, as opposed to an archipelago model. The archipelago model achieves simplicity at the cost of failing to represent, or acknowledge, the traffic among peoples and practices that obtains in, well, practice, on the ground, and the agency of language users in helping to shape and reshape those language practices. What is needed, in other words, is a model that brings in, among other factors, the temporal dimension, and that dispenses with the affordances of Venn diagrams. Figure 2 is one possible alternative representation of relations among language and literacy practitioners, modeled after images of traffic patterns.
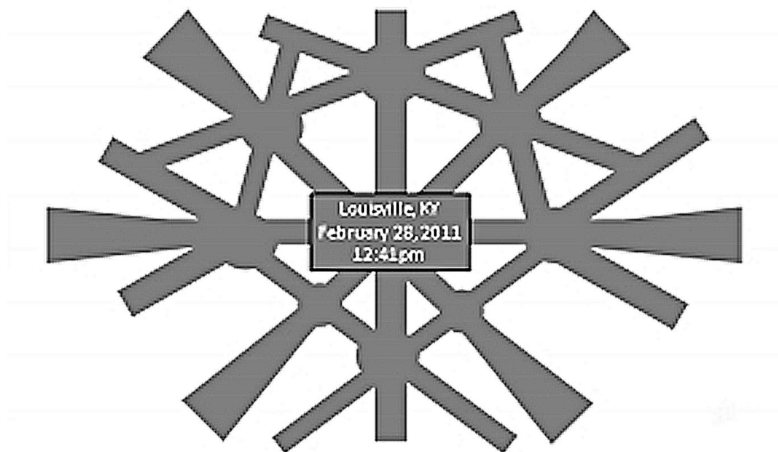

Figure 2: Traffic Model of Linguistic Heterogeneity

Three features of this model are key: first, practices to be found at any given location are informed by who happens to be passing through that location at any given time, what they bring with them, and how they interact with others passing through that location at that time and all that

they bring with them. Second, practices found at a given location will vary depending on the time: what you find at a given intersection point at a given time will differ from what will be found at ostensibly the same intersection point at a different time. It may help to add that in this model, people are to be imagined not as encased in separate vehicles but walking, strolling, or running through, and hence there is the possibility of engaging with each other not only through collisions and fender benders, and that they change their practices in the course of engaging with one another's practices. Third, and paradoxically, the apparent reiteration of a particular practice is in fact productive of difference insofar as it necessarily occurs in a different temporal location—the traffic, and hence the people producing the traffic, are not the same, appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, just as the river into which one steps is not the same, nor is oneself, nor one's step.

This model quite emphatically contradicts claims to a settled territory of English, writing, literacy, and language—what Mary Louise Pratt has termed linguistic utopias. Some would understandably see this as a limitation to the model insofar as it seems to complicate what we might wish were a simple, mechanical matter. And in fact, teacher-scholars have had to turn to neologisms to capture this more complicated approach to language, writing, and literacy: among others, *transculturation, plurilingualism, diversalité* (as opposed to *diversité*), and, for my colleagues and me, *translingual*—terms whose newness might be offputting in seeming to stray from the settled and understood.[5] But if we're to heed Mike Rose's warning against applying simple models to the complex phenomenon of writing, I would argue that the complexity these terms and the traffic model gesture toward is more appropriate insofar as it more adequately and accurately represents the actuality of practices with languages, Englishes, and literacies, especially, though not exclusively, current in the U.S. and elsewhere and especially, though not exclusively, in those sites identified with the teaching and learning of basic writing, by students and faculty. And, in fact, I would argue that this more complex model of language and literacy as a diverse set of practices that are fluid and intermingling, rather than discrete and stable, is precisely what teachers and students of basic writing have discovered. That is, by paying close attention to the language and literacy practices of our students, we have discovered that, monolingualist ideological beliefs notwithstanding, English, and literacy, are not simple nor mechanical matters but complex ones meriting, and even demanding, sustained critical inquiry.

But I want to go further here by suggesting that we can understand the writing produced by basic writing students—basic writing, as it were—and

hence basic writing students, as participating in the reworking of English and literacy through their writing. In other words, as participants in the ongoing traffic of language and literacy practices, basic writing students rewrite these through their work with and on them. In terms of language, we can say that our students, like all writers, do not so much write "in" English, or any other language, but rather write, and rewrite, English with each writing. Thus the basic writing course is a site for the ongoing and culturally crucial task of reworking English and its writing.

Two quick examples explain how this may be so. The first is relatively straightforward. Students regularly introduce lexical items and idioms that may well seem unconventional but have a logic. For example, one of my students wrote the following statement in a paper: "<u>From a Native Daughter</u> is an essay by Trask in which she spills out her heritage and upbringing, trying to prove injustice amongst the cultural history of Hawaii."[6] When I first read this, I was initially disposed to treat it as demonstrating a simple spelling error: clearly, I thought, she must have meant "spells out." But when I brought this example to class for a lesson in proofreading, it turns out the student meant what she wrote and wrote what she meant, and was using "spills" to capture the dynamics of Trask's style.

Again, another student wrote that "Both Trask and Lasch use language as a stepping stool." Here, I thought, was a case of someone unfamiliar with the idiomatic "stepping stone." But, again, I was corrected by my students, for whom, I learned, stones do not ordinarily serve as steps. Over time, and bit by bit, these and other language practices have the potential to achieve status as the norm, at least for a time, through subsequent iteration: what Pennycook refers to as an ongoing process of sedimentation of practices (*Language* 47). Conventions, in this view, are not simply there, but are sedimented through ongoing iteration. If and when others iterate the idioms mentioned above, they become sedimented in a process of what Pennycook, borrowing from Homi Bhabba, refers to as fertile mimesis. In other words, the *appearance* of language as a set of fixed forms and rules is itself the result of a sedimentation process of building up, over time (*Language* 46-47, 125). Grammar, for example, is the name we give to certain categories of observed repetitions in language practices (46).

It's easy enough to recognize the fertility of mimesis in iterations of what, at a given time, appear to be unconventional language practices. But that fertility, and hence agency, is also present in writers' iterations of the conventional, or what we are disposed to recognize as simply "the same." Thus, students offering up what might seem to be highly conventional lan-

guage, or attempting to do so, rather than having their efforts dismissed as mechanical, or being condescended to as the crude flailings of remedial students who need to learn "the basics" before advancing to "real," thoughtful writing, can instead be recognized as participating in that process of fertile mimesis. They are producing something with different meaning through necessarily re-locating a given practice—phrasing, wording, syntax or notation—and they can be expected, and asked, to account for their iteration of the seemingly same: what ends, given this context and their desires and needs, this iteration might serve. For if, as social theorist Anthony Giddens observes, "Every instance of the use of language is a potential modification of that language at the same time as it acts to reproduce it" (220), then every instance of the use of language, including what is recognized as repetition, represents an exercise of agency, a choice, whatever the level of consciousness in the making of it.

In her essay "Professing Multiculturalism," Min Lu described a student who can, from this perspective, be seen as exercising agency in two seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, she consciously constructed the unconventional phrase "can able to" to bring visibility to the distinction between the ability and the permission to undertake an action, a distinction submerged in idiomatic uses of the word "can" to mean both. Insofar as her fellow students took up this phrasing "can able to" in class discussions, they participated in fertile mimesis contributing to the sedimenting of this usage. On the other hand, the student herself, following lengthy deliberations about the usage by the class, decided to revise her writing to say "may be able to" (454), on the face of it an iteration of conventional usage.

While this choice might be seen as the writer's submission to the power of convention—a yielding to what dominant culture demands of writers like the student, multiply positioned as subordinate in her status as a female student of Asian descent in a U.S. classroom, and as a non-native English speaker—we can alternatively view her eventual choice to write "may be able to" as an exercise of agency, as in fact a choice rather than a requirement. As Lu herself argues, "the activities [of deliberation and negotiation] leading to that decision, and thus its significance, are completely different [from a passive writing of the same phrasing based on the sense that she had no choice]. Without the negotiation, [her] choice would be resulting from an attempt to passively absorb and automatically reproduce a predetermined form" (455). Hence, the student's writing of "may be able to," while appearing to be the "same" as conventional American English usage, relocates that practice, and in so doing, produces a difference in meaning by virtue

of who is engaging that practice, when, where, and why. The writer thus exercises agency, and produces difference, both when she writes "can able to" and when she writes "may be able to." We, and our students, are engaged in rewriting English even when the writing that is produced appears to be simple and mechanical iteration of the same old, familiar "basics" of English and writing. Appearances to the contrary notwithstanding, basic writing is not simple, not mechanical, nor ever the same.

I began by asserting that basic writing must be, and is always being, re-located, and that basic writing itself represents a re-location of earlier and other struggles that constitute a long and ongoing tradition of challenging dominant beliefs about literacy, language, and students. Some time ago, I wrote that

> Basic writing represents a writing movement that has consistently addressed "broad questions about the aims of education and the shape of various educational institutions" and that contributes significantly to the "revitalizing of the teaching of writing" (Slevin, "Depoliticizing" 12). By working with students institutionally designated as at the bottom, basic writing has explicitly called into question the social and political role of educational institutions and the politics of representing students, or prospective students, and their writing in particular ways, as either "literate" or "illiterate," "college material" or "remedial," "skilled" or "unskilled."[7]

Those present at the 2011 CCCC business meeting may recognize this passage as part of the statement I made in support of the resolution put forward by the Council on Basic Writing "that Basic Writing is a vital field and its students and teacher scholars a productive force within composition; is under attack by exclusionary public policies; and therefore must be recognized publicly and supported by CCCC as a conference cluster and with featured sessions" (Council on Basic Writing). I said then, and will reiterate here, that I support the resolution to sustain the continuing insights of basic writing and its project of responsibility to those most commonly identified as outsiders to the academy. I do so both in order that we meet our responsibilities to these students, and also to ensure that we meet our responsibilities as a field and organization committed to rethinking the meaning of literacy, the teaching of writing, and their potential contributions to projects of democracy and justice. This article is my attempt to further articulate how this is so. As I have argued, basic writing is vital to

the field of composition insofar as it rejects simplistic notions of English, language, and literacy, and always insists on searching out the different in what might appear to be the same and the familiar. Its commitment to work with students consigned by dominant ideologies to the social periphery as not, in fact, peripheral but central, leading edge, enables its teacher-scholars to learn, and re-think, along with their students, what it can, does, and might mean to write. Thus, re-locating basic writing as basic to the field of composition studies is vital to maintaining the intellectual, pedagogical, and ethical integrity of the discipline as a field committed to working and reworking language and literacy.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my thanks to J. Elizabeth Clark and Hannah Ashley for inviting me to speak at the 2012 meeting of the Council on Basic Writing and thereby prompting me to write the address that became this article. Thanks as well to all those attending the meeting for their interest and their suggestions in responding.

Notes

1. This paper was originally presented at the annual workshop meeting of the Council on Basic Writing, 21 March 2012, St. Louis, Missouri.

2. With apologies for many omissions, this scholarship included Adams; Barthololomae, "Tidy House"; Duffey; Fox; Gilyard; Glau; Gleason, "Evaluating"; Harrington and Adler-Kassner; McNenny; Rodby; Rodby and Fox; Royer and Gilles; Royster; Soliday and Gleason; Soliday, "From the Margins"; Soliday, *Politics*; Sternglass. My colleagues and I prepared for our work by studying this scholarship in a graduate seminar focusing on alternatives to basic writing. For a rich description of this and other graduate courses such scholarship makes possible, see Gleason, "Reasoning the Need."

3. On the relationship between ESL and basic writing, see Matsuda.

4. On the importance of addressing such traffic, see Dasgupta, Kramsch, and Pennycook, "English."

5. See Bernabé et al., Guerra, Zamel, Zarate et al. On a translingual approach specifically, see Horner et al., and Lu and Horner. For an overview of these and other terms emerging to capture this complexity, see Canagarajah.

6. All student work is reproduced here with the written permission of the authors on condition of anonymity.

7. This passage is taken from a longer statement submitted in support of the Council on Basic Writing's Sense of the House Resolution unanimously adopted by the Conference on College Composition and Communication at its 2011 business meeting. The text of the CBW Resolution and a list of signatories can be found at < http://cbwblog.wordpress.com/2011/04/18/ sense-of-the-house-motion-cccc-2011/>. My statement supporting the resolution patches together excerpts from my essay "Discoursing Basic Writing," revised subsequently and appearing as Chapter One ("The 'Birth' of 'Basic Writing'") in *Representing the "Other": Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*, a book I co-authored with Min-Zhan Lu.

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Stuck in the Remedial Rut: Confronting Resistance to ESL Curriculum Reform

Shawna Shapiro

Abstract: This article presents a case study of a university ESL program that was highly resistant to reform, despite substantial evidence that its curriculum and policies were ineffective. The author draws on surveys, interviews, and participant observation to show how remediation served not only as an instructional model, but as an institutional identity for the program. This remedial identity was reflected in a testing-heavy, basic skills curriculum focused primarily on lexico-grammatical issues, as well as in the program's policies for placement, tuition, and course credit. Through data-gathering and cross-departmental collaboration, the program was able to construct an alternative identity for itself—one in which its role was to support diversity, rather than to eradicate deficiency. This study adds to the growing body of scholarship on the ideological and political conditions in which basic/ESL writing is situated, and offers insights on how programs can re-envision their role within institutions.

Keywords: ESL; institutional identity; remediation; curriculum reform; basic writing

One of the research areas in which *JBW* has a well-established track record is curriculum reform. Scholar-practitioners in basic writing have presented numerous accounts of challenges, successes, and lessons learned throughout the reform process. In the most recent issue of *JBW*, Doreen Ewert offered one such account, focusing on an ESL program undergoing a "paradigm shift" from a decontextualized, skills-based curriculum to one focused on more holistic and authentic literacy goals. A similar shift has taken place at many other institutions, resulting in curricular models that emphasize reading-writing connections (Goen and Gillotte-Tropp), fluency ahead of accuracy (MacGowan-Gilhooly) and overall synchronicity between basic writing and the mainstream curriculum (Huse, et al.). Authors in *JBW* have presented a variety of course configurations for accomplishing these aims, including accelerated courses (Adams, et al.), stretch courses (Glau; Peele),

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studio courses (Grego and Thompson; Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson), and learning communities (Darabi; Mlynarczyk and Babbitt). Although these models differ in significant ways, they all indicate a trend away from traditional linguistic *remediation* toward more integrated curricular *mediation*.[1] That is, rather than trying to "fix" writers and their writing, we are more focused on helping students navigate the academic curriculum. Although this trend can be seen throughout the field of basic writing, it is particularly noteworthy in programs serving multilingual/ESL writers, as the field of TESOL has tended to place greater emphasis on lexico-grammatical issues than on rhetorical concerns (Kroll; MacGowan-Gilhooly; Matsuda, "Division of Labor").

This non-remedial trend has been bolstered by a growing body of scholarship about the pedagogical and ethical problems with the traditional remedial curriculum. In 1999, William Lalicker characterized the "baseline" (also known as "prerequisite") model of basic writing instruction as one emphasizing "grammatical conformity" over "rhetorical sophistication." Lalicker explained that this model often engenders resentment among students who do not see its relevance to their academic goals. A number of longitudinal studies have substantiated this claim, particularly among undergraduate ESL writers (e.g., Leki; Sternglass; Zamel). Such findings, combined with increasing political pressure to reduce or eliminate remedial education as an enterprise, have led many ESL programs to consider curricular alternatives (Otte and Mlynarczyk). The shift away from traditional remediation is also evident in recent position statements from a number of professional organizations, including the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), and Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), which articulate that support for multilingual/ESL writers is most effectively implemented through a non-remedial model in which courses are credit-bearing, content-rich, and collaboratively-designed, with input from mainstream academic programs and disciplines.

Despite this seeming consensus about the direction our programs should take, many institutions have not abandoned the traditional remedial model. Vestiges of remediation can be seen in many programs' policies for placement, credit, and tuition, and well as in assessment practices, curricular content, and the institutional position of the programs themselves—trends which will be discussed later in this article. My central question is why some programs are stuck in what I call a "remedial rut," while others have made significant progress toward an alternative paradigm. To answer this

question, I draw on a five-year case study of one university's ESL writing program, which was, until recently, very much on the traditional remedial side of the spectrum. My analysis suggests that for this program, linguistic remediation was more than an instructional model; it was an institutional identity. In order to move forward with curriculum revision, the program needed to develop an alternative understanding of its function within the institution. This was an arduous and risky process—one that is still in progress to this day.

Institutional Identity in Basic/ESL Writing

Before looking at the challenges faced by this particular program, it is important to consider the institutional conditions within which remedial education usually operates. This contextual understanding helps explain how an institutional "identity crisis" can prevent curriculum reform. In *The Politics of Remediation*, Mary Soliday posits that the function of remedial education is not just pedagogical, but political: Remediation allows institutions to claim to "maintain democratic access without damaging selectivity in a hierarchical system" (13). In many cases, remedial education serves as a *de facto* admissions and/or graduation policy for institutions whose academic standards have not been clearly defined or enforced. Sugie Goen-Salter describes the situation as a "delicate balancing act" between open access and high standards, with remedial education resting in the middle (97).

For institutions dealing with an increasing numbers of underprepared writers, remedial education seems particularly expedient: It places the responsibility for addressing the needs of those students squarely on the shoulders of the remedial writing program, without requiring substantive changes to the mainstream curriculum or to the institutional culture. As Soliday explains, the assumption is that "only students require remediation, not institutions, coalitions, or interest groups" (143). Moreover, if students who have received the "treatment" continue to need writing support, blame can be directed toward the remedial program. Hence, remedial programs function both as the solution and as the scapegoat for literacy and language problems.

The default institutional identity for a remedial program, then, is one of institutional service. Mike Rose and Mary Soliday posit that much of the discourse and practice in a traditional remediation model reflects a prioritization of institutional expediencies: Students undergo some form of standardized diagnostic which identifies the areas in which remediation is needed. They

are then prescribed a particular sequence of courses, and may be prevented from enrolling in some or all of their other (non-remedial) courses until they have completed the remedial treatment. Courses are usually non-credit, and may require that students pay additional tuition and fees. Although these features may give remedial programs some financial and curricular autonomy, they primarily serve to demarcate remedial coursework as separate from, and clearly not equal to, the academic mainstream. The typical curriculum for remedial writing also reflects this demarcation, focusing on accuracy over fluency, and decontextualized "skills" over discipline-specific conventions (Del Principe; MacGowan-Gilhooly; Rose 346-348).

Although this traditional remediation model can be seen throughout basic writing, it is particularly common in programs designed for ESL writers. Though institutions may claim to value these students' cultural and linguistic diversity, they often operate from a tacit assumption of linguistic homogeneity and therefore respond to multilingual writers with a "policy of containment" (Matsuda, "Myth" 642; Horner and Trimbur). This containment approach is most clearly reflected in a testing-heavy, grammar-focused curriculum, where the goal is linguistic assimilation through the eradication of error (Shuck 59-63; Smoke). Comparative studies have found, in fact, that ESL writing courses tend to focus more heavily on lexico-grammatical concerns than their counterparts in (L1) Composition and/or Writing Across the Curriculum (Atkinson and Ramanathan; Braine; Harklau). Ultimately, at many institutions, language difference is treated more as a deficit than as a resource (Canagarajah 589).

Because their work is so closely associated with "deficiency," programs operating from a traditional remediation model tend to be institutionally marginalized. Administrator surveys have revealed that ESL programs in particular tend to lack status within their departments, and their faculty rarely collaborate with their counterparts in other disciplines (Ignash; Williams 160). Instructors tend to have higher teaching loads, lower pay, less job security, and fewer professional development opportunities than many of their colleagues in other departments and programs (Blumenthal; Ignash). Many describe their institutional status as second class, and feel that their work is seen as less academic than that of their non-ESL counterparts (Gray, Rolph, and Melamid 77-78; Ignash; Williams).

This low status, combined with the institutional pressures discussed earlier, puts remedial ESL programs in a difficult bind: Their very existence depends on the presence of students the institution has deemed linguistically deficient. The program must be able to identify, label, and remediate those

deficiencies, as well as to demonstrate in an objective way that the remedy has been successful. When students are found to need additional language support after completing remedial instruction, the program may be subject to criticism. Given this complex set of conditions, it is understandable why some scholars have claimed that remedial ESL programs are better suited to the needs of institutions than to those of students (Blumenthal 48-49; Ignash; Oropeza, Varghese, and Kanno). Indeed, remedial ESL coursework has been found to divert time and resources from students' other academic goals, and may increase the likelihood of student attrition (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal 7; Ignash; Lalicker; Tinto). Many students come to resent or even reject the "ESL" label, because it is so often associated with an approach they find stigmatizing and punitive (Ortmeier-Hooper; Marshall; Oropeza, Varghese, and Kanno).

An increasing number of scholars in second language writing have called for an ideological shift—from deficiency to diversity—in the ways that multilingual/ESL students are treated by institutions of higher education. If these students truly are valued members of the educational community and contributors to institutional diversity, they must be treated equitably. This shift has implications for everything from curriculum and assessment (Crusan; Hamp-Lyons and Kroll) to financial aid and academic support (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal; Oropeza, Varghese, and Kanno). A diversity ideology also requires that institutions interrogate the myth of linguistic homogeneity, and consider ways in which multilingualism can be seen as a desired goal for all students, rather than as a deficiency on the part of non-native speakers of English. (Hall 37; Horner, Lu, Royster, and Trimbur; Shuck 68; Tardy 636-639). The labels applied to students are changing to reflect this diversity orientation, with increased use of terms such as "multilingual," "linguistic minority," and "linguistically diverse," as alternatives to "ESL" or "Limited English Proficient."[2]

What this implies is a shift in function for the basic/ESL writing program, from student remediation to institutional mediation. At many institutions, this shift is already taking place, as evidenced by the curricular trends discussed earlier. A recent exchange on the Conference for Basic Writing Listserv demonstrated this trend. Asked to characterize the curricular approach at their institutions, a number of participants said that their programs had evolved away from a "basic skills" approach, and were focusing more on academic literacy and critical thinking. This direction is not universal, however. Several members said their programs were still operating from the basic skills approach, relying heavily on practices best

aligned with a traditional remediation model, such as grammar drills and workbook exercises (May 2012).

The question is not whether the field is moving forward but rather why some of us are left behind. What prevents a basic/ESL writing program from assuming an alternative institutional identity—one in which it is associated with diversity, rather than deficit? The answer, in short, is that identity construction is a political process—particularly in basic writing (Goen-Salter 83). Remediation is a function that most institutions accept as a necessary evil. Its very existence allows them to claim, as Rose explains, that "[t]he problem is not ours in any fundamental way; we can embrace it if we must, but with surgical gloves on our hands" (357). Mediation, in contrast, implies greater authority and visibility for the basic/ESL program, as well as an acknowledgement that the responsibility for supporting multilingual/ESL writers must be shared across entities. Essentially, a mediation model asks more from the institution, and makes fewer guarantees. It is not so difficult to see, perhaps, why a basic/ESL writing program might think it risky—perhaps even self-destructive—to attempt to re-define itself in this way.

In this article, I use the Academic ESL Program (AEP) at Northern Green University (NGU)[3] to illustrate these dynamics. Drawing on survey and interview data collected in collaboration with program administrators, as well as on participant observation from program meetings and internal listserv discussions, I show how the AEP's curriculum and policies reflected a deficit orientation, and were perceived by many students as ineffective and discriminatory. I discuss how these findings brought to light a sort of identity crisis for the program, and how this contributed to curricular inertia. I then outline the rhetorical and tactical strategies that helped the program to articulate an alternative institutional identity for itself. This case is part success story and part cautionary tale: While the AEP's curriculum has become more integrated and relevant, some of its other policies still reflect a deficit orientation. This is a program that has not fully escaped the remedial rut, but is making significant progress in that direction.

Institutional Context: Northern Green University and the Academic English Program

Northern Green University (NGU) is a large, public research institution on the West coast. When I began my study in 2006, the university had more than 30,000 undergraduates and approximately 10,000 graduate students. Precise numbers of multilingual students are difficult to come by, since NGU,

like many institutions of its kind, does not regularly report on numbers of students for whom English is not a first language. However, residency data indicated that non-US citizens comprised approximately 14% of the student body—8% international students (F1 visa holders) and 6% US permanent residents (mostly with in-state residency status). NGU's policies stated that all of these non-US citizens were required to demonstrate English language proficiency. Students from some countries where English was the primary language (e.g., Canada, the U.K. and Australia) were exempted, as were students who had attended US schools for more than ten years. All others were required to submit standardized test scores (TOEFL, SAT, ACT, etc.) as evidence of language proficiency, or to take the AEP's "diagnostic test," which would place them in the AEP course sequence.

Several of the policies the AEP had in place in 2006 reflected a deficit orientation: First, the program relied heavily on testing not only for place-ment, but as the sole measure of success. Course completion depended on attaining a minimum of 80% on the final exam, and the failure rate for AEP courses was over 20%—significantly higher than in courses such as First Year Composition. Second, students had no choice in which courses to take, and were required to enroll in the designated AEP course before they could complete the registration process for their other (mainstream) courses. Third, all of the courses were non-credit and required additional tuition from students, at a per-credit rate that was actually slightly *higher* than that of in-state tuition. Finally, the curriculum was a salient example of Lalicker's "prerequisite" model, focusing heavily on grammatical rather than rhetorical objectives. The first three courses in the four-course writing sequence focused entirely on grammar and vocabulary, with writing only at the sentence-level. The fourth course emphasized paragraph-level writing in response to short articles from newspapers and encyclopedias. All four courses used timed tests as the only form of assessment, and writing was graded almost entirely on the use of grammatical structures and vocabulary that had been introduced in each unit. There were no courses devoted to writing beyond the paragraph level, nor to academic reading or speaking. No distinctions were made for US residents versus international students, nor for undergraduate versus graduate students.

Data Collection: Procedures and Findings

Administrators and teachers in the AEP knew anecdotally that many students were displeased with the program. Comments on course evaluations

often revealed a high level of dissatisfaction with the AEP as an entity, even though students often expressed appreciation for the teaching of a specific instructor. To gain a better sense of how the AEP was perceived by students, as well as how ESL students were perceived by non-AEP instructors, I worked with an AEP administrator to initiate a needs analysis project, which included several instruments for data collection. First was a paper survey that was distributed in-class to AEP students, without the instructor present. The survey included quantitative questions about how much importance students gave to various language skills and writing genres, as well as open-ended questions about whether they saw the AEP curriculum as helpful (see Appendix A). This survey was completed by 129 students (of 231 total enrolled) in Spring 2006. I also conducted hour-long, semi-structured interviews with ten students who were enrolled or had recently exited from the AEP, asking them about their experiences with the program (see Appendix B). Eight of the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed.

The AEP administrator and I also developed an online survey, which was distributed via email in 2007 to faculty and teaching assistants in departments and programs known to have high numbers of ESL students. The survey asked participants (N= 89) to discuss their perceptions of ESL students, and to describe the strategies and resources they used to support those students (see Appendix C). In addition, I interviewed seven non-AEP faculty/staff who work with large numbers of AEP students to gain an additional perspective on AEP students' academic needs and experiences, both inside and outside the AEP.

Findings from the needs analysis revealed that very few AEP students were satisfied with the curriculum. Many felt that the almost exclusive focus on grammar was not well-suited to their needs. As explained by one interviewee, a graduate student from Iran, "I think the level of my knowledge in grammar has been saturated." One of the survey respondents wrote, "Often times, I feel I know more grammar than a native speaker." Another said that "the stuff [in the courses] is not useful for academics." Students offered a number of suggestions for improvement. Most prevalent were requests for more extensive and disciplinary-specific writing assignments, more challenging readings, and more attention to speaking proficiency—particularly for graduate-level international students.

These findings were not particularly surprising, given that the AEP had made an intentional choice to prioritize grammar in the curriculum, which had been developed in 1996 to replace a model that emphasized process writing and library research skills, dating back to the 1980s. Very little data

is available about that earlier model, but veteran teachers did recall that it had culminated in a final research paper of 10-15 pages. By the 1990s, many had become concerned that the older curriculum prioritized quantity over quality of writing. Around the same time, a number of non-AEP faculty had begun to complain about the writing of ESL students in mainstream classes—particularly of US immigrant students, whose numbers at NGU were rapidly increasing.[4] Hence, the heavy focus on grammar starting in 1996 was the result of a pendulum swing away from fluency and toward accuracy—reflecting the sort of dichotomous thinking that is still quite common in discussions of ESL writers (Ewert; Kroll; MacGowan-Gilhooly).

The AEP's mission statement, which was said to have been developed alongside the 1996 curriculum, explained that the program's aim was to help students "bring their English skills up to a level where they do not pose an excessive burden to [non-AEP] instructors. . . . ensuring that students who graduate . . . . possess adequate English language skills that maintain the university's academic standards and reputation" (Operations Manual, 2007-2008).[5] Evident in this mission statement are two key assumptions: First is that ESL students are likely to pose a burden to faculty. Second is that those who graduate with inadequate English skills pose a threat to the university's reputation. As explained by one program administrator in a listserv post commenting on this statement, "It is easy to see how some teachers embrace both the remedial nature of the [AEP] and the idea of gatekeeping" (October 2008). Clearly, the program felt that it had a responsibility not just to students, but to the institution at large.

Although I never found evidence that the university had explicitly tasked the AEP with this "protective" function, the findings from our online survey of non-AEP faculty and teaching assistants did reveal that many saw remediation as the best and only way to address the needs of ESL writers. Among the responses were a number of calls for stricter entrance requirements and prerequisite instruction. A teaching assistant in the Communication department stated that "Many of them lack very basic skills that we assume they have when they get to our class." Another, from Engineering, posited that "stricter prerequisites for entry into the University, and into certain classes, would help students whose language skills still need remediation to receive that attention instead of failing classes." This sentiment was echoed by faculty and teaching assistants in a number of other departments, including Anthropology, Biology, and the Business School.

When asked what they did in their own classes or departments to support these students, the majority of survey respondents were able to

offer some examples of instructional strategies and/or academic resources. Still, many indicated that they were unwilling or unable to offer the level of support that was needed. Class size was one of the primary factors. As one faculty in Biology put it, "With large classes of 300+ in the intro level and 100+ at the 400 level, we don't have the resources needed to provide ESL students individual support." Other respondents were concerned about issues of fairness. As explained by one faculty member in the Business School, "I try to evaluate them relative to their background, but I don't think it is appropriate for me to actually change the class to accommodate the ESL students."

The AEP: A Fraught Institutional History

Given the sorts of comments presented above, it becomes easier to see how the AEP had come to believe that its students were a potential "burden" to instructors, and that a remedial curriculum was the best means of lessening that burden. Much of the tension evident in these statements is related to NGU's admissions practices: The Admissions Office had been moving toward a holistic approach, officially announced in 2006, whereby no minimum test scores were required. In addition, NGU had longstanding reciprocity agreements with several local community colleges, and was expected to maintain strong representation from those colleges in the incoming student body—particularly among transfer students, many of whom were US permanent residents. Faculty both inside and outside the AEP frequently complained about what they saw as a persistent lowering of academic standards that had resulted from these admissions initiatives.

Within this context, the AEP came to the conclusion that its "mandate," (a term often used in program meetings) was to address a pervasive problem of linguistic deficiency at NGU. Many AEP faculty were convinced, in fact, that non-AEP instructors were giving students a pass in terms of language, and that it was the AEP's job to raise proficiency *beyond* what was needed for academic success. As explained by one on the program's internal listserv, "I've heard time and again that professors feel compelled to lower their standards in order to accommodate the vast range of language skills they find in their students. . . . I'd really hate to just go with the flow in terms of what professors will let pass" (January 2006).[6] In other words, the AEP's sense of mission went beyond student support: the program felt its role was to create and enforce linguistic standards for the institution—to enact what Lalicker calls a "tough love" approach.

This mission of linguistic gate-keeping gave the program a sense of importance, but also put instructors in a difficult position, as the enforcer of standards that their own program had created. There was a persistent anxiety among instructors and administrators about whether the AEP could defend and validate its work to the institution. The heavy reliance on timed testing for placement and course completion was one means of demonstrating that the program's evaluation procedures were consistent and objective. While this testing-heavy model may have helped the AEP prove its worth to the institution, it caused many students to question the program's validity. As articulated by one survey participant, "The passing score for final exam is too high. I felt that the object of [AEP] course is not [to] help to improve English skills for student, [but] making money instead." Another wrote that "You should focus on teaching us how to pass the final . . . . I feel waste of time and money for taking this class." Some of the most emotionally charged comments came from students who had worked hard in their classes and done well on homework assignments, but did not score high enough on the final exam. One wrote, "When I failed the final, I just wanted to quit school. I know that somebody, who does not take [AEP] classes, doesn't understand students' feelings."

Students were also angered by the fact that the diagnostic test, which placed them into AEP courses, had been designed by the program itself, and was said to be particularly difficult. As explained by one interview participant—a female undergraduate from China who had recently married a US citizen—"We thought that the program made the test really hard [so] only the most excellent can pass." This concern was echoed by other students as well. One survey respondent wrote that "The AEP test is bias. It seeks our failure, not our success."

These comments echo what many AEP instructors saw as an inescapable truth—that the program's mandate came from the institution, rather than from the students. When students' expectations were pitted against those of the university, the latter won. This dynamic produced strong feelings of resentment in students. One of my faculty/staff interview participants, a writing center administrator who supports undergraduates from underrepresented groups, put it this way: "They [AEP students] start to feel like 'This is a hoop I have to jump through. I fill out these little exercises, get the right answers, and then get out of here as quickly as I can.'" In her view, the curriculum was based on a myth: "Pass the test and you're cured," she called it.

These concerns were occasionally brought up in AEP program meetings, and more frequently in private conversations. One long-term instruc-

tor said openly in meetings that in terms of testing, the AEP could easily be seen as "the fox guarding the henhouse." Other instructors told me they were worried that students, as well as other NGU staff committed to student support, saw them as the enemy. These sorts of comments reflect a high degree of frustration with the remedial mandate. Yet even greater than this frustration was the fear that questioning that mandate might result in the dismantling of the entire program.

An examination of the program's institutional history helps to explain why this fear was so strong.[7] The 1970s and 1980s were a time of high institutional vulnerability for the AEP. The program was passed back and forth multiple times between the English and Linguistics departments, because neither wanted responsibility for it. Leadership was also unstable during this time: Between 1975 and 1984, the program had six different directors, some of whom were graduate students. In 1984, the AEP was permanently relocated to the Office of Extension, a branch of the institution that operates autonomously, and includes mostly fee-based programs for non-matriculated students (e.g., professional certificates, community workshops, and summer programs). This arrangement gave the AEP more institutional stability, but also meant that the program had no departmental home and virtually no representation within faculty governance, where major decision-making occurs. As a result of its affiliation with Extension, the AEP's administrative offices were moved to a business tower about a half-mile outside the university's main campus. AEP faculty were ranked as Extension Lecturers, which gave them the lowest salary of any of the university's full-time teaching staff. In addition to low pay, job security was a major concern, as most instructors' employment was dependent completely on student enrollments, which varied with each quarter.

Although it seems most probable that the AEP had been moved to the Office of Extension for administrative ease, the story told internally was that the program had been officially demarcated as remedial, and that the state legislature had determined that remedial courses could not be covered by tuition. Therefore, it was said, the only place where the program's fee-based, non-credit courses could be housed was in Extension. These assumptions were later found to be myths: The program had never been given a remedial mandate, at least not explicitly. In fact, prior to the 1990s, courses had been credit-bearing, and much more closely linked to other academic departments. Additionally, no law or policy preventing funding for remedial education could be found in the records of the state legislature.

Although there are a number of unanswered questions about the AEP's institutional history and the lore that accompanied it, what comes through most saliently is that the program was institutionally vulnerable for a number of years, and that this vulnerability had resulted in a persistent fear of dislocation or even disappearance. As it stood, the AEP was financially self-sustaining and administratively independent. The program had complete control over its curriculum and assessment practices, as long as it could demonstrate that it was fulfilling the remedial mandate. The program's work needed to be standardized and quantifiable. As explained in the program's Operating Constraints, the AEP needed to maintain an "accessible, clear, easy to implement" curriculum with "reliable" testing measures and exit criteria. Anything that could not be measured in a timed testing situation was seen as less reliable, and therefore threatening to the program.

On the part of students, however, these practices were often seen not as objective, but as discriminatory or even exploitative. One interview participant admitted that "The impression I had was that [NGU thinks] international students have money. They can pay without questioning, and they don't have this option for us to question." Another asked me directly, "Are you guys trying—I mean the program—to make more money out of the international students?" Survey responses echoed these concerns. One simply wrote, at the end of the survey, "Stop stealing students' money!"

Deconstructing the Remedial Identity

Our needs analysis data confirmed that the AEP was not meeting the academic needs of its students. Even worse, as illustrated above, the program was seen by many students as an obstacle, rather than an asset. Yet in late 2006, when AEP administrators and I began to present our initial findings to others in the program, we encountered significant resistance. They did not deny that the curriculum and policies needed to be reviewed. Yet they were afraid that that any substantive changes might lead to some form of institutional backlash. The existing model, despite its many flaws, met the expectations of most NGU faculty, who assumed that ESL students simply needed more grammar instruction in order to be successful as writers—an assumption often made by faculty without a background in second language acquisition (Del Principe; Ewert). Most in the AEP knew this to be untrue, but were reluctant to disrupt the status quo, fearing that the program might be criticized—or perhaps even dismantled—if it tried to shift away from a traditional remedial model. What was the AEP's institutional mandate,

many wondered, if not to remediate linguistic deficiencies? From 2006-2009, despite the clear direction indicated by our research findings, the curriculum remained frozen, with only minor changes to testing and grading procedures. It became clear that real reform would not happen without pressure—or at least input—from outside the AEP.

Two initiatives were undertaken in 2008-2009, which helped to provide this input. The first was a cross-departmental working group that brought instructors (mostly graduate students) from the English department's Writing Program into dialogue with those in the AEP. One impetus for the formation of this group was a rarely-discussed claim on the AEP's website—that the program could "help students who are non-native speakers of English achieve the linguistic level of native-speaking incoming freshmen." It seemed logical, then, that the Writing Program for first-years might serve as some sort of curricular context for the AEP. At the same time, many in the Writing Program had expressed a desire for pedagogical strategies and resources to meet the needs of multilingual/ESL writers. As explained by one English faculty member on the online survey, "[the AEP] operates in relative isolation from other writing programs. So we need to share resources better and learn from each other."

The meetings, which first began as informational sessions, resulted eventually in two new collaborative course offerings, which were piloted in 2008 and have been offered each quarter since: First is a two-credit studio course, which is open to any multilingual/ESL student enrolled in the Writing Program, and is capped at ten students. The second is a linked model, in which a cohort of students enrolls in two back-to-back courses—one in the Writing Program and the other in the AEP. The instructors for both courses work closely together and share curricular content. These courses not only meet curricular needs, but also ensure a long-term, collaborative relationship between the AEP and the Writing Program. They also set a precedent for offering academic credit for some of the AEP's coursework.

The second major initiative was an institution-wide task force that was formed in 2008 to look at the university's language policies. This group was formed in part due to political pressures: An editorial article had been published in a local newspaper, criticizing NGU for recruiting low-income, first-generation immigrant students and then requiring additional coursework and tuition fees from many of them. At least one student had also threatened the university with a lawsuit, claiming that the AEP's policies amounted to discrimination by nation of origin. Several affiliates of the AEP, myself included, were invited to join the task force, alongside representatives from

Admissions, the Registrar's Office, the Office of Diversity, and other entities with a vested interest in the multilingual/ESL student population. This group began to look at some of the conditions and policies that had constrained the program, eventually articulating a list of recommendations for how the AEP, and NGU as a whole, might better support these students.

Both of these initiatives were significant in that they decreased the AEP's institutional isolation, which in turn led to a reconsideration of the remedial mandate. Two questions began to emerge from these conversations, and helped the AEP to re-envision its institutional identity: 1) What writing standards has the university articulated for all students? and 2) How does the AEP's work fit within those standards? Many in the AEP were surprised to find that very few university-wide academic standards had been articulated beyond the list of course requirements for general education and degree completion. After participating on the task force for several months, one of the program administrators wrote an internal memo in which he articulated his conclusion that "the entire edifice of [NGU's] undergraduate education as far as standards for incoming students or outcomes required for graduation is basically 'turtles all the way down.'" Consequently, he said, "we should feel quite free to invent our own curricular mandate for the AEP, because nobody else is going to do it for us. And really, this is only common sense. Who knows better than us?" (November 2008).

Although the "turtles" metaphor might seem cynical, it was quite effective as a rhetorical device for helping the AEP confront an inconvenient truth—that there was no universal linguistic "mandate" that had been agreed upon by NGU. Without such a mandate, it seemed clear that the AEP's institutional function could only be determined within the context of specific departments and programs, and in relation to the academic goals of students. The AEP could not on its own truly *remediate* anyone; it could only *mediate* (and help students mediate) within the academic curriculum. This notion of being non-remedial incited a variety of responses from AEP instructors. While some thought that it opened up exciting possibilities, others felt that it left the program without any sense of direction. After a series of listserv discussions about what next steps should be taken in terms of curriculum, one instructor wrote, "We are all talking about stuff, but it's slightly different stuff, and we are simply not on the same page about what the [AEP] is. Let's maybe answer that question first" (October 2008). This same sentiment was echoed in program meetings over the next several months. The AEP seemed to know what it was moving away from, but not what it should be moving toward.

A pivotal turning point came in a presentation at the AEP faculty meeting in February 2009, when the program director began to articulate an alternative identity for the program—a shift from remediation to support. The university "is responsible for its own admission and graduation standards," he explained. "We are to provide academic support to those who have been admitted in spite of limited English Proficiency." His presentation ended with a slide that said, "We are not fixing everything. We are merely (!) designing curriculum to support multi-lingual students (and thus diversity)" (punctuation original). This was the first time I had heard the word "diversity" mentioned explicitly as part of the AEP's vision. At the end of his presentation, the director encouraged the curriculum committee to return to the needs analysis data that had been collected in 2006 and 2007, to provide direction for reform. Even before this, some in the AEP had already begun to talk about these data as the new "mandate" for the program: "We've identified the needs these students have, not by means of some [NGU] mandate," wrote one listserv participant, "but by working with the students, talking with them about the demands of their courses and now, talking with others who instruct them and attempt to help them on campus" (October 2008).

By May 2009, a new curriculum had been developed and was ready to be piloted during the summer quarter. Over the next two years, the curriculum and policies continued to evolve, and have come to include several credit-bearing courses, more extensive reading and writing instruction, and a multi-pronged approach to assessment whereby assignments—not just timed tests—count toward the final grade. Instructors have also outlined goals for ongoing needs analysis and curriculum review. Many of them now gather feedback from students at the beginning, middle, and end of their courses, using surveys, reflective writing assignments, and more open-ended course evaluation forms. These measures provide regular input on students' experiences not just in the AEP, but across the curriculum. A number of students have commented that the new courses are much more relevant to their academic needs. One wrote on an addendum to the course evaluation, "I am certain that I'll use all of the styles that we learn in this course. In fact, I've been using some of the writing styles in my other humanities class." Another said, "I am a law school student, so these writing [skills] actually help me now!!!" (punctuation original). Students from a variety of other disciplines—including Business, Chemistry, International Studies, and Social Work—have given similar feedback. The AEP has begun to assume a "mediation" role in other ways as well, consulting more frequently with

the English department's Writing Program, as well as with several campus Writing Centers.

There are some lingering effects of the AEP's remedial past, however. Placement into courses is still based on standardized test scores, although the in-house diagnostic test has been revised significantly to be a more authentic assessment of language proficiency. Students who are placed into the program are still subject to a prescriptive curriculum sequence, and those who are not successful in completing the prescribed courses may have holds placed on their registration. Perhaps the most salient vestige of a remediation model, though, is that courses are not covered by tuition, and therefore continue to be a financial burden for students. In addition, the AEP continues to be institutionally marginalized. It is still housed in the Office of Extension, and instructors' working conditions have remained the same—or perhaps even worsened—with the recent economic climate. These dynamics seem unlikely to change in the near future, although conversation about them is much more prevalent than it had been in years prior.

Discussion

This case study confirms, but also complicates, much of what has been written about curriculum reform in basic writing. First is that reform is as much about process as it is about product, and often brings to light philosophical disagreements among writing teachers, or between the writing program and the university administration (Del Principe; Ewert). Effective curriculum reform efforts usually require extensive and often contentious dialogue among multiple stakeholders to help articulate these differences and find common ground. Within the AEP, however, the disagreement was not about what was desirable for the curriculum, but about what was possible for the program. Instructors and administrators needed a greater understanding of how the university functioned so that they could evaluate the level of risk involved in re-defining their program. In this case, the dialogue might have been more productive early on, if it had been less insular, and included individuals with a broader institutional perspective. To identify these individuals, however, the program would have already needed a certain level of institutional understanding. Because it lacked a departmental home, and was not included in faculty committees and other decision-making bodies, the AEP had few if any opportunities to interact with potential institutional allies. The program's marginalized position in the university prevented it from recognizing what information it was lacking, as well as what expertise

it had to offer to the broader conversations about writing and learning that were already taking place. In essence, this case study illustrates how institutional isolation breeds ignorance and alienation.

Existing literature also reveals is that there is often a tipping point at which change begins to happen. In Doreen Ewert's case, two factors—a call for increased programmatic integration and a change in institutional leadership—served to disrupt the status quo (9). Top-down initiatives like these often help programs to acknowledge and emerge from the remedial rut. In the case of NGU, the establishment of an institution-wide task force certainly played a major role. However, it is probable that this task force alone would not have been a sufficient catalyst for reform. If the AEP had not already laid the groundwork for change through needs analysis and collaboration with the Writing Program, the task force recommendations might not have had much of an impact. The task force was able to validate and scale-up the work that had already begun. For programs awaiting top-down reform *before* exploring curricular possibilities, this narrative offers a warning and a call to action.

This case also illustrates that language matters—not just the academic language we teach in our courses, but the language we use to talk about our programs. The AEP's focus on students' linguistic deficits, rather than on their assets, was infused into the discourse of its mission statement, programmatic documents, and curricular conversations. Beginning to talk about students as "multilingual" and about the program as "support" –both words that now appear prominently on the program's website—helped to facilitate a paradigm shift from deficiency to diversity. Of course, these discursive changes alone would not have been sufficient, and NGU as an institution still reflects a deficiency orientation in many of its policies. Nevertheless, having a new discourse with which to re-define itself was pivotal to the AEP's progress.

The story of this particular program helps to illustrate why the status quo is so difficult to counteract in programs that have been operating within a traditional remedial model. Such a model expects those programs to prioritize the needs of the institution over those of students, thereby reinforcing the notion that language difference is an issue of deficiency, rather than diversity. These expectations come to define, shape, and constrain the program—particularly if that program is already economically or politically vulnerable. Only by engaging explicitly in a process of redefinition, and forming alliances with other entities committed to student support and institutional mediation, can such programs escape the remedial rut. By

viewing curriculum reform as institutional identity construction, we can better understand the nature of resistance and the possibilities for change both inside and outside of our basic writing programs.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Throughout this paper, I use the term "traditional remedial" to refer to a particular type of remedial instruction that is most closely aligned with William Lalicker's "baseline" or "prerequisite" model. I recognize that there are many remedial programs that implement alternative models,. For this reason, I am distinguishing between "remedial education" as an enterprise which might include a variety of curriculum models, and a "traditional remedial model" as a particular configuration of curricula, policies, and practices within that enterprise.

2. In my analysis, I often employ the hybrid term "multilingual/ESL" in order to recognize the need for diversity-oriented labels (e.g., "multilingual"), but also with the knowledge that the term "ESL" has a much greater history within basic writing and may be more easily recognized.

3. This is a pseudonym that has been used in other publications about this same program and institution.

4. I was told by one administrator that these complaints had been documented in a non-AEP faculty survey of some kind, but I was unable to locate a copy of the survey or its findings.

5. The Operations Manual is a collection of documents referenced by AEP instructors and administrators, including lists of goals and operating constraints for the program. Some of the language quoted here was changed in later versions of the manual.

6. I have chosen to withhold the names of listserv respondents to preserve confidentiality.

7. Here I draw on a timeline in the AEP's Instructor Manual, as well as on a research paper written by a graduate student who worked with the AEP in the 1990s.

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Appendix A:
Student Survey Questions

1. I am . . . (check √ one) ___ a U.S. resident ___ an international student (F1 visa) ___ other:

2. I am . . . (check √ one)___ a graduate student ___ an undergraduate ___ other:

3. What is your major/area of study? (or What do you plan to major in?) _____

4. What [AEP] course(s) are you currently taking? (Circle)

5. What [AEP] courses have you taken? (Circle all)

6. How many quarters have you taken [AEP] courses? (Circle) 1 2 3 45 6+

7. What do you think should be the focus of [AEP] courses?

Rank from 1 to 5 (1 = most important; 5 = least important.)

___Grammar ___Listening/Speaking ___Reading ___Vocabulary ___Writing

8. What do you need help with most in your classes? **Check (√) up to 4**

_____ speaking: oral presentations

_____ lecture listening/listening comprehension

_____ speaking: participating in class/group discussions

_____ reading speed and comprehension

_____ speaking: pronunciation

____ study and/or research skills

_____ writing: developing ideas and arguments (content)

_____ vocabulary: oral and written

_____ writing: grammar, sentence structure and punctuation

_____ writing: organization

_____ **other**: _____

9. What **types of writing** do you most need to practice for your other classes? **Check (√) 3**

_____ business letters

_____ class notes

_____ creative stories, poems, etc.

_____ interpreting / analyzing texts

_____ laboratory reports

_____ personal responses to reading

_____ persuasive writing

_____ project proposals

_____ research papers

_____ **other**: _____

10. What parts of your AEP courses have been **most** helpful?

11. What parts of the AEP courses have **not** been as helpful?

12. Other comments/questions: (changes / suggestions for our program, etc.)

Appendix B:
Student Interview Outline

1) Background Information
- a. What is your family and language background?
- b. Where are you in your studies?
- c. How are you feeling currently?

2) History at [NGU]
- a. Which courses were easiest/ most challenging for you?
- b. Which assignments were most challenging?
- c. Overall strengths, weaknesses, and areas of growth over time
- d. What did instructors/programs do that helped you? (How can an instructor support [AEP] students?)
- e. What other resources helped you?

3) [AEP]
- a. History- Which courses have you taken? When?
- b. What do you remember most? (about program and about individual courses)
- c. Specific skills you found useful/not useful for your other classes
- d. What did you think before/during/after course sequence? (about requirement, about courses, about self as learner)

4) Curriculum specifics- How important have the following been for you?
- a. Grammar (What helps you improve?)
- b. Writing (Has your writing improved over time? How/Why? How do you know?)
- c. Academic vocabulary

5) How do you think the [AEP] (and the university) might better support ESL students?

Appendix C:
Faculty/TA (Non-AEP) Online Survey

1. With which department or program on campus are you affiliated?

2. Which of the following best describes your position at the AEP: Teaching Associate (TA); Faculty; Administrator or Advisor; Instructional Consultant

   Other:

3. Based on your experience, approximately how many of your students would be classified as "ESL" or "non-native speakers"?

4. Of the skills that are most important for success in your class, in which of these areas do ESL students need the most support? (please select up to 4 from the list below)

   lecture listening/listening comprehension
   reading speed and comprehension
   writing: developing ideas and arguments (content)
   writing: grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation
   writing: organization
   speaking: oral presentations
   speaking: participating in class/small group discussions
   speaking: pronunciation
   study and/or research skills
   vocabulary: oral and written
   Other:

5. (Instructors only): What forms of assessment do you use **most commonly** in your courses (choose up to 3)

   Exams / Quizzes: Multiple choice and short answer
   Exams / Quizzes: Long response and/or essay
   Short writing assignments (1-3 pages)
   Longer writing assignments (4 or more pages)
   Journals
   Projects and/or Presentations
   Other:

6. What strategies do you use (or are aware of your department using) to support ESL students' work in the classroom?

7. What ways have you and/or your department/organization found to support students **outside** the classroom?

8. Do you have any recommendations for how the needs of ESL students might be better addressed **inside** and/or **outside** your department?

9. Do you have any comments on the clarity or content of this survey?

Literature Circles Go to College

Ronna J. Levy

ABSTRACT: In basic writing classrooms and scholarship, reading too often remains invisible; neither research nor established practice provides tangible activities to support reading and connect it to writing. This article documents a search for structured, scaffolded, low-stakes reading activities, a search that moves off the college campus and into the elementary classroom where reading is more commonly taught. It is in this classroom space that Harvey Daniels's Literature Circles have evolved, and they offer a model for helping students engage in and experience reading as a process that supports and complements writing. The article posits Literature Circles, a student-centered and collaborative approach to reading used primarily in the lower grades, as a methodology that can offer college-level, basic-writing students an inventory of reading strategies for entering and navigating a text, initiating textual discussions, deepening comprehension of and connection to reading, and expanding the experience of writing.

KEYWORDS: developmental reading; literature circles; basic writing; K-12; pedagogy; collaborative learning; scaffolding

One fall semester in my developmental reading and writing classroom, we were reading James McBride's *The Color Of Water*, a text I thought was fairly accessible and enjoyable. I assigned chapters to read and expected the students to come to class ready for a discussion. Standing in the front of the room, I asked a question. No one made a move, not even an uncomfortable "Don't call on me" kind of look. Nothing. A thin, blonde, denim-jacket wearing young man in the front row complained that the book was hard because, he believed, the characters were speaking in a foreign language. Also in the front row was Larissa, a young Russian woman who was hard of hearing but could read my lips. Larissa was always prepared and ready to answer my questions but when she did, none of the other students could understand her. A young African-American woman always sat against the wall in the back row and she, too, was always prepared. She told me she liked the book. Unfortunately, she routinely walked in with a bagel and a carton of Tropicana thirty minutes late—just about the same time I usually gave up on a class discussion, adjusted my plans, and had students work on drafts or do free writing. Always sitting in the last row, tilting his chair back against the wall and turning his face up to the ceiling, Jero let me know he

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was repeating the class because he did not do schoolwork, did not want to be in school, and was only attending so his parents could keep him on their health insurance.

Desperate to get the students to read, I gave easy reading quizzes with straightforward factual questions such as, "Who is old man Shilsky? Who is Gladys? Where did Ruth's mother die?" When they arrived on time for class, my readers completed the quizzes; the rest of the students received zero after zero. If I could not get my college students to read the assigned pages and answer direct questions, how were we supposed to hold reading-based conversations and write reading-based essays? What I discovered was that students wanted me to stand in the front of the room and tell them the story. I was becoming jaded by their familiar behaviors: groaning when I assigned homework or forgetting it had been assigned; putting their heads on their desks signaling boredom; entering class late with music seeping through their ear buds and bumping fists as they walked to their seats; or engaging in what Sizer calls the "conspiracy for the least," where students agree to "behave as long as teachers require very little of them" (qtd. in Shor 142). Frustrated with my students and myself, I needed to find another way to conduct my class, another way to engage the students in the texts and subsequent discussions. But this default, teacher-centered pedagogy was all I knew.

We know that under-prepared or unmotivated students are not well served through traditional lectures and teacher-centered classrooms. Believing that knowledge is socially constructed, we create active, student-centered, and collaborative classrooms. We teach writing as a process, guiding students by using our catalogue of structured, scaffolded, low-stakes writing activities and peer-review sessions. The problem with this approach is that, too often, we assume that students know how to read actively, that reading has already been taught in the primary grades and therefore does not need to be the focus of our writing classes. We expect students to be able to assume the stance of experienced readers. But many basic writers are also basic readers, who need the same structured methodologies of scaffolded, low-stakes, and collaborative activities for the reading process as they do for the writing process.

Many developmental students, like many traditional students, see their course texts as information to study or memorize; thus, they remain both intellectually and personally separated from course materials, including their own writing. Absent is the student as reader. If the act of revision situates writers as readers of their own work (Berthoff), and if students are removed from experiencing their own writing as readers—if they approach their work exclusively as writers and not as readers—how can they effectively

revise? For the composition teacher laboring without tangible reference to activities for developing reading in the basic writing classroom, reading remains essentially invisible. The basic writer and the basic writing teacher are left separated from the role of reading in learning to write; they are left searching for what to do.

Chance led me to a new idea for a literacy model that I might adapt for use in my integrated basic reading and writing classroom when my eleven-year-old nephew told me about an activity called Literature Circles. Responding to my inquiry—What are you doing in English class?—he explained how he had to read a story and complete a worksheet for homework. Then in class, he would sit in a circle with a few classmates and discuss the story—exactly what I wanted to see in my college classroom. He was in the sixth grade, dialoguing with his peers about a book. How could I get my college basic reading and writing students to replicate the textual discussions that my nephew was having in the sixth grade?

My own search for structured, scaffolded, low-stakes reading activities took me off the college campus and out of composition scholarship and back into the elementary classroom where reading is a focus of teaching. It is in this classroom space where I found Harvey Daniels's Literature Circles, a methodology for helping students engage in and experience reading as a process in the basic writing classroom.

Evaluating Student Needs at the College Level: Is Reading Even a Problem?

Reading is becoming more of a focus in the field of composition, but its existence in the conversation remains inconsistent. For instance, Linda Adler-Kassner and Heidi Estrem note, "While reading pedagogy within the composition literature is not particularly well-developed, 'critical reading' is one of the primary headings of the WPA Outcomes Statement"(37). Still, we do find within the scholarship serious exploration of the place of reading in learning to write, the types of reading most effective in the writing classroom, and reading as critical thinking for writing students.[1] The voices within the academy, however, are not as loud as those outside the academy, where many stakeholders passionately express their concerns with reading in the form of national reading movements, community book clubs, celebrity book clubs such as Oprah Winfrey's, and government surveys and reports.

Most of the scholarship in reading at the college level remains in the shadow (or perhaps in the service) of writing. As recently as 2009, Diane

DeVido Tetreault and Carol Center comment, "As first-year composition teachers, we wholeheartedly agree that this reality—students' lack of experience as critical readers of difficult texts—is one that composition teachers too often ignore" (45). Tetreault and Center discuss reading strategies of experienced readers and argue, "Such reading strategies are routinely discussed in reading pedagogy, but much of this scholarship is housed in the discipline of education rather than English studies, often with a focus on K-12" (46). Likewise, in her 2003 book *Intertexts: Reading Pedagogy in College Writing Classrooms*, Marguerite Helmers points out that only "a handful of articles on reading pedagogy appeared in the major journals of composition studies between 1980 and 1999" (7). "The act of reading," she proclaims, "is not part of the common professional discourse in composition studies" (4). She also points out that most of the reading research has been supported by the International Reading Association (IRA), "an organization to which most college professors do not belong. Furthermore, the publishers who address the teaching of reading as a process tend to focus on the market for Grades K-12...." (4). In his 2007 review, "Learning to Read as Continuing Education," David Joliffe echoes Helmers' earlier observation, "Reading is a concept largely absent from the theory and practice of college composition" (473). This absence may be due to a presumption that college students can read; we simply expect they can move smoothly through literature interpretation and expository writing. But we quickly discover, as David Jolliffe and Allison Harl note in their 2008 study examining the reading lives of their college students, that "As they read, students need to be walked through demonstrations of mature, committed adult readers who draw connections to the world around them, both historical and current and to other texts" (613). Our students read passively, sliding over the words, missing subtle nuances, and privileging personal narrative in place of the broader connections we anticipate.

Our classroom experiences with our basic writers' reading proficiencies, along with the variety of national reports on reading practices of older students, should remind us that reading is important in college and beyond. One such report, the ACT *National Curriculum Survey*, measures the "educational practices and expectations" among middle, high, postsecondary (teachers of credit-bearing college courses), and remedial teachers in both public and private institutions across the country. ACT notes, "There are misalignments between postsecondary instructors' expectations and high school teachers' evaluations of student readiness" (5). With respect to reading, the discrepancies are stunning. While high school teachers, postsecondary, and remedial

teachers agree about the importance of reading, there is strong disagreement about how prepared the students are. Here is but one example: 30% of high school teachers feel as if all, or nearly all, of their students "meet the required level of reading comprehension for students beginning entry-level college courses in [their] discipline" (42). On the other hand, 4% of postsecondary teachers feel as if all or nearly all of their students meet "expectations for the reading comprehension of incoming students in [their] discipline" (42).

But the news is not all bad. An increase in literary reading has been observed in the public sector, as revealed by the NEA *Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*. The question querying reading practices of adults and the corresponding responses reveals, "In 2008, 54 percent of adults indicated they had read a book during the previous 12 months that was not required for work or school, a 2 percentage point decline from 2002. However, the percentage of adults reading 'literature' (defined as plays, poetry, or novels) increased from 47 percent of adults in 2002 to 50 percent in 2008. Increases in literary reading occurred across virtually all demographic groups" (29). It may come as a surprise to some critics of traditional college-aged readers which population saw the sharpest increase in reading: "For young adults (18–24), literary reading increased at the sharpest rate relative to other age groups. Between 2002 and 2008, their literary reading rate grew by nine percentage points, to 52 percent" (31). Even with this seemingly good news, another NEA report, *To Read or Not to Read*, opens on a foreboding note:

• Americans are spending less time reading.
• Reading comprehension skills are eroding.
• These declines have serious civic, social, cultural, and economic implications (7).

Much of the academic research echoes these less optimistic strains about eroding reading skills: "Generally speaking, reading is not taught beyond the third grade in most schools. If a student has not mastered reading comprehension skills by fourth grade, chances are that s/he will struggle with learning in grades four through twelve" (Forget et al. 3). In the developmental English class, we do not expect to instruct our students in phonics, decoding, word recognition, and vocabulary (outside of discourse-specific vocabulary). We presume our students have developed these proficiencies during their K-12 years and are prepared for the challenges and demands of college-level work; we labor under the premise that simply teaching writing is demanding enough. Furthermore, our students are digitally socialized, nimbly navigating an electronic terrain as bloggers, tweeters, FB friends, webpage creators, uploaders, downloaders, and gamers. They reside in the rapid and

abbreviated world of text messages, IM, and iChat; master communication instantaneous and spontaneous; interact, engage, and "graz[e] through huge amounts of information" (Plafrey and Gasser 243) in new configurations of multitasking. Yet, no matter how many gadgets they can manipulate and how deft the language play, Marisa A. Klages and J. Elizabeth Clark remind us, "While many basic writers come to us today with the fluency of digital natives, they still have the same need for learning writing and critical thinking skills that has traditionally marked basic writers" (33). The conclusion is clear: We need to expand reading research and develop reading pedagogies for the basic writing classroom.

The Realities of Reading in a Developmental Urban Community College Classroom

At my urban community college, approximately 70% of the entering students are considered not "college ready." Their scores on the reading and writing placement exams indicate they need to strengthen their competence in both reading and writing to prepare for our regular college English sequence. Many of these developmental reading and writing students have come from the city's public high schools where, as I have observed, they often sit in crowded classrooms with over forty students of various proficiencies for a forty-minute English class. For much of their schooling, they have been indoctrinated into an autocratic classroom. They follow the rules of the Initiate-Respond-Evaluate (IRE) classroom (Mehan) which situates the students as unknowing hunters in search of valued answers and the teacher as all-knowing keeper of meaning. Students often maintain an efferent stance, as their purpose for reading is to take away information they need to know now or use at a later time (Rosenblatt). From their perspective, reading is impersonal, an activity for gathering information, enacting what Marcia Dickson observes as a characteristic of a basic reader who believes the text "serves only as one-way communication from author to reader. . . . [The text's] purpose is to give information, nothing more" (n. pag.). Students read the chapter and answer the questions on the last page; read the chapter and get quizzed; or don't read the chapter and the teacher will explain it anyway. Reading in this manner leaves little concern for fluency, analysis, or comprehension of a text as a whole. Students see reading as a linear experience, not a recursive process that requires them to press through complexities, make connections, and identify relationships within a larger context. Nor do they trust themselves as readers to stumble through uncertainty and allow a text

to eventually unfold. It is more common for them to give up, say they are confused, and wait for the teacher to tell them what the reading is about and what they should think. In this way, students are essentially voiceless. Especially for the most inexperienced readers, these programmed patterns of response often result in assuming two powerless positions: 1) foregrounding the text with its "correct" answers as artifacts to be studied, disembodied entities containing information for tests, and 2) expecting the teacher to reveal the one and only correct meaning of a text. For many students, this programmed disengagement has been the level at which they have learned to read and, perhaps, is all that was ever asked of them.

The mid-level developmental English course I teach is an integrated reading and writing course officially titled "Developing Fluency in Reading and Writing," but nicknamed "Basic Writing." Even though our departmental philosophy supports the integration of reading and writing and essays are reading-based, my colleagues and I have always considered this class a writing class. This is not the only paradox. The end-of-term assessment tool is a writing and reading portfolio consisting of two reading-based essays (an in-class essay and a teacher-guided, multiple-draft essay) and a departmental writing and reading exam, consisting of an on-the-spot reading accompanied by a dozen short-answer questions; however, the University's multiple-choice reading entrance exam, which is also considered in exiting the course, trumps our departmental reading exam. In other words, students who do not pass our English department's short-answer reading comprehension measure but do pass the University's multiple-choice comprehension measure are allowed to advance. Thus, teachers and students receive a mixed message regarding the institution's views on reading. After all, does a passing score on a multiple-choice test really mean that students are competent college-level readers? This multiple-choice exam largely reinforces the impression that reading comprehension consists of employing strategies for short term gain, for instance: skimming a passage, reading the questions, returning to the passage to find the answers; reading one question at a time and pecking out answers from the text; using common sense to eliminate one or more answers, greatly improving chances of getting the correct answer; and, of course, old-fashioned guessing, leaving reading reduced to chance. More detrimental, this multiple-choice exam does not reveal information about the students' abilities and struggles, and what specific proficiencies they need to develop.

At the same time that students are enrolled in developmental English courses, they are taking college-level content courses, requiring that they

read textbooks and understand the discourse of the disciplines; the teachers of content courses are similarly short changed by the multiple-choice exam, which is an inaccurate gauge of students' actual abilities. The professors of content courses expect college students to possess the characteristics of experienced readers who can negotiate a text; extract, organize, and prioritize; and synthesize information on their own, without scaffolding and without sustained assistance, meeting college expectations. The preferred pedagogy is often lecture and reading done at home followed by quizzes and/or multiple-choice tests. And although professors may not admit it, "Students can actually pass exams if they come to the lectures and take (or buy) good notes, whether or not they have read the assigned material" (Jolliffe and Harl 600).

Political pressure keeps outcomes-based assessment ubiquitous: we quantitatively measure students' and schools' successes, measurements that we as teachers know do not necessarily take into account differences in classroom structures, student populations, or areas of study. Also missing from percentages of how many students pass a course or stay in school is the reflective practitioner, the teacher-researcher whose classroom narratives present humanistic and rich qualitative data about students, curriculum, and pedagogy (Cochran-Smith and Lytle; Dewey;Hubbard and Power; Two-Year College English Association). How ironic that it was not the quantitative data, rather it was the qualitative data, the myriad empirical studies of Literature Circles that compelled me to adopt this methodology.

Literature Circles: A Process Approach to Reading as Meaning Making

Moving students closer to a place where there is a more sustained and meaningful relationship between reader and text, where uncovering or recalling specific information is not the primary focus, and where meaning is continually constructed is a challenge in the developmental reading and writing classroom. Literature Circles, structured discussion groups, provide students with opportunities to discuss, respond, and reflect upon the reading material. Informed by psycholinguistics and rooted in reader-response theory, Literature Circles cast students in the role of active participant, not "passive recipient" (Rosenblatt 4).

In the twenty-plus years that grade schools have been employing this methodology, many variations have been documented. Harvey Daniels, the name most often associated with Literature Circles, explains the practice as small structured discussion groups of ideally four to five students who stay

together through the reading of a whole text. The group of students discusses sections of the text during class time for about thirty minutes on a regular and predictable basis.

Chiefly, Literature Circles scaffold transactional reading. David Wood, Jerome Bruner, and Gail Ross, who studied young children working with building blocks, define scaffolding as a means to facilitate a task beyond the students' capacity. Twenty-eight years later, Derek Holton and David Clarke, using mathematics as an example, expanded the definition of scaffolding with the idea of empowering the learner as the most significant criteria. They explain scaffolding as "support[ing] the immediate construction of knowledge" and "provid[ing] a basis for independent learning" (131). In Literature Circles, the critical and analytical reading we would like to cultivate is scaffolded by role worksheets, which provide a deliberate point of access to the text, an immediate purpose for reading other than fact-finding, and support for students' personal responses, with the overall aim of facilitating a self-generating and self-sustaining multi-perspective collaborative conversation. In fact, we could also say that the Literature Circle itself is a form of reciprocal scaffolding (Holton and Clarke), with students collaboratively helping each other.

Students complete their role worksheets as homework or during silent reading time in class and arrive in the circle ready to dialogue. In each circle session, students perform a different role, which represent the multiple perspectives that experienced readers naturally take. The role of discussion director is the part of us that is always questioning as we read, leading the directions that our textual exploration takes. The literary luminary is the reader in us who identifies memorable passages to reread, analyze, or share. As content connector, we make associations and connect a text with our experiences, our community, and other texts. Examining a character through dialogue, behavior, and actions places us in the role of character coordinator. When we encounter and define new words in a reading, we are word wizards. As summarizer, we recap the storyline(s) as we go. A group sheet can be created for the collective findings and a reflection sheet can be created to capture the students' individual reflections on their reading experiences. The various roles and role sheets engage students at the level of their unique circumstances, prior knowledge, and experiences, providing a context as students build upon their own knowledge with new information and perspectives and promoting comprehension by encouraging students to become personally involved with the text. Exposing students to the diverse lenses through which a text can be viewed not only adds to their understanding,

but also challenges them to reflect, reconsider, and re-evaluate what they know and to respect what they do not know.

As scaffolding tools, the different roles provide diverse access points to enter and discuss a text, the way more experienced readers engage with a reading. At the same time, students are building sophisticated skills, such as close reading and analyzing, and advancing complex thinking, curiosity, and student-generated inquiry—all vital proficiencies for college-level learning. Additionally, students are further developing oral language skills as they share and negotiate their experiences with peers. This malleable modality has infinite possibilities depending on the text as well as the teacher's and students' creativity, patience, and persistence.

The robust literature on the pedagogical model of Literature Circles has shown that K-12 students respond to its opportunities for self-investment.[2] As described by Daniels, the model of peer-led literature discussion groups evolved out of the elementary school classrooms in the 1980s, pioneered by Becky Abraham Searle (role sheets) and Karen Smith (small groups of students discussing their independent reading). The practice morphed and expanded in different contexts and for different purposes. For instance, Jeremy Harste, Kathy Short, and Carolyn Burke practiced authoring cycles, where groups of students discussed their own story drafts with their peers, and soon expanded this same peer-discussion model for studying other class texts. Further classroom research into this student-led, independent reading model followed.[3] Out of these experiences of collaborative learning, reader-response criticism, and independent reading grew the belief that "Literature Circles have the potential to transform power relationships in the classroom, to make kids both more responsible for and more in control of their own education, to unleash life long readers, and to nurture a critical, personal stance toward ideas" (Daniels 31).

In spite of these advantages, college instructors may resist experimentation with the Literature Circle model, arguing that it lacks sophistication, compartmentalizes reading, disrupts fluency of comprehension and discussion, and may make students dependent on the role sheets. Some may also argue that for college students, employing an adolescent classroom activity and slowing down the reading process is impractical in a twelve- or fifteen-week semester with so much other material to cover. First, we need to resist labeling "unsophisticated" reading practices as immature or seeing scaffolding as "compartmentalizing." The developmental reader is an emergent reader still gaining the proficiencies necessary for rigorous college-level work. The Literature Circle model is predicated on fostering textual interaction

and thoughtful discussion. The purpose of scaffolding is to reduce tasks into manageable parts to lessen students' frustration and disappointment when tackling challenging material and instill a sense of control over their learning. Developing this sense of control will certainly consume class time, but in the end, it is time well spent. Teachers may also worry that students will become reliant on role worksheets (Wolsey). Like training wheels on a bicycle, the worksheets are temporary devices. Routine implementation of role worksheets will naturally result in a familiarity and comfort and will no longer be needed. Daniels exhorts that the sheets should be provisional and transitional devices. Some instructors may believe that at the college level—where students are expected to read a variety of texts, determine what is significant, and discuss at an in-depth level—the small groups of developmental students will not be able to accomplish any of these tasks without the leadership of a teacher. Teachers are not absent in this model. Rather, the self-directedness of the circle discussion should be balanced with teacher guidance (Daniels). Teachers can move in and out of many roles[4] within the context of the circle dynamics, individual students' needs, the text being used, and the whole class. Literature Circles have been successfully adapted for use with textbooks and other non-fiction materials, particularly in science (Miller et al.; Straits and Nichols), social studies (McCall; Stix), non-fiction, and textbooks (Stein and Beed; Wilfong). Teachers are experimenting with numerous variations of Literature Circles both in content and text. As we search for effective classroom practices for developing reading at the college level, the Literature Circle is a modality that deserves consideration; it offers students an invaluable inventory of reading strategies for navigating a text and initiating textual discussions.

Motivating and Empowering Readers

As we have learned from John Dewey, engaging in a real experience as opposed to sitting outside an experience is what stimulates thinking and reflection. To that end, successful educational approaches are those that "give pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking, or the intentional noting of connections; learning naturally results" (154). Never having used Literature Circles or even felt comfortable doing group work, I forced myself to begin using this method the first week of school; if I did not dive in, I knew I would back out. My first attempt using Literature Circles was a fall semester in my mid-level developmental reading and writing class. The twenty-one students had not

passed either the reading or writing placement measures. Only a handful of them were continuing students who had moved from the lower level of developmental sequence; the rest were incoming freshmen. The class was reading *The Color Of Water* (I had decided to try it again using the new methodology). I copied the role worksheets (Appendix A) and a group sheet (where one student chosen by the group each week would record the group's findings during their discussions) as presented in Daniels's books. However, I made an initial change and renamed the Literature Circles "Reading Circles" and role worksheets "task sheets." I randomly distributed the task sheets for the first homework assignment. I explained to the students what to do and prayed they would come to class Monday morning prepared. I was surprised when they arrived ready and cynically assumed it was merely first-week best behavior. Students moved into groups without a fuss and I indulged in a split-second fantasy: readers in small circles immersed in a passionate hour-long textual discussion and reuniting as a class to share their findings. But I quickly returned to reality and feared the small-group behaviors I had seen in the past: students who are unprepared; discussions that disintegrate into gossip; and textual talk that turns into text messaging.

True to form, the first few times, students sat in their reading circles, fidgeted with their papers, and waited for someone else to begin. When they spoke, they robotically read their responses, making no eye contact with one another. When I stood near a group, the student speaking would look up from the face-in-the-paper position, looking for approval as if I, all-knowing-grade-giver, had the only eyes and ears in the classroom. After their quick, somewhat mechanical exchanges, usually completed in significantly less than thirty minutes, students would shout, "We're done, Miss."

Yet, the students were reading, responding, and collaborating—albeit hesitantly. I had created a reflection sheet (Appendix B) for all students to complete at the end of each Reading Circle session. These sheets exposed candid feedback about the methodology, the text, and students' reactions to one another. Most importantly, their reflections evidenced shifts in their reading practices and the authenticity of the Reading Circle conversations. Below, I discuss some reflection sheet responses, which highlight how the Reading Circles worked. (Student comments have not been altered for correctness and student names are pseudonyms chosen by each student.) After the midterm, I began taping some of the sessions, particularly when I began to reshape the Reading Circle activity, as described in the next section.

The students' stiff and awkward conversations during the first Reading Circle session do not carry over into their earliest written reflections, which

are mostly marked by enthusiasm. For instance, Kay, a 20-something Puerto Rican man, who commuted over an hour each day from the Bronx because he wanted to get as far away as he could from his neighborhood, writes: "My experience was good. Coming up with questions while reading gave me more insight on what I was reading. Most of the time when I read, I just read on and don't really think about what I'm reading. My specific task [discussion director] made me more interested in the book." His candor affirms what we already know: Students "read on" because the pages are assigned for homework, not because they are engaged or interested. He also admits that his usual stance was not to "think" about what he was reading. I assume Kay equates the word "think" with the idea of "taking control" of his reading. In other words, Kay was probably used to reading that required he know basic information, where the teacher ultimately controlled what needed to be learned about the text. But with the task sheet, Kay had to think in order to create the questions to present to his circle of peers; he had to be in charge and responsible for his own learning and his questions would also influence the learning of the group.

While Kay notes a difference in his reading process, Baby evaluates this new way of reading against her familiar ways of reading: looking for answers. She reports, "These task sheets help me understand the book more. This is a better technique then giving us questions to answer that an average student would just look up, as if the book were reading is a dictionary." She confirms what we know about the common intention of reading: finding answers. I sense a tone of disapproval about this familiar method of reading for answers. On the first day diagnostic, Baby wrote about her desire to be "so focused and dedocated to work." She said she hoped to become a nurse someday. Yet Baby had borrowed my extra copy of the book the first weekend, promising to have the book the following week, which turned into more than half the semester; it wasn't until after Thanksgiving when she finally purchased the book. Nevertheless, she borrowed my book every week and did her best to complete the homework. Both Kay and Baby acknowledge that, guided by their specific task sheets, reading becomes a different event: more purposeful and deliberate, an act no longer strictly linear, an act that demands a deeper level of engagement.

After a few weeks, I noticed the students were more comfortable with each other; I decided to take a risk and "college-up" the Reading Circle experience. I started with the task sheets. Instead of having one role per sheet, they now had four or five, requiring students to engage with the text from a variety of perspectives. I hoped to not only cultivate longer, richer discussions, but

also gently nudge the students to "read broadly and think deeply" as they shifted back and forth among the many moves of the proficient reader (Keene and Zimmerman). The students rose to the challenge. They easily completed the new multi-role task sheet.

Collaborating with peers and constructing meanings through a multiplicity of perspectives supports the social nature of learning, enriches comprehension (Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran; Gilbert; Jewell and Pratt,) and advances the development and construction of meaning and higher order thinking (Ketch; Langer and Close; Peterson and Eeds). Pookie—quiet, studious, and polite, a role model for her two small daughters—writes thoughtful reflections that capture the richness of her encounters with the text via the various roles:

> This week, unlike the other weeks, we were given a worksheet with all the tasks to accomplish. I found this weeks reading more fulfilling because I had to find several things from the reading, which meant, I had to look and analyze everything in the reading. The group discussion this week, I think, was better than past discussions. It was easier to talk about the book because we had to look at it from all aspects. Comparing the one task discussion to the multitask discussion the multitask is better.

Because she uses the word "fulfilling," I assume that, in comparison, her former reading encounters were perfunctory, passive, and unsatisfying; she felt separated from the experience. The multiple roles help Pookie get inside the text through actively reading and "analyz[ing] everything," creating a more fully realized and rewarding experience not just on a personal level, but also on a collaborative level when she met with her peers to discuss the text.

The collaborative structure of the Literature Circles makes it harder for students to retreat, challenges their desire for anonymity, and fights indifference. The role sheets integrate students into the textual experience. They may struggle with self-directed and self-generated textual discussions and resist the decentralizing of authority, but ultimately, the Literature Circle is a democratic forum where power is allowed to move freely. Additionally, this low-stakes practice liberates students from high-stakes anxiety and allows them freedom to take risks and be creative with their responses. Desiree's reflection captured what I hoped would be the heart and soul of the Reading Circle experience in my classes: access to a text; a safe space created within a collaborative classroom; the egalitarianism created within small groups and

the whole class; the tacit permission to openly express distinct responses; and the joy, surprise, and acknowledgement of exposure to the uniqueness of peers' perspective. She says: "The way we interpreted stuff was reflected of our human life. Because it was more understandable that way. Listening to other groups gives you a form of understanding because everyone explains it differently. It a real eye-opener it get ya thinking wow that could have gone that way. It so different from what your yourself see." She recognizes the Reading Circle as a secure space where she and her peers have freedom and power to interpret and share the text from their own perspectives. She also expresses surprise that understandings could be different yet all plausible.

But of course, there was a time or two when not all the students completed the assignment. One instance stands out. Three students came to class with no work. Directed to a few chairs on the side of the room, they were asked to read and complete their task sheets while the rest of the class sat in their Reading Circles in the front of the room. As was the routine, the students (even those who sat by themselves finishing the homework) completed a reflection sheet at the close of the class. On his sheet, John expresses disappointment in himself and the fact that he was not able to be a part of the circle conversations: "Today since I was not able to finish was different. I really didn't enjoy myself as much as when I work in a group. This was something I learned that next time do my work on time. The next time around I hope to be done with my work on time and work with class or group." John knows what he did and finds the consequences unacceptable. He takes ownership of his behavior and claims the authority to change it. He also notes his separation from the community that has evolved, a community he wants to be a part of. All three unprepared students consider the consequences of not doing the homework without offering frivolous excuses. I believe the weekly practice of Reading Circles fosters this sense of agency and responsibility to the collaborative classroom community.

Variations on a Theme: Playing with Literature Circles

After using Reading Circles with McBride's *The Color of Water* for about four weeks, the students were comfortable and chatty and I felt confident enough to shake things up. For one session, I brought Newsprint to class and asked each group to record its responses on the oversized papers, which we would hang around the room. Along with the Newsprint, I offered the groups colored markers and pencils. Like kids in an arts and crafts class, the students fought over which colored marker to use to write their group responses. As

the groups finished discussing and writing, I tacked each piece of Newsprint around the room; each group took turns reading their responses. I began to wrap up the class when Kay, who had become class ringleader, cheerleader, and most passionate participant, waved his hands in the air and chanted, "Hol' up! Hol' up! Put your hands in the a-a-a-y-a-a-a-hhh. Put your Rollies in the -a-a-y-a-a-a-hhh. Read that last line, Miss. You forgot to read that last line." Attempting to wrap up the class, I had not read the last response. Kay caught me. No one was going to be given short shrift: all responses had to be shared. The students had become committed to each other and the Reading Circle as a complete process.

Mixing it up once again, I had each Reading Circle group act as a panel and lead a whole class discussion. I polled students about the one role they wanted; they completed their individual task sheets, discussed the text with their groups, and filled out a group task sheet. I typed up the group responses and made class copies. In the following session, each panel representing one role from the task sheets led a class discussion of its findings. Kay volunteered to emcee the event. He called each group to the front of the classroom, wrote the members' names on the board, introduced each student, distributed the group sheets, and moderated the panel discussions.

Another week, the students took the lead to change things. They wanted to stay together and discuss the reading as a whole class. Their eagerness to discuss the text as a whole group and the passion with which their discussion flowed was, I believe, a direct result of a routine and predictable employment of Reading Circles and the collaborative community that had subsequently flourished. Discussion director questions, literary luminary passages, and content connector findings were bouncing around the room. I turned on the tape recorder.

In the recording, Kay notes McBride's gratitude toward his mother and proclaims appreciation for his own mother, says that he is going to go home and give her a hug, and asks the class if they, too, connect. Svetlana scrunches her face, "I really respectful for other people have really different times. I'm a mother also. She went to put her children to college and did good job. Maybe I can too." Most amazing, however, are the connections Ciano, a young Mexican man, makes. "I am a father and it's a way to think back to what my mother did for me. I used to live in shacks. When I grew up, I hung out on corners. I went to college, dropped out. I think about to respect to another. I think twice about my mother. She used to hit with belts. My mother had pressure like a nail bent. What did Zora say?" Here, Ciano is making a connection to the "nail bent" metaphor in the final paragraph

of Zora Neale Hurston's "How It Feels To Be Colored Me." Noting Ruth McBride's pressure of single-handedly raising her twelve children, Ciano links her experience to that of his own mother and her pressures in raising children; both were like nails "bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail" (246). I wonder if I had asked, in a typical teacher-centered discussion, about the pressure Ruth McBride's felt, would Ciano have made a connection between Ruth McBride and his own mother and Zora Neale Hurston? Maybe. Would he have articulated both mothers' experiences using Hurston's metaphor had he not engaged in a Reading Circle and had the task of content connector? Probably not.

As the recorded discussion continues to unfold, Kanatian, a shy, quiet African American girl whom I don't think ever spoke during class discussions makes a comment about McBride's subtitle: *A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother*. Ciano again erupts, "I'm a blaxican," making a connection with Richard Rodriguez's *Los Angeles Times* piece, "It's Not All Black and White," where he urges people to answer race questions on official documents by checking "yes" to every box, and as an example, describes a young girl of mixed black and Mexican heritage who calls herself a "blaxican." Ciano connects to McBride's mixed heritage. Later, I learn that Ciano is married to a white Irish woman and his children, too, are bi-racial. Ciano's connections between the different texts and between texts and his life exemplify deep comprehension. Research tells us that comprehension involves not simply what students know about a text, but what they are thinking about a text. Ciano's ideas were stimulated by his background knowledge along with personal and textual connections. These meta-cognitive strategies emerged through a routine commitment to Reading Circle discussions and task sheets. All the students were continually engaged in making compelling connections that genuinely concerned them.

Putting It All Together: Reading Circles and Writing for Assessment

Research points to the fact that reading and writing are connected; they overlap and share many cognitive processes for constructing meaning (Shanahan). Robert J. Tierney and P. David Pearson posit that reading and writing processes are similar, as both are means of composing meaning. But developmental readers, for whom the reading process is often a high-stakes enterprise of hunting for pre-determined, "correct" answers, do not always understand reading as a process, a dynamic activity similar to writing. Nor do they fully grasp that readers are meant to construct meaning as they

comprehend and interpret a text similar to the way writers construct meaning as they engage in the process of writing a text (Spivey). As an apparatus that supports reading as a process, the Literature Circle can serve as a middle ground connecting the two, integrating both reading and writing as a means for interaction with a text and the construction of meaning.

The Literature Circle discussion supports reading as a drafting process similar to the drafting process in writing. Through collaboration and dialogic inquiries, my students' reading was fostered as they constructed, negotiated, and renegotiated meaning; clarified, supported, and defended interpretations; gained awareness of new perspectives; returned to the text and pushed past comfortable spaces. The task sheets I provided offered students a plan, activating prior knowledge and narrowing goals into specific tasks as they interacted personally with the text. Student responses on task sheets were first reads of the text, similar to a first draft of an essay. The Reading Circle group discussions offered my students an environment to revise meaning and monitor their work. A structured reflection sheet supported my students' sense of agency as they pondered, refined, and extended their responses to discussions, revising their ideas. In the circle discussions, students had to collectively construct knowledge for an audience of their peers and, as a result, their acts of reading moved beyond the space where texts are vessels from which students extract, spew, and promptly forget information and became acts of dynamic composition.

The reading-writing connection could not have more palpable than it was during our preparations for the high-stakes midterm and final exam essays required for assessment. I positioned Reading Circles as a pre-requisite for the students' reading-based exam essays. The midterm exam was an in-class essay I designed based on the text we were reading in class. As was our routine, students completed task sheets on the reading in preparation for the in-class essay. The group and whole class discussions were lively and students were excited to share their ideas. I watched as students actually took notes on their classmates' ideas.

In his reflection, JJ explains how the Reading Circles connected his reading to the writing he would be doing: "It helps a lot when we prepare for the essay in class. It makes things very clear and makes the essay more easy to write. Doing all the task sheets helps you think and gives you answers. It is like support for our essay. We won't be stuck writing the essay because we have all this back up work that will guide us through the essay." He identifies the task sheets as a way to get him thinking and ready for the upcoming essay, subtly equating them to pre-writing or a first draft. He also expresses the security

of having the task sheet information, which would guide him and not leave him stranded with nothing to write. Like many of the students, however, JJ still approached the task sheets as answers. This thinking is deeply rooted, perhaps especially during exam times. I often saw students begin to write, stop suddenly, and ask me," Is this right, Miss?"

Crystal also found the group and class discussion beneficial for preparing for the midterm essay. She realized the discussions had given her the opportunity to grow or revise her ideas:

> As I sat in my group, we discuss what the author is saying. I read through the chapter but never took the time to visualize the quote so I would say it help me, now I have more information for my in class essay tomorrow to discuss. By me listening to other groups it help me to build information on my essay. Every time we discuss it helps me to get a better understanding of how I think among my peers.

Most astonishing is her closing remark. She had begun to examine and evaluate her own ideas in the context, not of the teacher's viewpoint, but of her peers' ideas. The place of authority had changed from the teacher to a self among peers as Crystal took control of her process.

These reflections demonstrate how the Reading Circle experience shifted my students' perspective by way of the tangible connections they were making between their reading, discussions, and what they needed to write for their in-class essay. So often, students substitute summary for analytical discussions of ideas. Finally, they seemed to grasp the concept of developing ideas through interactive textual analysis.

Overall, the students did quite well on their midterm essays. Midterm essays were cross-read in my portfolio cohort, where teachers use a rubric to provide written feed back but no grades (letter grades are given only at the end of the term). My students received positive comments from readers. Their essays were rich with information about and responses to the characters, events, and quotations from the text.

The strategies for textual interpretation fostered throughout the semester in the students' Reading Circles were further exhibited in our class discussions of the final exam reading selection. The final exam consisted of four short-answer questions and one essay question based on a short reading. Students got the reading in advance, were encouraged to annotate and discuss the reading with peers during class time (without teacher interference), and brought their annotated copies of the reading to the exam. Like

they did for each reading, the students completed task sheets based on the final exam text. I typed their seventeen discussion director questions and four literary luminary passages. I did not pair up or group people together because, by this time, the students had formed a community. They sat in a few haphazardly created circles, talking back and forth within their circles and yelling over to others. Every so often, Kay would step to the board and write down what he thought was an important point as the students chatted, working diligently to answer the discussion director questions and explicate the literary luminary passages. I had seen an advance copy of the final exam. The similarities between the students' abilities to read a text and articulate salient questions and the actual teacher-created questions astounded me. My students were able to anticipate the kinds of essay prompts that would appear on the exam with a great deal of accuracy and showed a high level of competence in extracting the significant passages, concepts, and supporting data, which would allow them to respond more fully on the exam. The task sheets generated a level of discourse that served as groundwork for students' formal written work, "provid[ing] a format for students to rehearse the sorts of arguments that ultimately underlie successful written literary analysis and interpretation" (Knoeller 12). Their overall results affirmed that the Reading Circle model should be in the catalogue of low-stakes but highly effective reading activities for developmental English college students. Out of the twenty students in my developmental reading and writing class, 75% of the students passed the college's reading placement exam. Four students advanced to Freshman English, fifteen bypassed the next level of developmental English and advanced to a test-prep intervention for the institution's exit exam, five advanced to the next level of developmental English, and only one student had to repeat the course. In the two developmental reading and writing classes I taught prior to this particular class, I noted only a 30% and 50% pass rate on the reading placement exam.

The principles supported by Literature Circles exemplify best practices in reading such as the seven strategies for reading comprehension (Pearson et al.)[5]; the thirteen core understandings about reading and learning to read (Braunger and Lewis)[6]; and the five characteristics essential to effective writing (Tierney and Pearson).[7] This model for collaborative reading is recognized as successful practice in the elementary school classroom, and its positive academic and literacy benefits have been well documented. Students have been found to have a deeper and more critical understanding of texts (DaLie; Dillon; Samway and Whang) and an increased motivation and engagement in reading and discussing texts (Holt and Bell; Stein and Beed). Research on bilingual

elementary students (Martinez-Roldan and Lopez-Robertson) reveals that, when guided with Literature Circles, bilingual children are able to express themselves and engage in rich textual conversations. More recently, studies have focused on using Literature Circles with adult EFL learners in Taiwan (Sai and Hsu), adult L2 learners in Malaysia (Yahya and Rahim), and adult ESL learners in the States (Kim). Preliminary findings suggest the Literature Circle is a promising approach for discussion and comprehension of texts among these populations. And studies are beginning to emerge about the use of online Literature Circles (Walters; Wolsey). Furthermore, in addition to the literacy gains, participating in a Literature Circle has been identified as a valuable tool for special needs students, augmenting their self-perceptions as readers, their self-esteem, and their self-confidence (Blum et al.; Pitman). From a sociological perspective, participating in Literature Circles has been found to positively impact the social and leadership skills of a cohort of at-risk elementary school students (Sportsman et al.).

With all this said, simply employing Literature Circles in the developmental English college classroom does not mean students will abandon their multiple-choice test taking strategies. In fact, they may still approach reading as a fact-finding expedition and each text as a discreet enterprise disengaged from other texts, themselves, and their lived experiences. Literature Circles may not guarantee higher order thinking, deeper comprehension, and better scores on standardized exams. Students may not necessarily be motivated to do reading assignments. But we need to provide our basic writing students with a framework and apparatus to nurture an affirmative relationship with texts, enable them to develop a sense of agency, and invite them to engage in grand conversations with a text and each other (Peterson and Eeds 10-14). How Literature Circles are adapted for a community college developmental English classroom depends on a teacher's commitment to and understanding of the model, a continuous routine effort along with a flexible implementation, and recognition of the needs and requirements of the students. Teaching this particular class for so many years offered me the experience, confidence, and knowledge to adapt the model while not losing sight of the overall objectives and demands of the course.

As we learn from the NEA report *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence*, reading and literacy levels are linked to teenage drop-out rates, employment, and wages. Literacy is also linked to involvement in social and civic activities such as attending theater, concerts, museums, and sporting events; exercising and health; volunteering; and voting. Most developmental reading and writing students are already situated on the

fringes of college, often denied entrance into credit-bearing courses until standardized tests are passed, or placed in a continuing education setting with contingent faculty until all standardized measures are successfully completed. These students are, of course, most at risk to drop out of school. If we want students to engage in their communities and society, we first have to engage them in the classroom, keep them in school, and see them graduate. Research has shown that students who are actively engaged in the classroom, with their course work, their peers, and their teachers are more likely to grow academically and socially. We want to move our students to a place where they are involved in, responsible for, and in control of their learning both inside and outside the classroom. The Literature Circle is one apparatus for engaging students in reading and writing, one method for affecting life-long literacy.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Bartholomae and Petrosky; Charlton; Deming; Dickson; Henry; Morrow; Salvatori; and Zamel. Although these are but a few names of the many who have for years been investigating reading in the composition classroom, reading still needs to be a greater part of the conversation in basic writing and composition studies.

2. For a sampling of classroom studies see Angeletti; Sportsman et al.; Gilbert; King, Raphael, and McMahon; Samway et al. and others mentioned throughout text.

3. Seminal works include Hill, Johnson, and Schlick Noe; Peterson and Eeds; Schlick Noe and Johnson; and Short, Harste, and Burke.

4. For a discussion and illustration of the various and multi-level teacher roles in Literature Circles see "'Teacher Watching': Examining Teacher Talk in Literature Circles," Short, Kaufman, Kaser, Kahn, and Crawford.

5. Seven Reading Comprehension Strategies: 1. Activating background knowledge to make connections between new and known information. 2. Questioning the text. 3. Drawing inferences. 4. Determining importance. In the sea of words that is any text, readers must continually sort through and prioritize information. 5. Creating mental images. 6. Repairing understanding when meaning breaks down. 7. Synthesizing information.

6. Thirteen core understandings about reading and learning to read: 1. Reading is a construction of meaning from text. It is an active, cognitive, and affective process. 2. Background knowledge and prior experience are critical to the reading process. 3. Social interaction is essential at all stages of reading development. 4. Reading and writing are reciprocal processes; development of one enhances the other. 5. Reading involves complex thinking. 6. Environments rich in literacy experiences, resources, and models facilitate reading development. 7. Engagement in the reading task is key in successfully learning to read and developing as a reader. 8. Children's understandings of print are not the same as adults' understandings. 9. Children develop phonemic awareness and knowledge of phonics through a variety of literacy opportunities, models, and demonstrations. 10. Readers learn productive strategies in the context of real reading. 11. Students learn best when teachers employ a variety of strategies to model and demonstrate reading knowledge, strategy, and skills. 12. Students need many opportunities to read, read, read. 13. Monitoring the development of reading processes is vital to student success.

7. The five characteristics are planning, drafting, aligning, revising, and monitoring.

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Appendix A: Role Worksheets (renamed Task Sheets)

DISCUSSION DIRECTOR

Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group might want to discuss about this part of the book. Don't worry about small details: Your task is to help people in your group talk over the big ideas in the reading and share reactions. Notice what you are wondering/asking yourself while you are reading and write down some of those questions along the way. For example, perhaps you were wondering about some of the following questions:

What messages the author is trying to get across to his audience?

Why something happened?

Why someone did something?

What was going to happen next?

LITERARY LUMINARY

Your job is to locate a few special sections or quotations from the text for your group to talk over. In other words, what passage really stands out for you? What is interesting? Powerful? Confusing? Copy the passage and explain why you picked it and what you think it means.

SOME PLACES I FOUND WORTH GOING BACK TO:

PAGE # / PARAGRAPH	REASON FOR PICKING

CONNECTOR

Your job is to find connections between the material your group is reading and the world outside. This means connecting the reading to your own life, to happenings at school or in your community, to stories in the news, to similar events at other times and places, to other people or problems that you are reminded of. There are no right answers!! Whatever connections you make are worth writing down and sharing.

SOME CONNECTIONS I FOUND BETWEEN THIS READING AND OTHER PEOPLE, PLACES, EVENTS, AUTHORS, MOVIES... (Please write below)

SUMMARIZER

Your job is to prepare a brief summary of today's reading. The other members of your group will be counting on you to give a quick (one or two minute) statement that conveys the KEY POINTS, MAIN HIGHLIGHTS, THE ESSENCE of today's reading.

CHARACTER COORDINATOR

Your task is to choose 2 characters you wish to examine. Identify key passages that provide insight into the characters' personalities, values, beliefs, etc. Write the passage and discuss what you think it tells us about the character.

1. CHARACTER _____

PAGE # / PASSAGE	WHAT DOES THIS PASSAGE TELL YOU ABOUT THE CHARACTER?

WORD WIZARD

Your task is to look out for new words. When you find words that are unfamiliar, puzzling, or difficult to read write them down in the chart below. Try to figure out what the word means from the context in which it is used. Write down your guess. Then use a dictionary to obtain the real meaning. Also look for words that are repeated a lot, or a common word that is used in an unusual way, or a word that seems to be important to the meaning of the text.

NEW WORDS

WORD	PAGE/ PARAGRAPH	MY GUESS	DEFINITION
I.			

These task sheets are adapted from Harvey Daniels's Role Sheets in *Literature Circles: Voice and Choice in the Student-Centered Classroom.*

Appendix B: Reflection Sheet

REFLECTIONS

Take this time to reflect on your reading and your group discussions. Use this page and the back if needed to describe your experience today.

- Describe your experience reading the assigned chapters with a specific task to complete.
- How did performing your assigned task affect the way you read the book?
- How did using the task sheets help / not help your reading?
- Explain why this task was / wasn't difficult.
- Describe your experience discussing your findings with your group.
- How did your group decide its answers? Were there disagreements?
- Describe your experience listening to the other groups discuss their findings.

Reflecting on the Liberal Reflex: Rhetoric and the Politics of Acknowledgement in Basic Writing

Matthew Pavesich

ABSTRACT: *In the 1990s, leading rhetoric and composition scholars criticized basic writing programs for their "liberalism." Basic writing had its defenders, however, and the ensuing debate exposed deep rifts in the field. This article argues that neither side in this formative debate nor the more recent alternative models of teaching basic writing manage to escape liberal hegemony. By combining political theory with rhetoric/composition scholarship, and relying on examples from recent changes to the basic writing program at Roosevelt University, I propose an approach to basic writing that combines rhetorical pedagogy with a new politics of acknowledgement in order to simultaneously concede and resist the university's inevitable liberalism.*

 KEY WORDS: *basic writing; liberalism; rhetoric; social justice*

"[Any] mode of government . . . both enables and constrains the possibilities for political action" (Cruikshank 2).

Basic writing's recent history tells a story of the long-running tension between the liberal tradition of equal treatment and democratic justice. This tension came to a head in the 1990s, and basic writing programs found themselves under attack from outsiders like journalists and legislators but also from compositionists within the field (Otte and Williams Mlynarczyk 11). Up to this point, many basic writing programs were influenced to some degree by Mina Shaughnessy's influential work in 1977's *Errors and Expectations*, in which Shaughnessy encouraged teachers to assume basic writers' potential for success and to teach accordingly—a change heralded as a victory for pedagogical justice. Administratively, however, basic writing continued to operate nationally on a testing and tracking model, which the 1990s critics said prevented pedagogical change from truly making just the basic writing enterprise. Testing and tracking, from this perspective, represented a liberal system of exclusion and/or assimilation, regardless of pedagogical approach.

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Unable to reconcile such a fundamental tension, George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk tell us, basic writing then splintered into a mostly disconnected collection of programs occupied primarily with their own modest goals and local strategies, which they call the "generational shift" (12).

Critics of basic writing's liberalism echoed a growing dissatisfaction with liberalism in political theory. Scholars in both fields agreed, in principle, that while liberalism's supporters equate with justice its commitment to the equal treatment of all people, clear-eyed accounts tell us something different: that for many liberalism offers only the injustice of assimilation or exclusion. Some took this opportunity to call for the "abolition" of basic writing, while others vehemently defended it, insisting instead that to abolish basic writing would be dangerously liberal. Each side in this debate accused the other side of relying on liberal logic and practice, while claiming for itself the achievement of justice.

Relying on contemporary political theory, I will argue, however, that both sides in this conversation work within the liberal paradigm. As Patricia Mann notes of liberalism: "It required several hundred years for liberal economic and political structures to develop . . . and our notions of agency remain deeply embedded in their practices . . ." (qtd. in Grego and Thompson "Repositioning" 82). Mann's description resonates with David Bartholomae's characterization of liberalism as a *reflex*, paraphrased in my title. Liberalism is so entrenched, that is, it has become reflexive. We re-enact it in our opinions, arguments, and decisions, sometimes even without intending to. Since we enact liberalism reflexively, it would be more productive to think about the opportunities it creates in basic writing, as in my epigraph, rather than identifying the (inevitable) liberalism of our institutions as the rationale for doing away with them or defending them, as we saw in the 1990s crisis. Further, if basic writing sits at a crossroads in need of a new political vision, as Mike Rose has recently claimed, any such effort must come to terms with the 90s crisis and what has happened since.

This paper steps toward that goal in two ways. First, I create room for a renewed politics of basic writing with a political theory-driven critique of the accepted crisis narrative. Second, I describe the formation of a new basic writing program at Roosevelt University, known in Chicago and nationally for its social justice mission and history of welcoming into higher education those historically excluded from it. In the fall of 2009, when I was hired as part of a four-person composition faculty team, we were charged with the reconstruction of the basic writing program, among other curricular and administrative projects. When we began our work, we turned to the basic

writing literature for the most recent programmatic and pedagogical innovations, and we found a wealth of practices and strategies, many of which we adopted for a pilot program in 2011-2012 that matched a rhetorical pedagogy with a Stretch-style program.[1] Our work drew on basic writing research for both a program proposal and a pilot curriculum, which I describe in detail. Frankly, the program is too new to deem either a success or a failure. Yet, in writing about these experiences, I look back through the lens of political theory because I believe that this lens can help to interpret the work we did and the political possibilities it indicates. By moving between basic writing scholarship, political theory, and an account of our work at Roosevelt, I propose that a rhetorical teaching practice based on Patchen Markell's *politics of acknowledgement* can help us to politically re-imagine basic writing pedagogy, while also promising a new way to think about the administration of basic writing within our inevitably liberal colleges and universities.

ON LIBERALISM

Even though the term "liberal" popularly connotes progressiveness in American political culture, liberal political philosophy represents the opposite of what many people would think of as progressive. Hardly radical, it provides the bedrock of the American political landscape, the enduring *doxa* of our political life. As we all know, one of the earliest and most familiar liberal principles is the separation of church and state. In his formative account of religious toleration, John Locke separates the private sphere, a metaphorical space symbolized by one's home in which people conduct the vast majority of their lives as they see fit, from the public sphere, the narrow space left for matters to be governmentally adjudicated. Over time, American courts and our legislative bodies have solidified our reliance on neutral procedures to determine what belongs to each sphere and the management of the public. By "neutral procedures," I mean the state's governance of public life according to laws and values that stand independent of any group's particular view of the world, religious or otherwise. Who you are and what you believe, in traditional liberalism, are not supposed to matter when it comes to the rule of law, which derives its neutrality from the fact that its most important work occurs behind a "veil of ignorance." John Rawls, in his contemporary re-articulation of procedural liberalism, devises this metaphor to emphasize the irrelevance of any one person's cultural affiliations regarding the proper operation of liberalism. Only "what" you are, in the thinnest sense, matters: a citizen of the liberal state (or not). Famously capturing the individualist

spirit of American liberalism, Thomas Jefferson colloquially noted, "It does me no injury for my neighbor to say that there are twenty gods or no God; it neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." The history of American liberalism represents the evolution of a once-controversial method for governing ideologically diverse populations into a contemporary article of common sense: that the equal treatment of every *one* means justice for *all*.

While these foundational liberal principles have become so accepted in everyday discourses as to be nearly invisible, and self-evident when visible, they have nonetheless drawn a good deal of critique in political philosophy. Though the particular critiques of liberalism would not crescendo until the 1980s and 1990s, Chaim Perelman in 1967's *Justice* questions liberalism on grounds that anticipate arguments in both political philosophy and basic writing in the 1990s. Opposing Rawls by name, Perelman claims that the equal treatment of "non-identical beings," the beating heart of liberalism, is fundamentally unjust (21-22). In his words, "equity is sometimes opposed to the uniform and mechanical application of a given rule . . ." (26). By inserting our non-identical natures into the liberal political calculus, Perelman calls into question what I described above as the very bedrock of American politics, the justice of equal treatment. Furthermore, he proceeds to re-introduce practical reason into the philosophical pursuit of equality, fairness, and justice, and in so doing, also raises the concerns of deliberative rhetorics, the importance of what we do and say in the presence of others amidst the particulars of everyday life. Thus, Perelman anticipated an important shift in political theory in which political philosophers would begin to think about the particulars of individual identity and their sources in cultural affiliations.

In the 1980s and '90s, we find prominent political philosophers, including Stanley Hauerwas, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Iris Marion Young, intensifying the criticism of liberalism along the same lines. This group, among others, cast doubt on value-neutral procedures, in principle and in practice. Once this ground becomes unsteady, liberalism begins to look less like a fair system that favors no single group over any other, and more like a subtle force reflective of one dominant group. In "The Politics of Recognition," Taylor insists that because identity is dialogically formed, individuals, qua individuals who are simultaneously members of identifiable social groups,[2] can "suffer real damage" at the hands of this subtle force—damage that he dubs "misrecognition" (25). In this account, even as most people describe, think of, and resort to liberalism for its neutral fairness, in practice it operationalizes a pressure that is at once assimilatory,

regulatory, and disciplinary. Taylor concludes that liberal institutions must account for difference in substantive ways, an approach he calls the "politics of recognition."

As an example of the knot in which liberalism ties minority groups, Kwame Appiah points, in the *Ethics of Identity*, to Canada's universal motorcycle helmet law. When this law was passed, Canadian Sikhs, who wear *pagri* (turbans), protested that requiring helmet use meant something different for them than for others. That is, any Sikh who wanted to ride a motorcycle, a right of all properly licensed Canadians, would have to make a difficult religious choice, one that amounted to either assimilation or self-exclusion. Furthermore, not all Canadian motorcyclists were forced to make the same choice. Sikhs argued that such a law disproportionately affected them, and further that the law amounted to their exclusion from equal citizenship (Appiah 94-95, 160). The point here is that laws, regardless of universalizing logic or language, impact people of different cultures differently. Canada eventually began to make exceptions in such cases, referred to as "reasonable accommodations"—an example of Taylor's politics of recognition in action. Canadians recognized Sikhs' freedom as being disproportionately impeded upon by the helmet law, and they did something about it. This accommodation required recognizing that equality does not necessarily equal fairness, the essence of Perelman's position. This argument has come to be known as the communitarian critique ("communitarian" because it recovers the identity/community connection so long ignored by liberalism), and it grew into an entire subfield of liberal political philosophy, including work such as James Tully's *Strange Multiplicity* and Will Kymlicka's *Multicultural Citizenship.* Clearly, liberal philosophers have struggled over the tension between liberal individualism and cultural affiliation; this struggle, in very similar form, sparked the basic writing crisis.

BASIC WRITING'S LIBERAL CRISIS

Within a few years of each other, both David Bartholomae and Sharon Crowley identified the problem of basic writing as its fundamentally liberal nature. Bartholomae writes that basic writing marginalizes students by placing them according to their "skill" and only allowing them to advance in accordance with their ability to demonstrate increased merit. As a communitarian might argue that a helmet law excludes or assimilates a Sikh motorcyclist, Bartholomae worries that universal composition requirements

exclude and/or assimilate an increasingly diverse student population within a narrow and supposedly neutral account of what constitutes good writing, hence his claim that basic writing is produced by the "grand narrative of . . . liberal reform" (18). Bartholomae eventually identifies what he calls the "liberal reflex": programs that implicitly insist, "that beneath the surface we are all the same person . . ." (18). He elaborates:

> I find myself characterizing basic writing as a reiteration of the liberal project of the late 60s early 70s, where in the name of sympathy and empowerment, we have once again produced the 'other' who is the incomplete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing the hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow way back then in the 1970s. We have constructed a course to teach and enact a rhetoric of exclusion and made it the center of a curriculum designed to hide or erase cultural difference. . . . (18)

Bartholomae echoes the communitarian critique: that one-size-fits-all writing instruction reflects the hegemonic group and the remedial mechanism unjustly assimilates, disciplines, and regulates everyone else. It might be more just, he concludes, since basic writing is so thoroughly liberal, to do away with it altogether.

In her more radical assessment, Sharon Crowley agrees with Bartholomae's characterization but goes one step further, arguing that not just basic writing but the first-year writing requirement altogether must be abolished (241). Crowley especially attacks writing programs' mobilization of "the language of democracy and freedom" insofar as they "subject students to a battery of standardized tests, which, in the name of individualization, simply placed them on one or another predefined rung of the educational ladder" (186). Further, Crowley's following zinger resonates with the account of liberalism as a my-way-or-the-highway system that parades as neutral procedure: "It takes considerable rhetorical chutzpah to tout a universal requirement as a liberatory practice" (186). To put it in communitarian terms, this would be like saying that forcing a Sikh to remove his turban for a helmet makes him freer. Crowley's comment here resonates with Taylor's characterization of liberalism, that it is equipped only to advocate for the purported universal good, which really only benefits the historically dominant group. Basic writing, that is, has continually mistaken its *equal* procedures, like the universal requirement and placement testing, for *fair* procedures and, based on

that mistake, forces thousands of increasingly diverse students to assimilate to normative language standards or be relegated to a kind of purgatory in higher education. Social justice for Crowley and Bartholomae demands the de-liberalization of basic writing or its abolition.

Predictably, many practitioners of basic writing resisted these attacks, especially defending it as substantively empowering and hence equating it with social justice rather than liberalism. In particular, Karen Greenberg and Ed White stand out among basic writing's defenders in the 1990s. Greenberg argues that tracking enables student success in higher education, rather than marginalizing or assimilating them. She scoffs at the accusation of oppression, insisting rather that basic writing elevates the "right to succeed" over the "right to fail" (70). To abolish basic writing would secure students only the "right to fail," she says, suggesting that the absence of basic writing amounts to the real danger. Struggling writers would have no recourse, no aid; they would be left to sink or swim, like marginalized citizens in a free market economy without socioeconomic safety nets. Greenberg echoes both the communitarian rejection of procedural "justice" and the hope for something more substantive, in the sense that her "right to succeed" rationale interprets tracking as a form of recognition. Basic writing, that is, recognizes the need for extra instruction and provides it. As such, she takes the abolition position and inverts it. Ed White makes a similar argument in his defense of basic writing. Like Greenberg, he uses the same binary of the critics (justice versus liberal oppression). And like Greenberg, White relies on "rights rhetoric" to achieve the inversion, stating that, "American education is subject to two contrasting underlying motifs: egalitarianism, the argument that everyone should have opportunities for success, and elitism, the restriction of opportunities to the most 'deserving'"—which often means to those from a relatively privileged home" (75). For White, the abolition argument signifies a rising elitism, a willingness to abandon the university's new diversity and to deny minority students all the privilege higher education can bring. The critique *and* the defense of basic writing work in the same rhetorical mode; they uncover the buried liberalism of the others' position. And here's the kicker: from where I'm looking, both sides are right.

First-year composition (and basic writing by extension) has always been liberal; it would perhaps be absurd to expect it to be anything else. In fact, it seems ironic that while liberal-style procedures have always been the university's response to recurrent literacy "crises" over the last one hundred plus years, it was liberalism itself that caused the crisis about which I write. Many histories of composition have told the much-chronicled story

of Harvard's composition course, the response made by late 19th Century faculty to what they saw as inadequate writing by unprepared students (Russell 7; Crowley 4). Built into the very fiber of composition, and its *raison d'être*, is the notion of remedial normalization as crisis response. Said one student, "In an endeavor (and a not very successful one) to conform to certain rules, I have lost all originality,—everything has a sort of labored rehashing, which makes whatever I have to say, dull and uninteresting" (qtd. in Crowley 75). Though this sentiment might have been expressed by a student in a basic writing class in the years 2007, 1993, or 1979, it was in fact expressed by a Harvard student in 1901. Composition courses have been assimilating students for a very long time indeed. The explosion of diversity in higher education did not create a new situation so much as make an old situation more visible and less comfortable. As critics noted, basic writing exerts a liberal pressure on the minority group to conform to normative language standards, but no one has yet observed that the abolition of this requirement amounts to a rough version of liberalism too, in the sense that one-size-fits-all writing instruction invokes the commonsense equivalence of equal treatment with justice.

Neither side in the 90s debate escapes the liberal paradigm; the abolition option activates one-size-fits-all liberalism, while remediation activates assimilatory mechanisms. As long as scholars and practitioners share the assumption that social justice requires the absence of liberalism, basic writing will remain in a political holding pattern, whether or not the field has seen a generational shift. At this point, I believe ceding liberalism's reflexiveness affords the greatest potential for political change. To ground these issues, I turn to the circumstances at Roosevelt University, an urban university with a social justice mission and a significant basic writing population, which I hope will illuminate how complexly the logics and rhetorics of liberalism and social justice can intermingle.

PROBLEMS FOR BASIC WRITING AT ROOSEVELT, 2009-2011

Neither an historically black institution nor a women's college, Roosevelt University (RU) nonetheless commits itself to those who have been traditionally excluded from higher education. In 1945, Edward Sparling, then-president of Chicago's YMCA College, feared that his board of trustees would require an accounting of the school's demographics so as to institute quotas on racial minorities, women, and immigrants. Even though such policies were common for the time, Sparling envisioned a more inclusive

institution. Rather than comply with the board's request, he resigned, taking sixty-eight faculty members with him to form what became Thomas Jefferson College, later re-named for the recently deceased Franklin D. Roosevelt ("Our History"). For sixty-five years and counting, RU has remained committed to redressing the historical exclusivity of American higher education with progressive admission policies and curricula, a spirit that informs the school's mission for social justice.

Sparling's story echoes in the halls of Roosevelt. Tenured faculty tell it to new faculty; student orientation leaders tell it to prospective students and their parents; the university president tells some version of it in most of his convocation and commencement addresses. *Roosevelt exists because Sparling rejected injustices common to his time; we must continue to resist those of ours.* This commonplace constitutes a significant element of what we might call the discursive fabric of RU, a self-reflective account of ethos. It says, "This is who we are," in a way that both represents the past and shapes the present and future. This story also lines the halls of Roosevelt, literally. Hanging on almost every floor, photos of early Roosevelt students, young women and men of color, constantly remind present-day students, faculty, and staff of RU's commitment to social justice. Today, this commitment manifests in a variety of ways, foremost perhaps in the many student organizations dedicated to identity groups and social justice issues, from the group for Roosevelt's lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer students and their allies, *RU Proud*, to a chapter of the National Association of Black Accountants. RU's current president, Charles Middleton, was the first publicly gay man to head a university, and he participates in a small national consortium of gay and lesbian university presidents. This ethos informs volunteer service days, which pepper the calendar all year long, as well as the influential Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation, which organizes both service learning courses and programming for the university and the public. Roosevelt's curriculum even requires for graduation a third writing class, a rarity in higher education, focused on writing about social justice issues.

The basic writing classes, however, present a more complicated picture. While basic writing must be examined closely at all institutions, especially those with significant populations of minority students (who tend to be overrepresented in basic writing), Roosevelt's foundational commitment to social justice demands an even closer look. More specifically, while the discourse within and about RU suggests an enlightened politics, RU basic writing policy and its consequences on the ground suggest a much more

typical institutional culture. At the same time, the social justice mission and Roosevelt's culture provide perhaps greater potential for change.

I would characterize basic writing in the 2000s at RU as exemplifying a collision between its social justice ethos and typically liberal basic writing policies, such as placement testing, remedial tracking, and a focus on normative error correction. While this collision happens at other institutions, it might not be going too far to say that RU's very identity is at stake in its management of basic writers. Basic writing at Roosevelt, until 2010-2011, consisted only of English 100, a remedial, skills-based writing class. Because the department employed only one full-time writing faculty member/administrator, virtually no composition *program* existed. What documentation was once provided for the many adjuncts teaching English 100 took the form of a long expository text articulating an account of basic writing very much in the style of Shaughnessy; it encouraged focus on writers' potential for success, not their errors. Even though the program expressed its commitment to writing as a process, the pass/fail class culminated in a timed essay written in response to an article and prompt. Students, therefore, received a profoundly mixed message. Their classes were exercises in process pedagogy, but they were assessed with a method that valued product only.

In the view of Bartholomae and Crowley, furthermore, RU's tracking policy remained its most significant fact. English 100 represented liberal management, leaving many students to struggle to assimilate to normative language standards or to remain in English 100 forever. The strict liberalism of testing and tracking, however, did not entirely define basic writing administration at Roosevelt. RU offered a free re-take of English 100 for any student who failed the class. This policy represented an impressive financial commitment to students who very often could barely afford to take English 100 the first time, but it could be argued that RU created the need for such compensation in the first place.

Another complicated situation arose involving transfer students. Transfers who tested into English 100 were lumped together with first-year students, whether or not they had completed their writing requirements at their prior school. This would be hardly worth mentioning but for the fact that Roosevelt participated in the Illinois Articulation Initiative. This agreement stipulated that Roosevelt would not require incoming transfers to take courses whose requirements they already had fulfilled at their prior institution, a decision often described on campus as one that illustrated our respect for students' credentials and the quality of higher education across the state. In this particular instance, Roosevelt claimed to honor transfers'

prior work, but then reverted to the liberal management of their writing with a one-size-fits-all placement test, general basic writing class, and timed final exam. To put it bluntly, RU's basic writing policies strained its commitment to social justice.

If all this weren't complicated enough, it became clear in 2009 that retention and persistence to graduation numbers indicated troubling trends at Roosevelt, especially when it came to basic writers. For example, of all first-time RU students in the fall of 2008, only 51.9% returned in the fall of 2009.[3] The scene was worse for students of color, as it so often is. We discovered that students of color at Roosevelt, mostly African-Americans and Latinos, simply were not making it to graduation in six years or less. Only 34% of Latino students in the Fall 2003 cohort had graduated by 2009 and only 19% of African-American students had done so. When we dug into the retention numbers regarding basic writers, it turned out that for the cohorts from 2006-2009, that percentage dipped significantly below 50% in three out of four years, meaning basic writers came back the following fall at even lower rates than our already unacceptable fall-to-fall numbers for the whole student population.[4] Something needed to be done.

RECOGNITION MEETS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: AND (MORE) JUSTICE FOR ALL

The new composition faculty and program director took as our first project the re-construction of basic writing. We turned, of course, to the large body of scholarship on basic writing for strategies and models, and we found that much like Canada's reasonable accommodations for cultural diversity in a liberal framework, basic writing scholars and teachers have looked for creative work-arounds to the issues raised in the 1990s crisis. Like Taylor's politics of recognition, these alternatives turn away from one-size-fits-all answers.

Innovation since the 1990s has come in many forms, both programmatic and pedagogical (which is not to say that there is always a tidy division between the two). Most new models have shared a powerful refusal to abolish basic writing coupled with an effort to blunt liberalism's sharp edge. At their most successful, these models represent smart and inventive options that address the worst aspects of liberalism's influence on the administration of basic writing; collectively, they strive to set new paths around the earth scorched by the heated debate of the crisis years. Given the above arguments, it is no wonder that the 90s crisis created a generational shift in which the

field turned to local contexts, needs, and solutions. Indeed, this shift in basic writing and the communitarian critique in political theory share a similar direction, a turn toward practical reason away from universalizing solutions. Hewing to Roosevelt's history and mission, we too were looking for ways to teach basic writing that neither marginalize students nor ignore their needs, while developing a program that we faculty felt equally comfortable describing and defending to students and administrators (what I have come to think of as a social justice litmus test).

Administrative Alternatives

William Lalicker has described the most important post-crisis models for administering basic writing, which he calls the "alternative models." Of these, we eventually adopted Gregory Glau's popular "Stretch" model. Stretch replaces remedial instruction (often ungraded and without college credit) with a "stretched" college-level course. Students take a two-semester version of "regular" English 101, with 150% of the work and the same faculty and peers both semesters, on the theory that what they need is more time to do college-level work, not remedial instruction. Both semesters are graded and credit-bearing, and this two-semester system offers time to build community among a population that tends to be an institution's most vulnerable by various measures (Glau "The 'Stretch Program'"). While we settled on Stretch, all five alternative models provide more nuanced procedural alternatives to the mainstreaming/segregation binary of the basic writing crisis in the sense that they seek variously articulated middle spaces between mainstreaming and marginalizing.

To call these models alternatives, however, is to imply that they are alternatives to the liberal programs attacked in the crisis. For that to be accurate, however, they would have to depart from the mainstreaming/tracking binary, and, to put it simply, they do not. Stretch, for example, still segregates writers from the larger population. Studio and Enrichment models, conversely, try to mainstream and segregate at the same time by requiring basic writers to attend both a "regular" writing class and a separate basic writing lab. One can also make the opposite claim, that Stretch mainstreams insofar as it relies on the same curriculum as "regular" 101, and the Studio and Enrichment models still track in the sense that only part of the population is required to attend Studio. In other words, these models make liberalism less visible or re-locate it. Directed self-placement, in which programs recommend a writing placement but students make the final decision, offers a

more complicated example, in that it recognizes student choice over liberal management of their writing track. I would still suggest, however, that it mobilizes liberalism in the sense described by Barbara Cruikshank, in *The Will to Empower*, when she argues that empowerment discourses often rely on self-regulation along liberalism's lines, what Foucault described as the "conduct of conduct," or the "conduct of the self." In the case of directed self-placement this would look like the student who, through exposure to liberal education policies, has come to self-identify as a remedial writer and chooses the basic writing class regardless of placement, arguing that she "needs it" in a replication of the liberal logic of normalization. While the alternative models, like recognition, revise traditional liberalism, they are still liberal. The era of the alternative models, then, does not offer alternatives to liberalism, no matter what we call them, as much as a temporary truce in the unresolved hostilities of the 90s.

Pedagogical Alternatives

Similarly, in some of the writing pedagogies devised since the crisis we see other connections with the politics of recognition. Basic writing scholars and practitioners responded to the 90s crisis perhaps even more ardently with pedagogical models (Pepinster Greene and McAlexander 12). Some of these pedagogical innovations seem, to me, very much to mirror the politics of recognition. Min-Zhan Lu, Matthew McCurrie, and Angelique Davi, for example, have offered sophisticated new models of basic writing pedagogy, all of which I would identify as mobilizing a politics of recognition. As one of the earliest to take basic writing in this direction, Lu seeks to avoid the problem of assimilation, insisting that one of basic writing's foundational goals must be "to conceive and practice teaching methods which invite a multicultural approach to style" (442). Interpreting students' writing differences as styles rather than deficiencies offers a form of recognition. Likewise, Matthew McCurrie, in the context of summer bridge programs, encourages teachers and administrators to engage students' "demographics" as a way to fight the assimilation model of traditional liberalism (31-32). Similarly, Angelique Davi's insistence on the relevance of race, class, and gender to higher education and "intellectual growth" recognizes students (73). Davi echoes Taylor's claim that misrecognition not only disempowers but causes real damage when she writes: "for students who have been perceived as weak writers and thinkers and, in many cases, have internalized these percep-tions, the service-learning component allow[s] them to occupy a new and

empowering position" (91). Lu, McCurrie, and Davi all very much manifest the spirit of the politics of recognition when they resist assimilatory educational models.

The Problem with Recognition

And yet, the politics of recognition might not be all it is cracked up to be, suggests Patchen Markell in *Bound by Recognition*. The act of recognition, Markell argues, finds itself stuck in a kind of identity cul-de-sac, a circular politics implicitly reliant on an *a priori* account of identity. More specifically, Markell insists that recognition mistakes the necessary fragility of political and social life for something that can be overcome. And if Taylor believes recognition can overcome this fragility, Markell argues, he must also understand identity as preceding recognition. If so, recognition relies on the possibility of mutual transparency, a social and linguistic impossibility. We see a similar critique in composition in the argument that certain forms of reflective and expressive writing ask students to peer into an identity that was always already there (Feldman 112).

Markell's alternative, the politics of acknowledgement, emphasizes ongoing action in the presence of others, an argument I see as fundamentally rhetorical. The politics of acknowledgement "demands that each of us bear our share of the burden and risk involved in the uncertain, open-ended sometimes maddeningly and sometimes joyously surprising activity of living and interacting with other people" (7). Acknowledgement emphasizes identity as the result of action over time, requiring ongoing insight into oneself and the other. In other words, the politics of acknowledgement demands engagement in a continual *rhetorical* negotiation for justice in the spirit of practical reason, as opposed to the implied finality and totality of recognition.

Recognition in a writing class can easily veer away from the need for rhetorical action. Based in the mutual transparency of one's *a priori* identity, recognition seeks what Markell calls the elusive "pleasure of sovereignty" (188). Markell sounds as if he might have an alternate career in basic writing when he insists that the goal rather should be to engage others by using, "serviceable forms of meaning [which] emerge out of local, contingent patterns of language use, [whose] operation does not depend upon the illusion of certainty" (184). As opposed to the politics of recognition, then, the politics of acknowledgement offers "the less grand and more tentative pleasure of potency" (188), a worthy, and politically defensible goal for basic

writing, and one that emphasizes the importance of rhetorically-oriented writing instruction.

But what has this meant for the students at Roosevelt, and our programmatic proposal and new course design? In what follows, I describe both our formal proposal to pilot a new stretched basic writing class and the common syllabus for that pilot through Markell's lens.

PROPOSING CHANGE AT ROOSEVELT: STRETCHING RHETORIC

At RU, writing faculty decided upon two angles of action for 2010-2011, writing a proposal for a Stretch-style pilot program in 2011-2012, and the design of a common syllabus for the pilot. Our goals were twofold: 1) to write a proposal that utilized liberal logic and language in order to win money to run the pilot and 2) to write a common syllabus that would move the program toward teaching writing rhetorically and away from teaching it as an elementary and transparent technology. We believed both Stretch and a rhetoric-focused course design enhanced the social justice elements of the program without overestimating our power to alter the University's liberalism.

In the proposal, we appealed to both economic arguments and arguments for social justice. By emphasizing how much money was being lost with our poor retention numbers, we hoped to make the case for how much we could save (and even earn) the university with a revamped basic writing program, a compelling argument at a tuition-driven university like RU. Glau's follow-up report on Stretch's effects on retention at Arizona State proved crucial in this regard ("'Stretch' at Ten"). In short, we were able to say that even if we were only half as successful as Glau's program, we could have saved RU $1.3 million dollars over the last four student cohorts. Our social justice argument entailed comparing the persistence to graduation rates of basic writers and students of color at RU to our peer institutions in Illinois by various measures. Our numbers looked even worse by comparison than they did alone. If RU was as committed to social justice and those historically underserved by higher education, we said, approve our proposal.

This document worked within liberalism in that it made the economic argument first, in spite of the fact that most of us were much more concerned with the social justice implications of the status quo. Secondly, when we began to discuss our plans, upper administrators seemed willing to simply allow us to put in place just about whatever we wanted. We, our new director especially, insisted on writing a proposal, starting with limited pilot sections

of the new program, and only later moving toward full implementation if our data supported doing so. We *wanted* to solidify our own efforts within the institution, to work in ways recognized by the bureaucratic liberal structure. Even the choice of Stretch was an effort to negotiate embedded liberalism. Though we were not using the political theory language I use here, there was discussion about whether we wanted to use a model that continued to segregate basic writers from other writing students as Stretch does or to use a more mainstreaming model like Studio. One reason we went with Stretch was that its continued segregation of basic writers would be familiar, given the liberal reflexes of administrators in charge of whether our proposal went ahead. Though still liberal, Stretch emphasizes a less marginalizing experience for students in its use of the same curriculum as "regular" English 101 and its graded, for-credit status. In the end, we were lucky; we received $20,000 for a one-year pilot in a bad economy, winning the stamp of approval for both the Stretch-style pilot and a rhetorical curriculum and pedagogy.

Potency without Certainty

Rhetoric, as I intend it here, does not adhere to the classical persuasive strategies of the virtuous man speaking well, nor to the "modes" lionized in scores of textbooks throughout the 20th century. For our purposes, rhetoric referred broadly to any communicative action taken in response to a particular situation. Rhetoric, so defined, connects the language of students' everyday lives to academic and other discourses by emphasizing each as the product of strategic choices negotiated within complicated social situations (Swales). A growing number of first-year writing programs, including basic writing classes, work from a fundamentally rhetorical perspective on writing (Lu, Grego and Thompson, Davi, Pine, Berlin, Bawarshi, Feldman, Miller). In general terms, what this has meant for college composition is a seismic shift away from teaching writing as though it were a universal and universally recognizable skill towards writing as a specifically social act occurring within highly complicated and particular contexts—a shift that begins to explain its confluence with the politics of acknowledgement. Basic writing, however, still needs to intensify its commitment to rhetorical instruction and to more thoroughly consider the political implications of this commitment.

I believe we achieved something like the politics of acknowledgement in rhetorically-oriented writing classes by asking students to write in a way that is conscious of and reaches out to the other, with critical awareness of situation, audience, purpose, and genre. Students choose some of

their own purposes, audiences, and genres for writing, and because they write analyses of their choices and the possible consequences of them in the public sphere, we acknowledge the student and her interests, offering what Markell calls the "tentative pleasure of potency" without the "illusion of certainty." Rhetoric and its effects are unpredictable, to put it mildly. The key is to value differences among students, as in the politics of recognition, while also mobilizing acknowledgement by setting students into certain types of rhetorical motion.

The new curriculum at RU exemplifies what I came to think of, in hindsight, as features of acknowledgement, which I can describe in two categories: the overall course design and process-oriented mechanisms.

Acknowledgement as Course Design

Overall, the course begins where students are and then takes an outward turn, following an ever more public trajectory. More specifically, the class first encourages students to recognize what rhetorical savvy they already possess. In discussion and low-stakes writing, students consider when they are most aware of their own language use, what sorts of circumstances cause this heightened awareness, and what this change does to their efforts of self-representation and persuasion. Doing so acknowledges students' pre-existing and unique rhetorical savvy in some contexts and provides an intellectual path to the thresholds that we want them to cross, the belief that all writing is rhetorically motivated and situated, and the skills to analyze and utilize broadly rhetorical factors like situation, genre and language choice.[5]

Continuing its outward turn, the class next considers others' uses of rhetoric and how rhetoric operates at the community level, along with increasingly public writing assignments. Accordingly, writing for the teacher gives way to blogging and other online writing. Students explore and write about discourse communities—ones they belong to, first, and then ones they do not, including conducting interviews with members of those communities. The course ends with a writing project in which the students join an ongoing, public discourse, or what Jenny Edbauer and others call a rhetorical ecology.[6] The outward turn of the course, then, is embedded in the sequence of assignments and the scaffolding that leads to each of them. We begin by recognizing each student's rhetorical expertise in one situation or another, then acknowledge them by *asking them to acknowledge others through their writing*, to examine, that is, their own rhetorical positions and the community's discourses they wish to join and tailoring their writing accordingly.[7]

Process as Politics

Here, I follow Joseph Harris in doubting that the process approach constitutes a pedagogy *per se* (55). In our pilot, process amounts to a political commitment in that we understand peer review, meta-cognitive analysis, and the format of final assessment as all part of the rhetorical model of acknowledgement. Like Mark Hall, in *The Politics of Peer Response*, we re-imagine peer review as a democratic process in which students collaboratively construct peer review guidelines and even grading rubrics. This primarily takes place in the form of open classroom discussion. Doing so constructs students as part of a community enterprise demanding self-awareness, awareness of others (including peers, faculty, and institutional context), and ongoing deliberative negotiation *about writing*. In other words, it emphasizes the message that writing and its evaluation constitute dialogical processes, precisely in line with the participatory emphasis of acknowledgement.

Simultaneously, every major project includes what we call meta-writing. Meta-textual analysis plays an important role by requiring students to analyze their rhetorical choices in light of audience, genre, and possible outcomes. Meta-writing asks students to perform a deep reflexivity, and politically acknowledges student-writers' intentions as significant. It also asks students to write in another relatively high stakes situation. They write to their teacher explicitly instead of implicitly, as in all the traditional classroom genres where students are instructed to write for the "general academic audience." Assigning meta-texts asks students to raise their level of self- and other-consciousness and to consider the ways they have interacted with those others, and the kinds of outcomes those choices create, a way to emphasize potency without certainty.

Lastly, we replaced timed writing with a portfolio of student work in the final assessment, an uncontroversial move at this point. Accordingly, I spend little time explaining or defending it, except to note that Pepinster Greene and McAlexander cite portfolio assessment as one of the most widely embraced elements of the process approach. Portfolio assessment acknowledges students in that it, "allows the student to be a participant. . .rather than simply an object of assessment" (13). Again, we can see acknowledgement's emphasis on self- and other-directed action.

While our proposal worked self-consciously to grasp opportunities within a liberal value system, I believe that the pedagogical approach of our pilot course, wedding rhetoric and the politics of acknowledgement, resisted traditionally liberal composition. Rhetorical education represents

a significant re-boot for basic writing, a change that has been happening here and there across the field, but our model begins to realize more fully the deeply political implications of this shift.

AGONISTIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We know from the work of Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason ("From Remediation to Enrichment") and Gleason alone ("Evaluating Writing Programs in Real Time"), that pedagogical change cannot generate on its own a new politics. As I have noted, our changes at Roosevelt matched a rhetorical pedagogy with a Stretch-style program, creating the overall effect of a politics of acknowledgement. While Patchen Markell himself cautions us against hoping that the politics of acknowledgement can, "settle political controversies or prescribe courses of action" (178), he hopes for "other, subtler effects" (178). He believes acknowledgement, "can change our view of the nature of the problems we confront; it can alter our sense of what courses of action are open to us in the first place" (178). I must ask, therefore, what sorts of institutional negotiation are "open to us" in basic writing once we've ceded liberalism's reflexiveness?

Chantal Mouffe's concept of *agonistic pluralism* suggests an answer. Mouffe both acknowledges liberalism's hegemony and advocates the generation of productive pressure (*agon*) within that paradigm. I do not propose this last section as an unearthed solution to the 90s political crisis—as an eureka! moment—but as a way to re-consider and re-organize our relation to the liberal reflex.

In *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe approaches the same set of problems addressed by Perelman and Taylor, the tension between the liberal tradition and the pursuit of democratic justice. Like them, she takes on John Rawls, among others. Unlike Perelman and Taylor, Mouffe does not argue that Rawls has incorrectly solved the problem of liberalism and democracy. She argues, instead, that *there is no solution*. More specifically, Mouffe identifies the source of liberal democratic political tension as, "[resulting] from the articulation of two logics which are incompatible" (5). These two logics do not fit and never really have: "On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation" (2-3). Like

Markell's claim that recognition seeks the unattainable, Mouffe characterizes as fraught the very grammar of liberal democracy, concluding that there is no resolution to such a tension. We can only aim for "temporary stability through pragmatic negotiations" (5). Rejecting consensus as a political goal, Mouffe calls for a process of temporary stabilization she calls *agonistic pluralism*. Her theory focuses on active negotiation toward always-temporary, imperfect agreement, and thereby forwards a permanently dialogical account of politics (15). Mouffe calls political agents "friendly enemies" who share common symbolic space but have different organizing goals for that space (13). Rhetorical practice within liberalism, in this model, operates like a complex ecology, rather than according to the more strictly persuasive definition, which operated like a train that stayed on the tracks and arrived at its destination (consensus) or didn't. Mouffe's approach suggests a productive mindset for basic writing administrators, who constantly negotiate the shifting terms of upper administration anyway.

Rather than seeking solutions to the political tensions that fractured basic writing, we can craft dialogues that maintain an agonistic space, even as they require constant revision. The seeds of this kind of thinking exist in much of the literature I have already cited. Perelman, for example, argues that legislation is creative work, requiring a kind of public, discursive synergy (67). Similarly, Markell claims that time constitutes part of the difference between acknowledgement and recognition; acknowledgement is a perpetual dialogical process, rather than the end point of a teleology (15). In pedagogical circles, Grego and Thompson, in *Teaching/Writing in Thirdspaces*, evoke something like agonistic pluralism when they claim that Studio seeks not solutions, but "lateral interactions across previously existing institutional hierarchies or boundaries" (50). Practicing acknowledgment in our classes and in our larger institutional contexts, with the goal of maintaining agonistic space rather than foreclosing it, generates productive forms of pressure on traditional liberal practices.

I have argued that the crisis over liberalism in basic writing in the 90s overestimated anyone's ability to operate outside of liberalism. Furthermore, I have advocated for the combination of 1) a rhetorical writing approach crafted in the image of the politics of acknowledgement with 2) a rhetorical effort to maintain agonistic space within liberal institutions. Students benefit, yes, but the combination of the two provides a model for how to realistically manage administrative relationships, too. We practice what we teach: contextualized rhetorical action in constant need of revision.

POSTSCRIPT, ON ROOSEVELT

I left Roosevelt and the Stretch Coordinator position the summer before the pilot began, in order to take a job in the city my partner had already lived for two years. I'm still in touch with friends and colleagues at Roosevelt, and they tell me the pilot has gone well, reporting anecdotally that students have embraced the rhetorical pedagogy, and seem to feel less marginalized than did their counterparts in English 100. We will know more once final portfolios are evaluated and programmatic assessment is conducted over the summer.

Programmatically speaking, there has been an interesting conversation in the last year that I think nicely illustrates agonistic pluralism. Earlier, I described the problematic practice at Roosevelt of placing transfer students in basic writing in spite of our articulation agreement that assured them that we would honor their prior completion of any school's writing requirement. Many of us in the writing program had repeatedly argued that forcing transfers into a first-year basic writing course was unjust, in light of the articulation agreement. But now, if Stretch entirely replaces English 100, RU cannot continue to require transfers with incoming 101-credit to take the class because Stretch utilizes the same curriculum as "regular" 101 and is thus coded as a 101-level class in the catalogue. Our new program closed this particular liberal loophole. For a period of time, it looked like transfers would simply not be required to take any writing classes, a possible outcome about which many felt ambivalence. It was not long, however, before university administrators began to insist that many transfers would still need formalized basic writing in some form and that the old English 100 would serve this purpose nicely. It should be no surprise, I suppose, that in the face of change the liberal reflex kicks in, and that is precisely why my former colleagues at Roosevelt must continually mobilize their own rhetorical practice aimed at maintaining a space for agonism. If English 100 is indeed maintained, now exclusively for transfers, it would continue to exert a blunt assimilatory pressure on students of the very sort that sparked the basic writing crisis in the first place.

At this point, however, RU writing faculty are engaged in a more complex conversation about basic writing than had existed at Roosevelt for some time. Indeed, the conversation continues. I'm happy to report that the writing program has been negotiating with upper administrators to adopt a Studio-style option for transfers, perhaps driven by directed self-placement. Such an outcome would signify, I believe, the successful adaptation of the

politics of acknowledgement in maintaining agonistic pluralism at Roosevelt. The replacement of RU's former program with a rhetorically-oriented Stretch program for freshmen *and* a Studio for transfers, it seems to me, represents a significant improvement—for now. And "for now" is the best any of us can do, when our re-orientation to institutional liberalism is driven by the creative effort for a practical and socially just approach to basic writing.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. I write about this experience from a distance, both geographically and chronologically, as I am no longer at Roosevelt and most of the events I describe occurred in 2010-2011, during the planning of our program proposal and pilot classes.

2. I borrow the term "social groups" from Iris Marion Young's chapter "The Five Faces of Oppression" in *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, a term she defines as neither an association nor an aggregate, but a group that is publicly identifiable in Heidegger's sense of "thrownness" (39-65).

3. All retention numbers came from the Common Data Set from RU's Office of Institutional Research.

4. Data on retention and persistence on students of color who began as basic writers was not available.

5. While "starting where they are" is close to an old chestnut in rhetoric and composition (see anyone from Shaughnessy to Graff), it also constitutes

an important element of acknowledgement insofar as it goes beyond recognition of communicative differences.

6. See Rivers and Weber for a detailed example of this sort of assignment.

7. Nancy Pine's model of service learning in basic writing achieves something similar to our pilot's outward turn, especially in her ethnography assignment and in the way she connects this to academic writing. I would argue, however, that her model sometimes settles for recognition over acknowledgement, especially when Pine's assignment leans toward what Thomas Deans calls "writing-about" rather than "writing-for" a community agency.

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News and Announcements

JBW Archives Now Online and Open Access

We are pleased to announce that nearly all of the back issues of the Journal of Basic Writing are now available (open access) on the Journal's web page, hosted by the WAC Clearinghouse (http://wac.colostate.edu/jbw/). We are deeply indebted to Professor Mike Palmquist and the staff at Colorado State University, including Ann Schwalm of the CSU Libraries and Vince Darcangelo of the CSU Testing Center, for the many hours of painstaking work that went into making the JBW archives readily available online in high-quality, searchable PDFs.

It is fortuitous that the archives have become available at a time of renewed interest in basic writing scholarship and teaching, as witnessed by the heightened visibility of the field at CCCC 2012 and in the Call for Program Proposals for CCCC 2013.

Our sincere thanks to all who helped to make this dream a reality.

CBW Resource Share

The Council on Basic Writing is pleased to announce the launch of a new site, CBW Resource Share, dedicated to collecting and sharing teaching materials that have been used successfully in basic writing classrooms across the nation. Launched on June 6, 2012, the site has experienced an exciting amount of traffic, confirming our field's professional interest in collaboration.

To encourage an inspiring exchange of teaching tools and support for all basic writing faculty, the site (http://cbwshare.wordpress.com/) needs your contributions. Please look through your files and consider sharing your go-to materials. You may email your assignments, handouts, classroom management tips, and other teaching materials to the site's creator and curator, Professor Elizabeth Baldridge, at elizabeth.baldridge@icc.edu. Please include a brief explanation of the item's purpose and attributions in the interest of according proper credit.

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