



Journal of Basic Writing

Special Issue on Graduate Education, Volume 1

Laura Gray-Rosendale

Guest Editor

An Unconventional Education: A Letter to Basic Writing
Practicum Students

Susan Naomi Bernstein

A Tale of Two Generations: How We Were Taught, and
What We Learned (Or Not)

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Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting
a Professional Identity in Basic Writing

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Graduate Teaching, New Developments in the Contextual
Model, and the Future of the Discipline

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 20-30 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 four to five 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, especially as it entails IRB review (which should be noted in an endnote).

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments via e-mail to: Hope.Parisi@kbcc.cuny.edu, and Cheryl.Smith@baruch.cuny.edu. You will receive a confirmation of receipt; a report on the status of your submission will follow in eight to ten 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 such fields as psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. The journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of new literacies, translanguaging, multimodality, digital rhetorics and online and social-media impacts as per intersectional writing identity formations.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, and critiques the institutions and contexts that place students in basic writing and standardize academic language, as much as it may illumine the subtexts of individuals' writing practices. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population and settings 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 written in non-technical language; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy. A familiarity with the journal is the best way to determine whether JBW is your next venue for scholarship.

EDITOR'S COLUMN

As I write this Editor's Column, fall is fast approaching Flagstaff, Arizona, the mountain town I have made my home for the last twenty-one years. There's a clear crispness in the air. The sky's a robin egg blue. The fluttery aspen leaves are turning from green to gold. The fern on the Kachina Trail up near Mt. Humphrey's are going brown now. The herds of elk are moving from the higher elevations, instead being sighted on the trails in town, even roaming through the backyards of certain neighborhoods. Birds are gobbling up sunflower seeds for the winter, many of them readying themselves for the long flights ahead. There's a sense of anticipation of the winter to come.

I have approached the process of editing two special volumes on Basic Writing and Graduate Education with this same feeling of anticipation. For many years I have been teaching graduate courses in Basic Writing. During those years, I've presented on my work of teaching such classes at the Conference on College Composition and Communication and taken part in crucial discussions about graduate teaching at the Council on Basic Writing. All along I have been hopeful that one day I could bring together some of the key voices of teacher-scholars in our discipline to consider why teaching our graduate students about Basic Writing theory and practice is increasingly important and how we might best do so. I want to thank Hope and Cheryl so much for giving me this terrific opportunity to serve as guest editor.

Barbara Gleason's very insightful 2006 essay written for the twenty-fifth volume of *JBW* has long influenced my desire to do this work— "Reasoning the Need: Graduate Education and Basic Writing." As she notes in that essay, Basic Writing training for teacher-scholars has been a concern for Basic Writing Studies from the 1980s onward. Turning to her present moment, Gleason examines various syllabi created for graduate courses in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice from 2000-2005, noting that we need to examine "the value a knowledge base may have for improving the opportunities and lives of individuals, families, and entire communities" (67). In essence, Gleason was calling for us all to examine exactly how we teach graduate students about the theory and practice of Basic Writing. She was calling for us to understand the wide-reaching effects this work might have. And, most of all, she was calling for more of us to engage in this crucial work.

Teaching our graduate students about Basic Writing theory and practice remains very relevant— though some twelve years later the specific contexts within which we are attempting to address such concerns have somewhat shifted. This first volume's essays involve a group of thinkers who

are deeply concerned with how we might best work to empower our graduate students who are or who will become teacher-scholars of Basic Writing in today's educational landscape.

These essays address questions such as the following: How do we help to engage our graduate students in the histories, theories, and pedagogies of our discipline when we are facing increased budget cutbacks to Basic Writing programs and ever-greater difficulties in working conditions? How can we effectively empower and train our graduate students in Basic Writing when we have few or even no courses within our curricula that are specifically designed to do this kind of work? When we do have the opportunity to offer such classes, what are the essential assignments we might use and approaches that we might take? Finally, how can we move to a place in Rhetoric and Composition Studies where Basic Writing history, theory, and practice are not simply add-ons, smaller units within larger courses, but constitute powerful courses of their own?

Susan Naomi Bernstein's "An Unconventional Education: A Letter to Basic Writing Practicum Students" provides an invigorating start to this special issue by taking a creative approach to empowering our graduate students in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice. She speaks to our graduate students studying Basic Writing Studies directly by writing a letter to them, sharing her own experiences as a teacher and as a student alongside those of the Basic Writing discipline itself. As I read and re-read Bernstein's essay, I see it most clearly as a major form of advocacy, a call to action—one for faculty of graduate students in Basic Writing as well as graduate students. As she notes, "Our job as teachers and as administrators is to become a forceful presence that creates visibility for our work and the work of our students." Specifically, Bernstein encourages graduate students to question and observe practice, to develop a broad rather than a narrow perspective, and to break rules that call to be broken. Along the way, she examines the importance of taking on issues such as gender non-conformity and racial literacy with our Basic Writing students. In the end, Bernstein's essay shows us that we have very important roles to play in the future of Basic Writing Studies since "BW allows us to envision a place where the different lived experiences of the world may collide and perhaps even connect."

The second essay, Victor Villanueva and Zarah C. Moeggenberg's "A Tale of Two Generations: How We Were Taught, and What We Learned (Or Not)," suggests that we have some significant work to do in empowering our graduate students to conduct research and teach in Basic Writing as a discipline. In this essay, we get the invaluable thoughts and analyses of one

senior scholar and one junior scholar, both of whom have been schooled in Basic Writing history, theory, and practice in very different ways. Villanueva describes how his graduate student experiences were shaped by the publication of Mina Shaughnessy's work and characterizes the role Basic Writing Studies has played throughout his career as a teacher-administrator and a scholar. Moeggenberg, a junior scholar interested in issues of queer composition and Basic Writing and whose graduate studies are not yet far in the rearview mirror, describes her own deep desire to learn about Basic Writing Studies as part of her graduate training when no such courses were in fact available. Her story is essentially one of how she came to study Basic Writing in her independent work with Villanueva himself: "Three years of one-on-one mentoring and my own independent study are how I came to understand Basic Writing." Moeggenberg offers this challenge to the discipline of Basic Writing Studies: "We need to rely less on chance encounters and put more energy into constructed ones. While my mentoring with Victor may have been sparked by a couple of chance encounters, it sustained itself by proactively making more encounters possible and accessible in spaces that do not necessarily sustain conversations pertaining to basic writing politics and pedagogies." The two authors' voices are woven together yet each is distinct, Villanueva speaking to the long history as well as the present of politics in Basic Writing and Moeggenberg speaking to how graduate students are negotiating this ever more complicated landscape. Fundamentally, as Villanueva suggests toward the end of their piece, we need to "engage in a greater awareness of the ideological implications that rhetoric can carry" and "try to engage (and have students engage) in more critical, politicized metalinguistic awareness."

Karen S. Uehling's "Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting a Professional Identity in Basic Writing" is concerned with empowering graduate students to create professional identities for themselves within the Basic Writing discipline. Uehling describes the texts she selects and her major assignments for her graduate class titled "Issues in Writing, Teaching, and Learning," a course in Basic Writing theory and practice that focuses heavily on issues of professional development. As she notes, "we explore important issues in the field, such as adult learners, assessment, diversity and valuing difference, English language learners, the history and politics of basic writing, learning styles, reading and writing instruction, the teaching of grammar, and teaching and learning perspectives." This course is mainly online but also has some crucial in-person gatherings on her university campus to

supplement the on-line work. The class is heavily involved not only with teaching students about key texts and concepts in Basic Writing theory and practice but also with mentoring them in the professional business of the discipline and discussing issues of contingent faculty members' workloads. As she beautifully articulates, "Depending largely on contingent instructors devalues these students we serve. If we are willing to hire people at the last minute to teach under exploitative conditions, we are saying that that is all the planning and support that students deserve." In her graduate class, Uehling introduces her students to the Council on Basic Writing discussion list, helps them to create material to post on the Composition Frequently Asked Questions wiki on basic writing, and aids them in presenting their work at conferences as well as in submitting manuscripts for publication. Uehling's essay ends with a series of critical questions we all need to consider as we move forward as well as some potential paths we might consider as we search for answers.

In my own article, "Re-examining Constructions of Basic Writers' Identities: Graduate Teaching, New Developments in the Contextual Model, and the Future of the Discipline," I reach back into the history of Basic Writing Studies as a way to better train our graduate students. Like Uehling, I explain the structure of a graduate course titled "Teaching Basic Writing" that I have taught for twenty years (both in person and online) to graduate students from a wide range of backgrounds. However, unlike Uehling's class which focuses on professionalization, my course structure draws from my previous research in Basic Writing Studies that has charted a series of shifts in how the discipline constructs Basic Writers' identities in terms of "developmental and grammar-based models (1970s), academic discourse models (1980s), conflict models (1990s), and contextual models (2000s)." I then examine some new, intriguing trends in research that appear in *JBW*, ones that I find hopeful for the future of the discipline and will help me reconceive my graduate course itself. As I note, some work in Basic Writing is now concentrating upon "our basic writers' constructions of their own identities in ways that do not put pressure on them to solve the many problems of the discipline but instead feature their fluctuations, their messinesses, their moments of contradiction." Finally, I describe some of the intriguing projects that my graduate students have produced over the years and offer my thoughts about the future of the discipline.

All of these essays advance crucial ideas about how we can empower our graduate students to better understand Basic Writing history, theory, and practice. Bernstein encourages teaching Basic Writing as a kind of activism

while Villanueva and Moeggenberg call for a methodology of critical self-reflection as well as stronger education in Basic Writing Studies. Uehling encourages us to examine the importance of professionalization while I return us to our history in a search for clues about our potential futures. In some sense, upon finishing reading the last essay, the reader should be even more prepared to return to the issues raised within the first essay. As such, the essays are meant to offer the reader a kind of circle in thinking such that one essay feeds directly into the next. These essays continue a decisive and ongoing discussion in Basic Writing Studies about the absolutely crucial role of graduate education.

Soon the Flagstaff ponderosa pine trees will be caked with snow and we will all be donning skis and snowshoes to hit the trails, leaving our dusty hiking boots in closets until next spring. A new, colder season will commence. This winter season promises to be a wonderful time to contemplate our next steps in Basic Writing and graduate education. In our next special issue, we will be expanding and developing the questions posed here even a bit further. I look forward to visiting with you again then.

--Laura Gray-Rosendale of Northern Arizona University,
Guest Editor

Works Cited

Gleason, Barbara. "Reasoning the Need: Graduate Education and Basic Writing." *Journal of Basic Writing*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2006, pp. 49-75.

An Unconventional Education: A Letter to Basic Writing Practicum Students

Susan Naomi Bernstein

ABSTRACT: This essay, in letter form, introduces graduate-level study in Basic Writing to practicum students. It situates teaching practices within Basic Writing histories and pedagogies, and invites readers to focus widely, read deeply, and keep writing. Included are lessons from Bernstein's experiences in presenting David Bowie's artistic and cultural contributions, reading James Baldwin, addressing racial literacy, and becoming a neurodiverse writer and teacher of Basic Writing.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; David Bowie; graduate education; interdisciplinarity; neurodiversity; pedagogy; racial literacy

Dear Basic Writing Practicum Students:

In this letter, I want to share with you the story of how I became—and why I am still becoming—a teacher of Basic Writing. I share these stories with you, in part, to consider the call for more teacher training and professional development in BW. But more significantly, I offer my experiences with the idea that your own stories also are worth sharing, and that expertise is not a stable commodity, but a shape-shifting and fluid approach (Anzaldúa) to the material realities of our field. Because of this fluidity, teacher training also is not a commodity or even an insurance policy for a better, more sustainable career. If you imagine that teacher training in BW will clear your path for a carefree journey through the academic world, then please reconsider. BW carries with it a mandate for advocacy, and not only advocacy for our students, but also advocacy for our courses and our programs, and of course for fostering growth in our students' advocacy for themselves and

Susan Naomi Bernstein's recently published work includes the essay, "Occupy Basic Writing: Pedagogy in the Wake of Austerity," featured in Nancy Welch and Tony Scott's collection *Composition in the Age of Austerity*, and an entry on *ASU-Tempe's Writing Program*, in collaboration with Shirley K. Rose and Brent Chappelow, in *Writing Program Architecture*, edited by Bryna Siegel Finer and Jamie Farnham-White. Susan writes a blog for MacMillan, with whom she published *Teaching Developmental Writing*.

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their communities, and by extension all of our communities (Kinloch et al., “When School Is Not Enough”).

Please note that I am writing to you not only as future (or even current) administrators, but in your primary role as graduate students and shapers of BW pedagogy—now and for the future. Your presence in graduate school at this present moment in the history of our subfield of Basic Writing and in the history of our nation is quite different from the world I found myself in as a new graduate student and a new teacher of basic writing more than 30 years ago. The resources available to each of us are quite different, certainly in terms of technology, but also in terms of economics.

In 1987, the year I taught my first basic writing course, education was still considered a public good. By this I mean that tuition reimbursement was more available and somewhat less competitive. Then as now, our professors warned us that even with a PhD in hand, we were not guaranteed a full-time tenure track position. But at that time, we were not yet required to own cell phones or laptops. Our housing costs were lower because gentrification had not yet hit our small college towns. Our undergraduate students could support their college educations with benefits from welfare, which allowed a four-year college degree to count as job training. In other words, times have changed.

As a graduate student, you might find yourself in conditions that necessitate planning for contingency and flexibility, for thinking outside the box of standardization (Sousanis and Suzuki) and work/life balance (Mountz et al.; McMahon and Green). You might wish to compartmentalize less and to integrate more, and to learn to advocate for yourself as well as for your students and your programs. This letter speaks directly to those needs.

If a career as an educational advocate is not what you had in mind, then let us reflect together on what advocacy can mean for you as a teacher. You are not here for the glory or the accolades, because those are few and far between. You are not here only for the teaching either, however, because as rewarding as the teaching is, you must learn to think beyond the classroom and understand the intersections of our and our students’ lives as members of larger communities. Your goal is to offer students the news that they may already know: inside and outside of our classrooms, they can learn to become their own best teachers.

ADVOCACY

You are here, then, to advocate for our students and ourselves always growing as writers and as human beings. Moreover, even as you are advocating for our students, you are also advocating for spaces in postsecondary education that will offer sanctuary for our students and their human right to an education, in which writing plays a deeply significant role. Writing will set into motion our students' movement toward freedom as writers and as thinkers (Freire).

That freedom will not happen simply through "accelerating" students (Adams et al.; also see the *Basic Writing E-Journal* Special Issue on ALP edited by Anderst et al.), nor through "stretching" students (Glau), to use two common course names that have become metonymic terms for reframing basic writing. We can invent as many new terms and new course names as we would like, but one basic truth remains: students by virtue of their placement in courses designated as "basic writing" are considered marginal to postsecondary institutions. Our job as teachers and as administrators is to become a forceful presence that creates visibility for our work and for the work of our students. As bell hooks writes, the goal is to move all of us from the margins to the center of the stories of our lives and of our communities.

MY METHODOLOGY

I believe it will be helpful to present my methodology in conceptualizing not only our practicum course, but also our course in basic writing, called "Introduction to Academic Writing" at my previous institutional home.

My methodology relies on deconstruction of the term "not college-ready," a designation that postsecondary institutions employ to determine student placement into "remedial" writing courses. The existence of the remedial writing course contradicts the premises of diversity and inclusion by labeling students as "different from" their so-called "college-ready" peers. Moreover, through its label, the remedial course already becomes a target of elimination.

In order to avoid elimination, teachers may be under pressure to produce visible results in increasingly accelerated periods of time. The struggle for efficiency can point to a separation between the goals of students (learning to write for college) and teachers (producing as many passing students as possible in the shortest length of time). Such pressures, as Kinloch emphasizes, can result in: ". . . the damage of teachers silencing students

and/or asking them to abandon their lived realities and community voices upon entrance into classrooms” (“Difficult Dialogues,” p.110).

I deconstruct the term “not college-ready” to address reading beneath the surface of students’ texts. Reading beneath the surface allows students and teachers alike to discover their strengths in writing, which students can then develop and build on. We can discern and apply, with students, a significant shift to writing for new audiences and purposes. Along with this shift, students are experiencing years-long (Sternglass) and deeply embodied experiences related to the material realities of transitions to college. These transformations, observable over the course of the academic year in our campus’ two-semester “Stretch” writing course, are critically intertwined with students’ approaches and attention to the processes and products of writing.

In *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida describes writing and the process of writing in terms that invoke violence, or at least as a process that unsettles and produces vertigo. In this context, writing “denatures,” “wrests,” “estranges” (137); and is a “simulacrum that must be understood as a force—of an identity that is ceaselessly dislocated, displaced, thrown outside itself” (326), and the writing process understood as “a new form of dizziness” (326). This “new form of dizziness” holds particular relevance for analysis of writing created in developmental writing classes, especially when postsecondary institutions use standardized tests to categorize students as “not college-ready,” a designation that students would not use to describe themselves.

What Is Normal?

One of the first lessons I try to address in BW teaching and teacher training is an unpacking of “deficiency,” often by asking the question, “What is normal?” How is normal defined, and who is allowed to write that definition? This pedagogical approach helps establish the groundwork for students’ reinvention of themselves as writers. The placement methods of BW have defined students as outside the norm (Davis; Wood). Although conforming to the norm might allow for students to feel safe initially, this conformity is not necessarily the strongest attribute for transitioning to college writing, much less for fostering a sense of self-advocacy and community advocacy. Instead, writers at every level, all of us, need to reinvent ourselves, to grow, to learn, to absorb, and to become better writers. We need to defamiliarize what we think of as writing, to make the familiar strange again (Schmid).

THREE COMPONENTS OF GRADUATE TRAINING

Graduate training in Basic Writing for me has come to consist of three components, all of which evolved from what was absent from my own graduate training in BW:

Component #1: Question and Observe Practice

Question not only practices required by our program, but also our own emerging pedagogical practices. In *Repurposing Composition: Feminist Interventions for a Neoliberal Age*, Shari Stenberg recounts her program's process of developing assessment, which "allowed us a window into the roles of writing and research in one another's disciplines and classrooms, enabling us to think relationally and contextually about our responsibilities as writing instructors" (139-140). This feminist practice, as Stenberg suggests, can become a starting point for important questions regarding both programmatic requirements and classroom practices.

We can consider our work as always in process and subject to revision, observing ourselves and others without judgment, but always with the motivation to learn and grow from each other as teachers. In our own classrooms, we can take field notes on our own practice. For instance, we can jot down our classroom notes in the margins of our course planners, or in the note-taking app on our phones. We can invite students to take part in this practice through anonymous comments on discussion boards, or in other anonymous comments or questions that they can submit to us (Bernstein, "File Card Discussion").

Through these questions and observations, we can create and continually revisit a thick description of our practice. If we notice inconsistencies or blank spaces, we can take a moment to defer judgment and pay close attention to what we are learning from this process. After that moment, we can return to questioning and perhaps working toward revision of our own programmatic requirements and our own practices.

Component #2: Develop a Broad Rather Than a Narrow Perspective

Model your own education in teaching BW and your subsequent professional development activities using the processes that are part of a strong basic writing curriculum: Read widely and deeply, and process your reading through writing, to develop a broad rather than a limited perspective.

The following guidelines can help teachers to more completely attain their instructional goals. More significantly, however, these guidelines enable teachers to offer a curriculum that encourages students enrolled in BW to contribute their unique perspectives in an intellectually engaging classroom environment:

- **Focus Widely:** My research and teaching rely on interdisciplinary insights from philosophy, history, music, and literary studies, as well as from Basic Writing Studies and Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies. Focusing on only one disciplinary approach allows few opportunities for ourselves as teachers to learn and grow outside the box, and this presents the potential to miss vital tools to interrogate how the system works or to develop empathy for how students learn and grow.
- **Cultivate Compassion:** For graduate students new to teaching courses institutionally categorized as basic writing, reading literary, philosophical, and historical texts can cultivate compassion for the life circumstances and positionality of students whose approaches to learning may appear quite opposed to our own practices and beliefs (Barbezat and Bush; Inoue; Von Dietze and Orb, drawing on the work of Nussbaum). These texts should include sources on racial literacy (Sealey-Ruiz), anti-racist assessment (Inoue), intersectionality (Crenshaw), decoloniality (Tuck and Wayne Yang), translanguaging (Anzaldúa), disability (Davis), and queer theory/disidentification (Muñoz), all of which remain of deep concern for students enrolled in BW.
- **Read Deeply:** Also assign reading and writing in many genres. Pay close attention to students' questions and concerns. Remember that poetry and fiction can be read rhetorically, and that our students grow their abilities to read and think empathically and rhetorically outside the box through encounters with a variety of genres, including literary texts (Isaacs). Under no circumstances should the reading be narrowed to Writing Studies, or to the emergent field of Basic Writing Studies. Writing Studies and Basic Writing Studies, in their attempts to professionalize, systemize, and codify our discipline, often reify the systemic hierarchies that stigmatize placement in Basic Writing as a potentially permanent marginalized status.

- **Keep Writing:** Make sure that you keep up with your own writing practice, and consider making pedagogical/scholarly/creative contributions yourself. These contributions can take forms that you have practiced, and perhaps forms that are new to you, such as contributions to journals (e.g., *Journal of Basic Writing*, *Basic Writing E-Journal*), edited collections, or blogs. If your budget allows for it, presenting at conferences can offer additional opportunities. Venues for presentation in the field include (but are not limited to) the Council on Basic Writing, a Standing Group at the CCCC (Conference on College Composition and Communication), the AERA (American Educational Research Association), the NADE (National Association for Developmental Education), and TESOL International.

Component #3: Break Rules That Call to Be Broken

Do not hesitate to embrace a new approach or to break any rules that seem to have calcified. This includes the rules listed above, or those that appear to foster a self-satisfaction that our approach is the best approach for all times and in all situations. In a subdiscipline that historically and in our current historical moment must justify its existence to people inside and outside of Writing Studies, this third component holds particular relevance. Interdisciplinarity and openness to teacher/scholarship from the arts and humanities, the social sciences, education, and STEM can offer us insights for developing our work, leading to pedagogies and policies for creating equity for all of our students.

MY TRANSITION FROM GRAD SCHOOL

In 1993, as I undertook my first post-graduate teaching position at an urban community college in the Northeast, I began to research the many historical and cultural contexts, the *kairos*, of how I came to be educated as a teacher of students in courses institutionally categorized as “basic writing.” Most of all, I wanted to answer the question of how we can prevent catastrophes both *perpetrated* AND *perpetuated* by white supremacy from happening ever again (Rich). At the time, I had moved from a publically funded rural Northeastern doctoral granting institution to the largest city in the same state. While the university was located in a depressed town in

northern Appalachia, the college occupied space in a city that was deeply entrenched in financial crisis and racial and economic disparities.

The consequences of these disparities were evident every day in the deteriorating physical plant of the college's main building, and I could not help but compare that building to the well-maintained upstate campus from which I had recently graduated. I could not reconcile the fact that the majority of my students in the city were black, and the majority of my students upstate were white. In bearing witness to these imbalances, I became aware of the deep necessity for intersectional self-questioning (Valdes), and also for self-education. For this process, my graduate school courses in theory, American and comparative literature, and philosophy served me well.

From these courses, I learned to interrogate the shiny surfaces presented to me by employers and to seek out knowledge of the deep structures that constituted the material realities of students' lives. In the fissures between administrative commodification of college life and students' stories of struggle (with the welfare system, the criminal justice system, the healthcare system, the education system, the foster care system, and so on) grow the roots of basic writing pedagogies.

These roots are ever shifting, and often they are difficult to find. But it is the search for roots that keeps our teaching fresh. I cannot teach you a system or method that provides a 21st-century version of *The Key to All Mythologies*, an ongoing work in progress written by Mr. Casaubon, a professorial character in George Eliot's 19th-century novel, *Middlemarch*. There is no key to teaching Basic Writing, nor should there be. We come to teaching and learning BW with different motives and experiences, and what I hope to teach you is how and why to examine those motives and experiences, so that you are better prepared to work with and listen to students, no matter who they are, and no matter what and how they write.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

In the fall semester of 2016, just past midterms, a sense of nervousness overtook the classroom. My students, traditional in age and diverse in background, struggled with complicated feelings about their transition to college, and about the upcoming presidential election.

Meanwhile in practicum, the field work/observation assignment was due. A graduate student who did not have a class of their own to teach asked about the possibility of visiting my classroom and teaching a lesson on creativity. The purpose of the lesson was to encourage students to think outside

the box of writing with templates and formulas. The graduate student hoped that these new college students in the first term of their two-semester Stretch writing program would be open to experimenting with poetry and music in order to foster new experiences for writing. I asked the students in Stretch if they were open to devoting an hour of class time to this lesson. Intrigued by the idea of a break in routine, the students agreed.

Before the practicum student visited the class, I took note of where we had been and where we were going. We had just finished a unit on the question “What is normal?” which included a presentation of David Bowie’s contribution to cultural awareness, particularly through his music and artistic presentation in *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (see Figure 1). Bowie provided a powerful and groundbreaking example of disidentifying, or separation of self from the conventional fixed-binary gender identities of mainstream culture, thus queering our classroom as a safer space for private reflection upon and group discussion of diversity (Muñoz).



Figure 1. “David Bowie in the Early 1970s: Newcastle Upon Tyne City Hall.” (Rik Walton) commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:David-Bowie_Early.jpg. Accessed 10 Oct. 2017.

As part of that unit, we played and discussed the official video of David Bowie's "Starman," from the album *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. We also discussed the lyrics and noted references to "Starman" in contemporary settings. One of the presidential candidates included "Starman" in a series of songs played before and after stump speeches. The song also served as musical accompaniment to the film *The Martian*.

The students knew the song, but did not know Ziggy. I explained Bowie's deliberate appearance as an alien, and the shock value of the song in 1972, the year Bowie toured as Ziggy: the long red hair, the rainbow costumes, the non-heteronormative stance, and the hope embodied in the lyrics for the 1972 international teenage audience, of which I was a part (Trynka, pp. ix-xii).

I was nervous. Bowie had been dead for less than a year, and in that time I had once again absorbed his music through my skin, using it for solace in the midst of an ongoing depression that would not seem to lift (Bernstein, "David Bowie"). I had rarely brought his music or his lyrics to class before. But I could not think of a better illustration of the question "What is normal?" than the character of Ziggy, and it became apparent that some of the students were familiar with Bowie from the movie *Labyrinth*, or through the albums their parents played for them. *Starman*, and Bowie's performance as *Starman* performed by Ziggy, asked students to take on intersectional self-questioning. Ziggy was the alien who could save us from ourselves, if only we could tune in to his frequency.

By the time of the practicum student's visit, we were ready for discussions on creativity. Besides Bowie's work, we also watched Evelyn Glennie's TED Talk, "How to Truly Listen," in which Glennie discusses the processes of becoming a performer with profound hearing loss. Throughout these processes, Glennie emphasizes the deep significance of creativity, and how and why careful listening relies on pushing the senses and the imagination beyond what appears to be the most obvious or easiest responses to music, toward new experiences in education and in life. Because she is profoundly deaf, Glennie had to argue for her admission to the Royal Academy of Music in London. She suggests in her TED Talk the necessity of presenting such arguments in order to ameliorate injustice for future generations, and indeed, the processes for audition changed as a result of Glennie's efforts.

The practicum student's presentation focused on "Clapping," which is an additional percussion piece performed by Glennie. In both the TED Talk and "Clapping," Glennie's performances were addressed as a means of introducing the place of creativity in academic writing. The first-semester

students in Basic Writing offered their responses, of which I provide two samples:

A music education major:

The Evelyn Glennie “clapping Music” video was very cool, it is a typical piece of what musicians call organized chaos. From the Music you could tell she was in 4/4 time, and she was at about an andante tempo of I’m guessing 64- 78 on a metronome. To continue, the Rhythm had an accent on one, a beat on the “and” of 1,2,3,and ,4, and she was also doing triplets on top of those. Her hands were in a 2 to 3 ratio with the melody (or in this case the almost melody) in her right hand, and her steady beats and tempo in her left hand. Her shape and dynamics were in a grow and release form which added what musicians call “musical color” to the piece because it created a different tone to the instrument. Also adding to the “color” of the piece was her technique and her placement of her sticks and hands.

An engineering major:

The video we watched made us focus really hard in order to hear and see what the composer wants us to feel. The sound of the instrument is a clank instead of a thump or wind instrument. The pattern is simple and repetitive. Very catchy still have it in my head. There’s a noticeable difference in the tone between a low and high clank. The pattern is so systematic and mechanical that when I hear it the picture I see is an old car that’s stuck on cranking. The ticking and thumping of a v8 engine the same pattern but many different sounds I can relate that to the song. In the youtube video Evelyn Glennie is playing an instrument that produces a strange sound and wants the reader to listen. During the YouTube video I discovered that while she was playing there’s two ways to hit the instrument to get two different sounds out of it. Another thing I noticed in the video is her dress and the stage lights. She wears a yellow dress and has blue stage lights. While in the other clips of other performances she wears red is on the floor and has pink mood lights.

These writing samples are an indication of the depth of thought that can be expressed by students regardless of their level of expertise in writing

and their placement in a remedial writing course. A placement in remediation, no matter what its label in the course catalogue, is far from a desirable requirement for our students—or for anyone’s students. Immediately, at the beginning of their college careers, first-year students are thrown back into the messiness of test results, and frustrations about having to take an extra semester of writing. Fear of failure often plays a role in students’ performance, because placement in BW is always already a sign of perceived failure.

While names like “Stretch” and “ALP” (Accelerated Learning Program) may be an attempt to alleviate or even eliminate the stigma of remedial placement, we need to remember that these names were put in place to persuade administrators, colleagues, outside funders, and other stakeholders of the efficacy of these interventions (Glau; Adams et al.; also see the *Basic Writing E-Journal* Special Issue on ALP edited by Anderst et al.), which supports the efficacy of our work as WPAs, teachers, and graduate students. But we need to look at these names from the point of view of first-year students, and view the nomenclature with pathos for students who experience the emotional as well as the material realities of enrollment in any BW course. For students who have come of age in an era of educational austerity and precarity, the arguments for additional course hours can feel like economically fraught barriers rather than conduits to learning and moving forward through their educational programs in a timely manner (Fox).

This reasoning propelled me as a graduate student to the discipline of Basic Writing. I had started in Art and Art History because my undergraduate grades and GRE scores were initially too low to be offered a teaching stipend in English. Besides, I had a Modern Languages BA.

Although the connections to writing seemed straightforward to me, they did not seem nearly so to my professors, who were invested in power struggles to quantify their own relevance in departmental politics. The political dimensions of the job seemed to take a great toll, and this is often the case with the political battlefields where BW skirmishes are fought and fought, over and over again. Students have their own battles in surviving a system that so often mitigates against their academic success. For these students and for any student, it is not a personal culture of poverty that they have inherited (Payne; Bomer et al.), but a societal culture of material poverty that devalues raw creativity, even as it praises polished innovation.

From the perspective of first-year students, there remains a deep disconnect between their placement test scores and the amount of academic labor and financial capital they must invest in the transition between high school

and college. For students, BW feels like a step backward, even if it is offered for six hours of credit for transfer or graduation, or accelerated, or integrated with reading or another course. BW is not where students expected to end up at the beginning of their college careers, and no amount of administrative explanation or metaphorical obfuscation can take away the frustration of the material circumstances of students' lives.

Students may express frustration with a BW placement, but every so often we may encounter a moment of recognition, such as this student's reflection:

I've always struggled with writing all throughout middle school and high school. I just get in front of the computer screen and kind of freeze and I can't think of what to write. When I came to college I was nervous for WAC 101 because I thought it was going to be really hard and strict writing, considering I thought I was bad at writing; but when I got to WAC 101 and started doing my journal entries and once I submitted my first writing project, I realized it wasn't that hard. Turns out WAC 101 wasn't strict writing, it was creative writing and I enjoy writing a lot more now. So it feels good to be a writer as of today.

Let me be clear. Our class is not a creative writing class. What our practicum student provided, and what I tried to support, was an atmosphere of openness and an expectation that students would achieve much more than they might have initially thought possible. For many students, that "much more" is a reconnection or a first connection with language, audience, purpose, and context, which are among the many components of a first-year writing class. What has changed between the last decade of the 20th century and the second decade of the 21st century is the writer's connection (or lack thereof) to their own thought processes. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have taught students how to fill out the templates necessary to pass tests, and the students who have played by the rules to complete high school have had limited experience with thinking outside the box in their lives at school.

Our students in BW often struggle without these templates, yet that struggle is a necessary first step to finding a voice that will connect them to their own thoughts and to moving toward a more engaged and committed presence in their writing.

DEVELOPING RACIAL LITERACY

The classroom vignettes that offer success in application of creativity to everyday life present more challenges to creative thinking when applied to developing racial literacy (Sealey-Ruiz). According to Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, “Racial literacy is a skill and practice in which individuals are able to probe the existence of racism and examine the effects of race and institutionalized systems on their experiences and representation in US society” (386).

In the second semester of Stretch, concerned about the need to address racial literacy, I asked students to create an essay that drew connections between difficult texts that initially seemed completely different to students: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”; Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave”; and texts that students would choose themselves. The results challenged my thinking on this subject, and changed my approach to discussing race in practicum and in Stretch Writing courses. I now introduce the conversation about racial literacy in the first semester, through reading and writing about the works of James Baldwin (Bernstein, “Why is Writing So Hard?”), and then focus on additional examples of protest literature in the second semester (Bernstein, “Creative Projects”).

The experiment of addressing racial literacy in the second semester was not entirely a success, and the results seemed to fall across racial lines. In the first semester unit on creativity, students had an opportunity to think outside the box across categories of difference, such as the previously mentioned example of David Bowie and gender fluidity. Yet the evolution of racial literacy proved more ambiguous.

During the second semester, students wrote on race as follows:

Sample 1:

In MLK’s letter he talks about the injustice in birmingham and how the justice system is wrong because they are denying his legal rights to peacefully protest. In the mountaintop speech he says “True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.” without justice peace is impossible and there isn’t any justice when MLK was sent to jail for peacefully protesting. MLK is the prisoner in Allegory that escapes and sees the real truth. He gets to see how the world really is and the real truth of life. MLK gets to the mountaintop and sees the truth and sees the civil rights movement succeed and gain their rights.

Sample 2:

It was about 53 years ago, Martin Luther king Jr. delivered a speech that, described a dreamed he had, and still today it resonates with individuals around the nation, giving chills with the amount of passion it was delivered with. Looking deeper into Martin Luther King's work to the work that, we have covered in class so far specifically Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Comparing both of these works we see a connection of intolerance, how it can consume an individual like, being trapped in a dark cave, and only through the initial blinding light of education can you escape this way of thinking. Today, we see that Martin Luther King's dream has not been fulfilled, and African Americans are still discriminated against.

Sample 3:

After "Martin Luther King Jr's Letter from Birmingham Jail 1963, Sam Cooke wrote a song "A Change is Gonna Come." This song talks about how a boy is told what he should and shouldn't do because it is not the right thing. But he still believes and knows there will be change and takes his life day by day and wants to see the day things change in the world. In the verse, "Then I go to my brother, And I say brother help me please, But he winds up knockin' me, Back down on my knees, There been times when I thought I couldn't last for long, But now I think I'm able to carry on." This explains how Dr. King relied on the president at the time and he didn't help because he was afraid how the nation would react, but that didn't stop Dr. King from continuing his movement. It also shows how the prisoner goes back to tell the others but is not believed.

This experiment did succeed in allowing students to grapple with difficult texts (Sealey-Ruiz), and to attempt to address new concepts and complexities within and between those texts. Yet some of their attempts to do so are presented in quick summations and simple "happy" resolutions to complex issues of race and social injustice that are in actuality still ongoing. For other students, who have already experienced racial injustice first hand, the hope for a better future remains contradicted by the intransigence of the present.

The imposed structure or template of a comparison/contrast essay will not work for synthesizing specific details that, for many students in this

cohort, remain deeply emotional. The emotional labor of studying these issues seemed especially evident as these students wrote in the spring of 2017, when political shifts in the United States rendered discussions about race especially difficult (Grayson, p. 144). The cohort students grapple in this writing with subjects from which many of the adults around them had retreated (Coates, “The First White President”).

Racial identity development (Tatum) can take decades of exposure to injustices that are outside the experiences of many students and teachers (myself included), who grew up in segregated white communities, or mixed communities with school districts that reify racial segregation through ability tracking or the charter school movement (Fine). For people who identify as white, part of this process includes not merely calling out the unearned benefits of white privilege, but also persisting in working to end the racial hatred of white supremacy through our long-term commitments to teaching, scholarship, and personal and community action (Bernstein, “The Nice White Lady”; Green, “Difficult Stories”; Winans, “Cultivating Critical Emotional Literacy”).

PROGRESS AND UNCONVENTIONALITY

Progress in writing, as Marilyn Sternglass observed in *Time to Know Them*, her 1990s study of student writers at risk at City College of New York, is not linear, because students’ writing lives are not linear. Students must make adjustments for the material realities in their lives outside of the classroom, which often include full-time or equivalent employment and care for family members. Sternglass noted that students frequently must make the choice to drop out to deal with the material realities of their lives, and then return to their studies in times that they hope will be more stable.

Similarly, Paul Attewell and David Lavin conducted a longitudinal study, published in 2009, to chart the impact of higher education for working-class and poor women and women of color enrolled in the first cohorts of open-admissions students at City College in the early 1970s. After the passage of several decades, the women involved in this study reported economic and social mobility not only for themselves, but also for their children and grandchildren (Attewell and Lavin).

Nonetheless, in the ensuing years, the complexity of students’ lives and the long-term gains of higher education have been overlooked in the interests of institutional efficiency, and BW no longer exists on the four-year campuses of the City University of New York (CUNY) system (see Fox;

Gleason; Pepinster Greene and McAlexander; Otte and Williams Mlynarczyk; Soliday; and Soliday and Gleason for additional discussion and examples). The losses of “access to the kinds of cultural capital that higher education offers” (Fox, p. 4) need to be accounted for, and as M. Rose, Shaughnessy, and Rich have suggested, we need to pay deep and abiding attention to the material realities of students’ lives.

A student who tests into BW has already broken with conventional-ity, because BW has been defined in the last two decades not as a vehicle for educational equity (Inoue), but as a placement of last resort for students categorized as deficient by their institutions. But the reasons for this categorization do not mean that the student is deficient, only that the category is inadequate for addressing and ameliorating pre-existing societal conditions of education inequity. A typical student in BW is not typical. She may have attended low-performing schools, he may have worked for many years or served in the military before beginning or returning to college, she may have diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities, they may have come from a community or family that, for reasons of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, language background, immigration status, and so on, is identified as outside the mainstream of higher education.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND OPENNESS

Given the current complexity of our students’ lives, my guiding practices and principles as a basic writing teacher, and now as a basic writing practicum teacher, rely heavily on Components #2 and #3 of graduate training noted above: interdisciplinarity and openness (Banks), and a willingness to challenge and break the rules when necessary. Perhaps this move is rhetorically risky in a field that has only recently emerged from out of the shadows and elitism of traditional 20th-century English departments, and in our current political climate.

Yet the works that still resonate with us, the documents that we still continue to study and hope to teach to others, were composed during similarly difficult times (such as King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” James Baldwin’s “The Artist’s Struggle for Integrity,” Albert Camus’ “The Myth of Sisyphus,” and Audre Lorde’s “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”), and often with great risk. Study of these historical writings and their substantive complexity is important for not only creating an inclusive environment for our students but also engaging them in the kinds of intellectual work necessary for progress inside and outside of the basic writing

classroom. We also benefit from such challenges as we consider the precarity of our own work in the field of BW. Nonetheless, if we wish to avoid elitism ourselves, we will need to divest from the insularity of Writing Studies as a discipline, and learn how to power through the often profound discomfort of the problems posed by the material realities of courses institutionally categorized as Basic Writing.

JAMES BALDWIN: EVERYBODY'S HURT

Longstanding societal inequities, as Baldwin suggests in "The Artist's Struggle for Integrity," require us to reach out through writing to connect with one another. This especially holds true for Baldwin through the inherent contradiction brought about by segregation and inequality: it is very difficult to connect with one another on a human level. Nonetheless, Baldwin attempts to offer a means to this end: "Everybody's hurt. What is important, what corrals you, what bullwhips you, what drives you, torments you, is that you must find some way of using this to connect you with everyone else alive. This is all you have to do it with" (52).

In our own time, as well as in Baldwin's, some educators may mistake the embodiment of that hurt as students' deficiencies as individuals. The deficit model paradigm suggests that students need to overcome a so-called "culture of poverty" (Payne; Bomer et al.), or to "unlearn behaviors" that some BW educators see as detrimental to students' success in postsecondary education (Bernstein, "Qualifications"). In this iteration, students (and by extension their communities) are always already understood as deficient, and in need of training to conform to systems that, in Baldwin's terms, have led to human isolation and degradation. In "Sonny's Blues," Baldwin continues: "For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness" (104).

Baldwin suggests that we do not deny the existence of inequitable and cruel laws and policies. In our own field, we can count as inequitable those policies that lead to postsecondary basic writing placement. Such policies include (but are not limited to) housing segregation and school segregation, and segregation within schools of students with language differences and cognitive processing differences, and the school-to-prison pipeline (Coates; Satter; Kozol; Orfield, Frankenberg, et al.; Alexander; M. Rose). Consequences of these material realities play out every day in the lives of poor and working-class people and people of color in the United States, yet in the lives of many

white and middle- and upper-class people, such forces remain invisible, or even nonexistent.

Yet BW allows us to envision a place where the different lived experiences of the world may collide and perhaps even connect. In Baldwin's terms, we forge experiences of triumph so that there will be new stories to tell.

This vision of BW is not as easy to achieve as we might hope. For all of postsecondary education's talk of diversity, inclusion, and excellence (Watts), BW courses like ALP and Stretch are not meant to encourage difference, but to replicate pre-existing social norms that fail to examine binary oppositions of "virtue" and "deficit" (Frank). Frank rereads Baldwin to try to reconceptualize these oppositions; he states that, "with love, we see possibilities in our students that even they may fail to fully appreciate." In other words, in his reading of Baldwin's work for its relevance to contemporary teacher education, Frank suggests that we consider possibility rather than deficiency, and that we allow love to infuse our work as teacher educators.

MORE BOWIE

In August 1980, 37 years ago, I did not know what basic writing was. Unemployed, done with college, and living on the outskirts of Chicago, I accompanied friends to watch David Bowie's performance in Bernard Pomerance's play, "The Elephant Man" (see Figure 2). "The Elephant Man"



Figure 2. Blackstone Theatre Program, David Bowie in Pomerance's "The Elephant Man." Special Collections, Chicago Theater Collection-Historic Programs, Blackstone, 31 Aug. 1980.

tells the story of Joseph Merrick (called John Merrick in the play), a man with physical differences so stark that even a charitable audience was challenged to accept Merrick's humanity. Less charitable persons exploited Merrick's appearance in freak shows until Merrick was found by Dr. Frederick Treves. Dr. Treves brought Merrick to a London hospital for more sustainable care for his body and attention for his developing mind. Bowie played the character of Merrick.

This story of difference and escape from the freak show (Garland-Thomson) unsettled my world, not the least because Bowie played the title role. He did not wear makeup or use costuming to convey physical difference (as John Hurt would do in the film based on the play), but instead used his training in mime to embody the suffering of body and mind. Bowie wore a white loincloth or sometimes a hospital gown and his voice creaked and rattled (*David Bowie Is*; Trynka, pp. 357-58). I still hear echoes of that voice when I think of Bowie, especially since his death in January 2016. The voice grows clearer in memory.

I never heard Bowie perform in concert, but "The Elephant Man" seems like the deconstruction of Ziggy Stardust, from glam with all its glitter and colorful clothing to that plain white loincloth, the halting movement of the body, and the sound of the voice offering great depth and dignity. In Chicago, the recession of 1980 was in full swing and the steel mills were closing. Segregation was evident still, as it is to this day, and the only job I could find with a BA in French was at a suburban call center. I was mortified.

But I remembered Bowie, I remembered how he worked his bones and muscles to convey distress, and also dignity, and how the voice he adapted for the character of John Merrick claimed agency even as the freak show marked the Elephant Man as deficient in every way.

I would not teach my first BW class until 1987, thirty years ago. Yet it was Bowie's ability for transformation, his beautiful glamorous Ziggy reformed into the stark beauty of John Merrick, in minimal costuming and sparse makeup, that inspired me as I began teaching and that I remember to this day. Similarly, BW offers opportunities to develop two attributes that I admire in Bowie: unconventionality and reinvention.

KNOWING THE SCORE

Here is another story of unconventionality and reinvention, directly related to the question of who belongs in postsecondary education.

| ACT | | | | |
|------|------|---------|---------|-------|
| ENG. | MATH | SOC. S. | N. SCI. | COMP. |
| 20 | 10 | 23 | 15 | 17 |

Figure 4. Susan’s ACT Scores (1975, Personal Archive) English: 20 Math: 10 Social Sciences: 23 Natural Science: 15 Composite Score: 17

The scores shown in Figure 3 above represent the results of my second attempt at the ACT test forty-two years ago and are the scores that appear on my final college transcript. When I received these scores from my guidance counselor, he strongly suggested that I scale back my college aspirations.

I left his office as quickly as I could, walked as steadily as possible to my empty twelfth-grade English classroom, found a seat, and wept uncontrollably.

The composite score of 17 felt particularly frustrating (Kapelke-Dale). The readings and problems on the ACT did not have an urgency of context, and I forgot them the moment the test had ended. I do remember feeling bored, frustrated, and anxious, but that was normal for me. While I already understood that my “normal” did not always match the normal of many of my peers, or the expectations of many of my teachers, I had not expected the ACT to assign a score that was an underestimation of my abilities to learn and grow.

My teacher arrived well before class began and found me there. She asked why I was crying, and I responded by showing her the scores from the retake, and shared with her the guidance counselor’s words. “Of course you’re college material,” my teacher countered. “You will find a place and I will help you.”

At present, some learning specialists see divergences in test scores as an indicator of cognitive processing or other learning differences, even as ADHD remains underdiagnosed in girls and women. My ADHD diagnosis came very late, but also just in time for me to appreciate the struggle that so many college students face in the transitions, gaps, and fissures between our classrooms and the rest of their lives. My diagnosis also came with the understanding of the role that white privilege plays in my life, and the responsibility to work in coalition to create positive, equitable, and lasting social change (Bernstein, “Occupy Basic Writing”).

UNCEASING EFFORT

Teaching Basic Writing allows me to create a space for not only learning the art of writing, but also, through the action of writing, to become aware of our own challenges, the challenges of those who came before us, and the challenges of others in order to form new connections within ourselves, with classmates and peers, and within and beyond our own communities. Albert Camus's "The Myth of Sisyphus" explains this process as "unceasing effort." Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to roll a rock up a mountain for all eternity, an impossibly depressing task. Yet the last time I taught Sisyphus, a student found an insight so moving that they wrote it on a t-shirt: "He is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock." I included the t-shirt in my quilt "All of Our Grievances Are Connected" (see Figure 4) and considered the meaning of that rock. Perhaps it is time to bring Sisyphus into the classroom once more.

We gather together in this historical moment to discuss our teaching of a course called Basic Writing. With "unceasing effort," we can work to invoke its more vibrant and sustainable future.

Keep moving forward, dear Basic Writing practicum students, and take good care.

Sincerely,
Susan

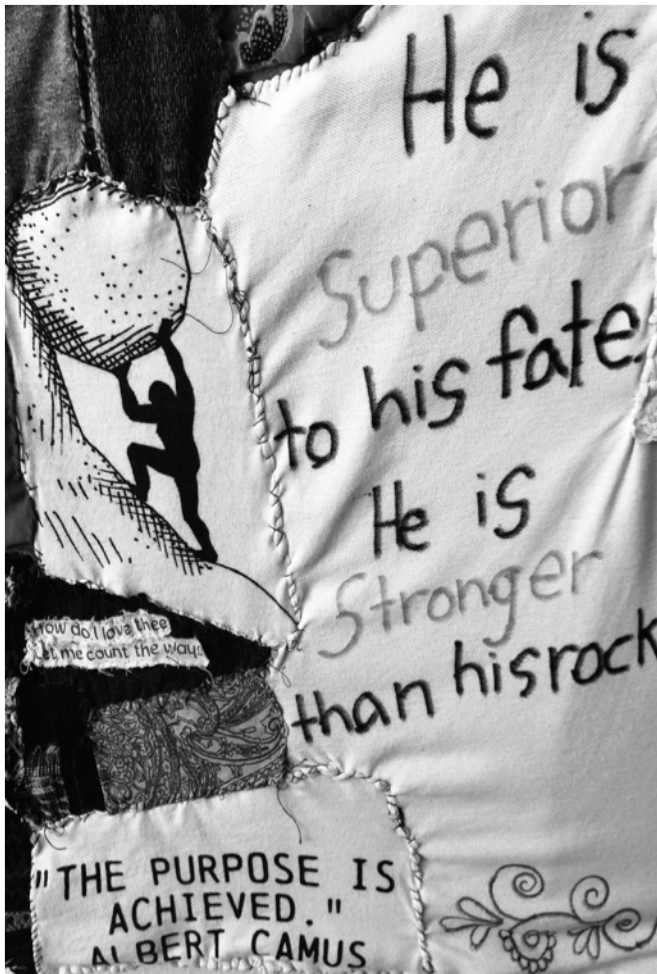


Figure 4. From Bernstein Quilt “All of Our Grievances Are Connected.” Detail of Student-Made Patch, “He is Superior to his fate. He is Stronger than his rock” (Camus).

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A Tale of Two Generations: How We Were Taught, and What We Learned (Or Not)

Victor Villanueva and Zarah C. Moeggenberg

ABSTRACT: For this essay, the authors provide an “introspective retrospective.” A senior scholar of basic writing provides his views on the development of basic writing as one who began graduate school in rhetoric and composition two years after Mina Shaughnessy’s 1977 Errors and Expectations. That perspective carries us through the discussions that took place during the 1980s and early 1990s. Of note are the ways in which a discussion that began with providing greater access to students who would not otherwise have entered the university eventually became racialized, given perceptions of orality versus literacy, with basic writers having been deemed as oral learners and thereby cognitively insufficient. That perception is then complicated by a junior scholar who came to basic writing in 2012, when basic writing studies was no longer offered within the graduate program in which she entered. She provides her own introspective on how she has experienced the learning about and the teaching of basic writing. Together, the authors speculate on the political implications of the current status of basic writing.

KEYWORDS: basic writing history; graduate education; Great Cognitive Divide; orality vs. literacy; LGBTQ; racism

Victor’s Story

I began graduate school in 1979, just two years after the first publica-

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tion of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*. Basic writing was on the mind of the profession, for better or worse. In 1981, I entered the doctoral program. On the one hand composition studies was still making claims that writing is a process. Our basic texts were Janet Emig's *The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders* (1971) or James Britton, et al's *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (1975). So too was Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), or Pulitzer Prize winner Donald Murray's telling us to "Teach Writing as a Process, Not a Product" (1971). Others were providing empirical evidence of writing as process, drawing impressive flowcharts, coming up with new methodologies. The research tendencies began, in terms of the changing presence of writing research, with Richard Braddock, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Lowell Schoer's 1963 *Research in Written Composition*, but I came into graduate school with Cooper and Odell's 1979 collection, *Research on Composing*, and I became an assistant professor at about the same time as Beach and Bridwell's *New Directions in Composition Research*. In terms of "impressive flowcharts," there was the work of John R. Hayes and Linda Flower, "Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes," contained in Gregg and Steinberg's 1980 *Cognitive Processes in Writing*. And there were others.

That said, there were no graduate courses on basic writing because it seemed as though basic writing was an integral part of the conversation within composition studies, explicitly so when Maxine Hairston, drawing an analogy to Thomas Kuhn's *Structure of Revolutions*, credited Mina Shaughnessy's work as the greatest influence in changing the paradigm of teaching writing from one focused on written products to writing-as-process. But it was Sondra Perl who drew the empirical connections between writing processes and basic writers, influenced, she writes in "Composing a Pleasurable Life," mainly by her own work as faculty in Lehman College and by her participation in meetings of CUNY teachers of writing, meetings led by Mina Shaughnessy. Perl completed her dissertation on basic writers' processes in 1978. She then published "The Composing Process of Unskilled College Writers" in 1979, establishing that the basic writer was no different from any other student writer.

But let me back up a bit. In a very real sense "process" began with Jerome Bruner's "cognitive process" theories, the degree to which development was tied to language, and the degree to which writing required greater cognitive abilities than the spoken, insofar as the written is an abstraction of the oral (Babin and Harrison, 272). Both Janet Emig and James Britton grounded their theory of the writing process in Bruner. But in so doing, they inadvertently began a process in composition studies that would work to

the detriment of basic writers. Though Bruner disagreed with Piaget (or at least saw limitations in Piaget's context-free, universal theory), composition folks got caught up with developmental schemes—Bruner to Vygotsky to Piaget (see, for example, DiPardo and Freeman). Mina Shaughnessy would poke fun at the developmental with “Diving In,” marking the development of writing teachers in their attitudes toward basic writers, where they begin by “Guarding the Tower,” moving to “Converting the Natives,” then, finally simply knowing that the work just takes “Diving In.” And as Shaughnessy notes in that same essay, terms like “remedial” and “developmental” reflect more about teacher and administrative attitudes than the qualities or abilities of the students. Yet the terms continue to this day— nearly a half century after Shaughnessy's article.

On a not-side-note: As composition studies' relation to rhetoric grew (particularly with the attention given to invention that took shape in the 1980s, most notably through scholars like Karen Burke LeFevre), Erik Havelock's *Preface to Plato*, originally published in 1963, gains a resurgence with a new paperback edition in 1982. The likely impetus for the paperback reprint was Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, which came on the scene in 1982, Ong having been influenced by Havelock's work. But Havelock's was a particularly ethnocentric view of history, claiming that new cognitive abilities arose with the creation of alphabetic literacy (with special attention to the copulative verb, syntactically). This gave rise to what will become The Great Cognitive Divide.

And it was the Great Cognitive Divide that began a problem in characterizing basic writers. When cognitive psychology met with a particular reading of classical rhetoric, the basic writer became the orally-dependent writer, on the wrong side of Great Cognitive Divide, under-developed. Mina Shaughnessy based her pedagogy on the assumption that students were locked in orality. But rather than the apolitical, essentialized view of language that is accorded to Shaughnessy (Min-Zhan Lu), Shaughnessy's politics were responses to the students' own perceptions, to the realities of the then underprepared teacher, to the realities of administrators and the realities of budget allocations. In the Introduction to *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy writes,

For the BW student, academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone. The spoken language, looping back and forth between speakers, offering chances for groping and backing up and even hiding, leaving room for the language of hands and

faces, of pitch and pauses, is generous and inviting. Next to this rich orchestration, writing is but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws. (7)

Her awareness of orality versus literacy is not tied to cognitive abilities but to the pragmatics of institutional politics and political economies, that

there is the awareness of the teacher and administrator that remedial programs are likely to be evaluated (and budgeted) according to the speed with which they produce correct writers, correctness being a highly measurable feature of acceptable writing. (9)

Although we can't know how familiar Shaughnessy might have been with the Students' Right to Their Own Language (SRTOL), published three years before *Errors*, her view does echo SRTOL, in which one can read that

Teachers should stress the difference between the spoken forms of American English and EAE [Edited American English] because a clear understanding will enable both teachers and students to focus their attention on essential items. EAE allows much less variety than the spoken forms, and departure from what are considered established norms is less tolerated. (14-15)

In short, for Shaughnessy, the students' orality was a simple fact, not tied to cognitive function nor the racism suggested in relegating New York City's students of color to the oral. But others, most notably Thomas J. Farrell, contended that inner-city students' dialects outside of the Standard English relegated them to the bottom of the heap, to suffer from lower IQs.

"IQ and Standard English" appeared in *College English* in 1983, the same year I began writing my dissertation. I was a product of the inner-city, Brooklyn, a dropout from one of the city's vocational-technical high schools, a speaker of non-Standard English (a dialect Ana Celia Zentella labeled "Puerto Rican Black English," a mix of African American Language and Spanglish). After years in the military, I arrived at a community college with a high school GED. According to Farrell, I was supposed to be suffering from a linguistically created cognitive dysfunction. But I was about to write a dissertation. So I was already clearly predisposed to argue the association between basic writing, culture, and cognitive development. Accordingly, I

aimed to challenge the oral-literate debate in my dissertation by comparing the discussions that take place among students of color in writing groups within a basic writing classroom and students of color who had placed into conventional first-year writing courses. What I discovered that was most important, I think, was that the overarching differences between the basic writers and the conventional first-year writing students, apart from matters of “correctness,” was understanding audience. Basic writing students had no conception of what readers needed to know, neither how much nor how little. And so the basic writing students would carry on about how to board a bus, for example, instead of advancing an argument. The difference was understanding the culture they had entered, assuming vast differences between their experiences and those of their teacher.

I enter the profession in 1985. I taught basic writing, headed a basic writing program, became an assistant professor, eventually headed another basic writing program, a bridge program (the English component of the Successful Transition and Academic Readiness—STAR—program), moved to another university as an associate professor, reinstated the basic writing program there, and created a graduate course in basic writing. Years passed; I found myself looking more broadly at racism, its connection to rhetoric (as a means of ideologically maintaining racism even when arguing against it), rhetoric’s connection to political economies, colonialism, and the like. It was the racism-writ-large that remained my obsession. Still, I continue to work with students and teachers on basic writing, lending advice when asked, working on developing curricula, trying to add to an understanding of the scholarship and research on basic writing. Among those students (who is also a teacher) was Zarah. She has taught some basic writing— with great success and with mixed results— but with no real formal training. And we discover in conversation (with follow-up) that basic writing returns to racialization, to matters of dialect rather than writing, as she’ll explain in what follows.

Zarah’s Story

I think what drew me to basic writing was the feeling of being an outsider. A lesbian in a Catholic college before going on to graduate work, there weren’t any representations of LGBTQ identity in my coursework. No one was “out.” Although I would not understand it until later, like so many basic writers, I was at some distance from the expectations of the institution in terms of identity, in terms of the conventions of academic writing, in terms of pursuing academia for my career.

When I began my MFA in the Midwest, I was the only openly out queer in the department— for two years— but I could begin to explore what it meant to be gay and even write about it. Challenging the for-the-page genre of poetry with spoken-word poetry, I seemed to make the other poets and writers uneasy in our weekly workshops. Sometimes, they were silent, or they returned my drafts without comment. My evangelical officemate also questioned the morality of my sexuality more than once. I found myself taking fewer risks in my poetry in terms of content during the first year-and-a-half of the program. I went to my office at 10:00 in the evening to compose and practice what I really wanted to do with my poetry. That was when I knew everyone would be out of the building. In a small, unused classroom that might have held ten students or so, next to a dusty chalkboard, surrounded by stiff chairs from the 1980s that were neatly tucked beneath the fake-wood tables— I could be loud. I would repeat long phrases to find the music through my body. I could feel my voice channel into my shoulders and knees. I would gasp for air and practice letting it go in different cadences, trying to find, out loud, each queer voice I had written into my poems. A woman from Chicago experiments with her gender expression: “She cut her hair to Mohawk because she says she likes her hair / to match her shoes. And she is through with dresses, and she finds / That her breasts bind best with ace bandage wrap— the inexpensive kind.” Another woman struggles with losing her wife and raising their daughter: “And I tell her you never left that you are in the grass and the air / even though sometimes I can’t feel you at all. And I am barefoot all the time now. / And so is she. And I’d ask you if all of this is alright.” But more than anything, I explored with my body out loud if my sexuality could survive, if the way I saw the world counted, if *I* was possible: “I wind my hands the way my dad didn’t. He said, / ‘You’re still beautiful,’ his head cocked to the side.”

I was an outsider. So were the students with me in the Fall of 2012, when I was assigned to my first basic writing course. A professor in our program had asked if I were interested in teaching basic writing. She told me that it would be challenging, but that she thought I would do a good job. Perhaps it was serendipitous that I met these students when I did, when I was on the cusp of saying “Fuck it” to my program and to the heteronormativity of academia, and when they were on the cusp of saying “Fuck it” to a higher education that didn’t seem to take them seriously as thinkers and writers.

Edward M. White and William DeGenaro call these “chance encounters” in “Basic Writing and Disciplinary Maturation: How Chance Conversations Continue to Shape the Field.” The pair look back at the last twenty years

of Basic Writing in order to celebrate “small moments,” collaborations, and mentoring. Their collaboration, they write, “was a chance conversation, a teacher and student” (11). DeGenaro complicates the narrative of growth in the Basic Writing subfield when he writes that even as we fortify and sustain ourselves as a discipline, “maybe one of the best things we can all do is be more attuned to the little, idiosyncratic moments, the serendipities that can prove productive” (18). How White and DeGenaro describe their relationship as mentor and mentee in Basic Writing through chance encounters is well reflected in my own experience.

The first basic writing course I taught was in the second year of my MFA. I was the first graduate student to teach it. The class was comprised of primarily working class students and students of color, as well as some “re-turning” students and veterans. I think the students in this class delighted in teaching me phrases like “CPT” (as in Color-People Time), how to use “low-key” before a very audible “secret,” and arguing over whether Chicago or Detroit was better. They were a lively group. And intimidating.

I had taught first-year writing before this course but knew little to nothing about Basic Writing. Many people told me to focus on grammar. My mentors told me to expect many of these students to fail. “It’s common,” they said to me. In that first semester teaching a course of basic writing in the Midwest, I wouldn’t say that I did a poor job, but I also wouldn’t say that I did a great job. Significant to what White and DeGenaro write, a chance encounter as a MFA student halfway through my program with the opportunity to teach Basic Writing completely changed my career path. The professor who said she thought I would do a good job sat me down and told me to ensure I assigned shorter essays and that I focused on grammar once a week. I knew nothing of code-meshing, code-switching, what SAE meant, or how class and race are implicated in assessment processes. However, I was fortunate that one professor who would later teach me composition theory and another mentor both shared a great deal of their materials. My composition theory professor gave me the corpus of her assignment sequence and explained how she structured her lessons. My other mentor counseled me during tough moments: “Some students are simply not ready to be here. That’s not your fault.” My Director of Composition observed me a few times to give me further advice on my day-to-day activities with students. Some of this advice included better using the gradual release of responsibility method, a kind of I do, We do, You do way of teaching—I still find this effective in any course. She’d repeat to me, “You need to spread this out more. Show them, practice it with them, and then let them do it in groups.” Mostly, she helped

me understand when I was rushing concepts, something I would continue to work on for the next five years. She'd say, "I think you're trying to do too much. Choose, at most, two activities instead of, say, three or four."

After that semester teaching basic writing for the first time, I wanted to better understand composition theory; more specifically, I wanted to understand Basic Writing. These desires weren't fully satisfied at first, but they were over time. As I was enrolled in our institution's MFA program and there was also an MA program, there were attractive courses I wanted to take that conflicted with required courses in my own program. For example, the composition theory course offered to MA pedagogy students was at the same time as my poetry techniques course for MA and MFA creative writing students. I was fortunate that the young assistant professor teaching the composition theory course I mentioned earlier would meet with me in her office for an hour or two each week. I was frustrated by the readings in Villanueva and Arola's *CrossTalk in Comp Theory* and even cried when my professor first discussed the readings with me in her office. I struggled with literacy, with simply extracting the main points of these texts. Reading texts like Ede and Lunsford's "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked" and Flower and Hayes' "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" were a foreign language to me. I read sentences over and over, trying desperately to make sense of them. There were even words I could not pronounce. Others would knot in my mouth. Over time I got better at unpacking the arguments within these canonical articles. And while I can't say I learned much about composition that semester, I did learn how to read. By the end of the year I could well understand the essays and had a firm grasp on what informed composition studies at large. But it was critical that my professor set aside that time to unpack the articles with me, and that she helped me trace, page by page, the arguments.

Encouraged by one of my basic writing mentors at the time, I applied for and was awarded a summer research grant before the third and last year of my MFA program. The grant allowed me to explore what it meant to queer a writing prompt. I had become increasingly interested in what queer identity could mean in the classroom beyond representation within course texts, something Stacey Waite has recently written about in *Teaching Queer*, a critical text that moves queer composition toward queer-as-method within our field. During this short grant period, I read about what it meant to be an out LGBTQ teacher in Kevin Jennings's *One Teacher in 10*. I read Heidi A. McKee's "'Always a Shadow of Hope': Heteronormative Binaries in an Online Discussion of Sexuality and Sexual Orientation," which helps us understand

that “even within discussions centered on binaries, greater understanding of and tolerance for (and even acceptance of) differences can occur” (334). I read Alexander and Wallace’s “The Queer Turn in Composition Studies,” who write that “queer perspectives and experiences can serve a critical role in multicultural approaches to composition that seek to make teachers and students mindful about how different cultural backgrounds and allegiances shape different literacy practices” (303). In reading these texts and more by Spurlin, Alexander and Wallace, and Alexander and Rhodes, I began to understand what a pivotal moment I was in as I was entering this field. Ultimately, this all led me to consider in my creative writing pedagogy how I could get students to embody LGBTQ identity in their writing assignments, rather than simply read texts that had LGBTQ characters. Beyond that summer of 2013 on the small research grant that paid my bills, I knew I had found my niche, and that it might be possible to connect some of the things I was reading in queer composition to Basic Writing. But I knew it meant getting another terminal degree.

The next academic year I found myself accepted to several doctoral programs: two in creative writing, one in developmental education, and three in composition. I quickly ruled out creative writing and visited the other four programs. I was looking for three features: a basic writing course to teach, a mentor who did queer theory, a mentor who did Basic Writing. I found that each of the programs I looked at tended to have only one of these components. They varied with their monetary offers, teaching opportunities, GA-ships in writing program administration, faculty specialties, and research opportunities.

On the visit to the first school, in the Southwest, I found myself in an education program that specializes in developmental writing. While overwhelmed by the passion their graduate students had for “developmental” learners and while the program actually offered nearly everything I could want—both financially and support-wise—it lacked a rhetoric program that would help situate me theoretically. I would be so immersed in qualitative and quantitative methodologies, that I feared I would lose sight of what had really moved me to come to Basic Writing in the first place—the *how* of queering composition to make room for students otherwise excluded by the university. I knew, even without much exposure to scholarship, that if I were going to invest four to five years of my life getting a PhD, I had to situate myself in the history of our field, in a program foregrounded in rhetorical theory. And, I needed a program that was going to give real attention to

Basic Writing— its history, its rich possibilities, and its culture. I knew that chance encounters there would be slim.

The second and third schools— both rhet/comp programs— also didn't seem to have the right fit. The one in the Pacific Northwest— which I ended up choosing— didn't seem to offer me a lot of support at first. Victor was unavailable that day to meet; Wendy Olson was at a distant campus; and Basic Writing seemed to have disappeared from the program. The other program in the Midwest would mean I would have to travel to teach and research Basic Writing and there was no queer theorist for me to work with, nor someone who really specialized in Basic Writing anymore.

On the visit to the fourth school, I was exhausted and dissatisfied with my visits to all of the schools to which I had received acceptance. Nothing seemed to be the right fit for me. Queer theory and basic writing are hard to combine, I realized. A full professor was the last person I was going to see before meeting up with my mother for a late lunch. Sitting in an old armchair in an office full of neatly organized clutter and plants, this professor smiled as I melted into the other armchair nearer the door. As I let out a long breath, she asked me, "So, what do you think?"

"I'm not sure," I replied, feeling oddly comfortable and relaxed.

"What are your options?" she asked, tilting her head.

I told them to her at length, in great detail, and she listened intently.

She sighed, but didn't break eye contact. "You must go to Victor in Washington. You have to. It's a must."

I laughed. "Really?"

She nodded.

"He wasn't there when I visited."

"They'd kill me if they knew I was saying this," she nodded at the door and continued, bringing her voice to a whisper, "but you have to go work with *him*."

And so I did.

My chance encounter with the professor at the fourth school is likely *the* reason why I am still invested in Basic Writing. As White and DeGenaro write, small moments matter a great deal (16). This was a moment of mentoring that had nothing to do with institutional affiliation. It had everything to do with recognizing how to really support a young scholar within the larger work of supporting our subfield.

My training in composition at large has been good in my PhD. My Director of Composition at Washington State University stressed theory as

part of her training of graduate students in ways my previous program had not. Much of what I read during my MFA was covered during my PhD in ways that helped me to understand and develop my pedagogical approach more fully. I recognized the ways in which expressivist theory influenced my previous institution and how process theory and classical rhetoric influenced this one. The DoC at WSU, like my last, also fully supported my use of queer texts on transgender issues in my composition classroom. She helped me ground this work in current scholarship on queer composition and multimodality, as well as in previous scholarship in process pedagogy. At the beginning, she talked through with me how to integrate queer texts and make them integral to students' rhetorical analyses and synthesis papers. I learned to use these texts more unapologetically and without preface. I think some of this came from our casual conversations in the hallway about them, but those conversations were critical to me becoming more confident as a teacher. Later, these conversations helped me to consider how I might still integrate queer texts and help students build toward portfolio requirements while still composing in queer ways. For example, the Digital Scholarship Workspace assignment I discuss in my chapter in Laura Gray-Rosendale's *Getting Personal* is an assignment that asks students to build a website and unpack some of their research in a nonlinear structure. The assignment is largely informed by J. Jack Halberstam's notion of *play* and Alexander and Rhodes's discussion of queer rhetoric and its interruption of the normal in their "Queer Rhetoric and the Pleasures of the Archive." This move from discussing queer texts in my classroom to engaging students in queer composing was something I needed to anchor myself as a queer compositionist. This simple support from my DoC, mostly short conversations and quick check-ins, was instrumental to grounding queer theory in my pedagogy.

My mentoring in Basic Writing— and, really, graduate education in it— began when I met Victor midway into the first semester of my doctoral program. I knew what Victor looked like from pictures on our university website. In The Writing Program half-way across campus, rather than in the English Department building, he was illusive to me. I spent considerable amounts of time near his office for a couple of classes, but there always seemed to be somebody sitting and talking to him. I would write an email to him, rewrite it, and then delete it. I was terribly excited at the possibility of working through Basic Writing scholarship with him, but I felt like a total imposter.

One morning, I came out of a queer theory class to head to another. As I rounded the corner, I observed a man staring up at the numbers above the elevator, watching them move from right to left. I watched his eyes trace each number as it lit up a dull yellow. He was pacing slowly with his hands in his pockets. I hesitated about whether I should just head to my other class or take this moment where Victor wasn't in his office advising one of his graduate students or junior faculty. I found my hand raising by itself and heard my voice croak, "Hi, I'm Zarah. We haven't met yet."

He seemed a bit taken aback, but he smiled and shook my hand. "Ah, yes. Send me an email. Let's chat."

And that was when my mentoring in Basic Writing began.

There isn't a graduate course here at WSU that teaches Basic Writing theory or pedagogy. I think there is some version of it that morphed into something else—in fact, I know there is—but the truth is there isn't anything much at all now. During coursework, I took Composition Theory 1 and 2. The second course was more useful for understanding the history of composition, the different eras and movements, how composition latched itself to rhetoric, its relationship to literature, etc.. However, it didn't help me understand Basic Writing's position in the academy. This was where Victor filled in.

By the time Victor and I started working together he was much more invested in political economy and racism than he was in Basic Writing, although the subfield was what his career has been built from. For him, working with me one-on-one may have been a comfortable return. For me, it was a new fire.

We met weekly for over a year—we still do—and during that time we worked through Shaughnessy, Gray-Rosendale, Villanueva, Bartholomae, Bartholomae and Petrosky, and many others. But, really, we began with *Bootstraps*. He said to me one day, "If you really want to understand Basic Writing, if you really want to understand how I come to it, you have to read it." It was evident why this was important for us to move forward, but the following lines seem to sum up the ways in which mentoring/study of Basic Writing come together for me. Undoubtedly, they do for Victor:

In short, basic writers can be encouraged to develop and to trust their oral and their literate ways while continuing to communicate the struggles entailed in being other-cultural and outside the middle class. . . . (Villanueva 115)

Like Victor reflects in *Bootstraps*, I could identify well with many of the students who have been placed into my basic writing courses. The struggle with being “other-cultural” and from “outside the middle class” made it challenging to trust my own voice as powerful.

Victor struggles with the doctoral dissertation: not trusting in his Latino-literate, ostensibly oral ways, trying to maintain the voice of distance, of objectivity, of the researcher, without race, without a person. He believes he can. (Villanueva 115)

For me, where Victor and I are similar, him an academic of color, me a queer academic and woman, is not just to do with the ways in which we are othered within and outside of our field, but in how we do rhetoric. Victor found that oral discourse should be encouraged in Basic Writing pedagogy, encouraged to be *trusted*; yet it took him a long time to realize this for his own ways with rhetoric. Similarly, it took me a long time to trust that my body may be critical to my own ways with rhetoric, especially while I pursued my MFA. And now, as I theorize a queer composition, I struggle with how embodied practices and the body may become more meaningful for basic writing students as they continue to navigate the structures and movement of power within and outside of language.

Three years of one-on-one mentoring and my own independent study are how I came to understand Basic Writing.

And that’s a problem.

My year-long learning of Basic Writing theory and scholarship ran the stretch of my second year of coursework, the second semester of which I taught basic writing for the first (and last) time at Washington State. In short, it came too late again. In fact, it felt as though the entire time I was playing catch up. By the time I taught the course there I certainly understood how the Cognitive Divide informed some of the content I had been encouraged to teach in the Midwest. And while the foundation Victor and I were laying was necessary, even essential, it would have been wonderful, for example, to have read Kati Ahern’s notions of “invisible writing,” what Christopher Minnix writes of the literacy narrative as a way to open up public writing curricula in basic writing (32), or Kendra N. Bryant’s work on seeing “computer technologies as tools for embodied community building” (67). In other words, I was still stuck in literature that wasn’t discussing yet the possibility of multimedia and multimodal composing in basic writing pedagogy. I wasn’t giving my students assignments that may have helped

them excel and engage rhetorical strategies with which they take pride. Minnix's and Bryant's insights would have completely changed my approach to Introduction to Composition that year. I think of one student in particular, upper body slumped over his desk when I would walk in, arm extended, his thumb scrolling bottom to top on his smartphone. I think of how I could have engaged digital spaces and literacies so much more in that room.

My experience feeling inexperienced is well-reflected in the BW workshop at CCCC's in Portland in 2017: there we discussed moving toward multimodality and multimedia, a conversation our field has been having for twenty-some years. Because we do not have graduate coursework or substantial mentoring in Basic Writing at either the MA or PhD levels, because basic writing is so often taught by under-supervised, inexperienced, and under-supported graduate students and adjuncts, and because English and writing programs provide little educational support and professional development with which to help ourselves and even other disciplines in our institutions to understand the distinct needs of Basic Writing students, "chance encounters" are nearly impossible. As the only graduate student teaching Basic Writing, without chance encounters with other Basic Writing instructors, without any community to bounce ideas or concerns off of, I struggled with my teaching. And I failed to build a community in my classroom. I laugh out loud now, finding myself nodding when Bryant remarks in her essay that an increasing online participation contributes to the "silent spaces" we enter. She describes these spaces as "where students are not discussing the latest reading, reviewing last night's homework, or even gossiping about the latest reality television program, but are sitting there, 'alone'—distracted and reaching for a sense of belonging via texts, tweets, selfies and Facebook updates" (55). When I taught Basic Writing during my PhD, I repeatedly failed to interrupt that silence, even after students' cell phones were put away. I was underprepared to build the embodied writing classroom Bryant says is crucial to supporting basic writing students.

We need to rely less on chance encounters and put more energy into constructed ones. While my mentoring with Victor may have been sparked by a couple of chance encounters, it sustained itself by proactively making more encounters possible and accessible in spaces that do not necessarily sustain conversations pertaining to basic writing politics and pedagogies.

During my last year of my PhD, our interim Assistant Director of Composition worked hard to form a basic writing subcommittee to not only support the few of us who currently taught or had taught it, but to also draft goals and outcomes—because there hadn't been any for years. At our last

basic writing subcommittee meeting before the 2017 holiday break, I ask the other PhD student in our small group what she will teach the next semester.

A 400-level technical and professional writing course. Her favorite, I know.

I ask whether she thinks teaching Introduction to College Composition had steered interests for her PhD.

She says something like, “I love to study public writing, and I just don’t see how that could fit.”

I tell her I had just read Christopher Minnix’s “Basic Writers in Composition’s Public Turn,” that he is interested in literacy narratives, like her, too.

I want more moments like these. Yet I am sure she won’t teach the course again here.

At the basic writing workshop at the 2017 Conference on College Composition and Communication, we discussed the real need for graduate coursework in basic writing. This has been a need for decades. I shouldn’t have had to work so hard to understand basic writing as a graduate student—through one-on-one meetings and independent study—but this appears to be the current nature of the field. When we better prioritize graduate education in basic writing, we are more prepared to serve and empower students who may otherwise continue to be excluded within higher education.

The changes we see taking place are too strikingly commensurate with changing needs within the current hegemony. The changes can be turned into counter-hegemonic advantage, however. Changing demographics make for classrooms filled with children of color, those whose common sense likely differs from the white middle class. The current changes in the dominant’s needs also make for a greater entry into the universities of those who have been traditionally excluded...The traditionally excluded might better see the contradictions in the current hegemony. (Villanueva 137)

As our field looks forward, I believe educating graduate students on basic writing is a crucial step in order to continue to support composition programs that are increasingly invested in multimodality, multimedia, technologies, and technical writing. Graduate coursework, especially a course dedicated to basic writing in our graduate programs, is critical to developing any “counter-hegemonic advantage” as we see, across the nation, increases in enrollment for students “traditionally excluded.” As Victor writes that traditionally marginalized students have likely very different common

sense within the current hegemony, coursework dedicated to basic writing supports graduate students' understanding of the roles they might play in supporting the counter-hegemonic rhetorical strategies of marginalized students. Such coursework may include the following: what basic writing is; the purpose of basic writing across various types of institutions; its historical influence on composition as a field, on state legislation, and on national political trends in education; and, its current direction and conversations.

As I worked through my dissertation, I kept waiting for basic writing to surface as a major component of a chapter. In my dissertation, I looked at how dominant ideologies like racism, sexism, and heterosexism depend upon reproducing norms through the submission of our corporeal bodies. I theorized what I call *repronormativity* and I explored how norms are reproduced to maintain a white, male, cisgender, linear, and written discourse. While some scholars have established *repronormativity* as referring to the privileging of sexual acts that lead to reproduction (Edelman 13, 21; Downing 1142; Franke 183, 185; Weissman 279-280), I am interested in how *repronormativity* extends beyond the sexual into the everyday dominant ideologies that structure our lives. It was the repetition in the activities in Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts*, the stress on grammar in Shaughnessy, and the rhetoric of normal within basic writing studies that led me to wonder what the relationship was between repetitive written discourse, ideology, and this notion of *repronormativity* I had read about in queer theory. Could queer theory and its contentions with heteronormativity, sexism, and binaries come to mean more in composition studies, especially with its orientation toward correctness, that "highly measurable feature of acceptable writing" (Shaughnessy 9)? However, when I got into my last chapter of the dissertation, having fully intended to reach a discussion of basic writing as it pertains to queer composition and the body, I realized basic writing wouldn't become a part of my dissertation explicitly. It simply wasn't what my theory had led me to unpack. It wasn't that the one-on-one meetings with Victor weren't helpful over the three years we met weekly. The relationships between basic writing and normativity in queer theory were issues I began to think about while we were reading some of the first texts ever published in basic writing scholarship. However, that queer theory was a major component of our meetings as well, a full 6 months dedicated to it, helped us see both basic writing and queer theory through each other's eyes. In completing my graduate work, I am not disappointed in my education. Small conversations, one-on-ones with Victor, a few mistakes, and a lot of failure— this education built me into a queer scholar.

And, although not explicit, basic writing is written all over my dissertation. I know that making counter-hegemonic strategies more visible to others is critical, even to basic writing, and this is what I did. Victor writes that “The traditionally excluded might better see the contradictions in the current hegemony” (137). I believe that when we foster environments for graduate students to synthesize the scholarship they are already vested in with basic writing, we set up rich possibilities for our field.

Victor, A Post-Script

I am taken by the irony that Zarah was drawn to basic writing because of her emerging orality, that “the problem” of orality when I was a graduate student became the very thing that Zarah was asking students to embrace. But I’m most taken by what she sees as the possibility of basic writing’s demise, at least as what she calls a “subfield,” that a legitimate subject for graduate programs seems forgotten. So many decades later, the solution to teaching basic writing remains the teaching of prescriptive grammar, even as we know that teaching grammar is not teaching writing, though I’m not one of Martha Kolln’s alchemists. I see too many graduate students in English who do not know the conventions, and lacking the conventions, they do lack a certain rhetorical power.

So I want to make a case that was made by Patrick Hartwell (and many others) long ago: better writers enjoy greater metalinguistic awareness. But I think I would ask that we engage in a greater awareness of the ideological implications that rhetoric can carry, that we try to engage (and have students engage) in a more critical, politicized metalinguistic awareness. I bring this up because I seem to be watching the wheel being reinvented. As Keith Gilyard so clearly points out in his critique of translingualism, the current discussions of translingualism risk taking us back to the days that Mina Shaughnessy had to contend with, when language was abstracted, removed from the real political contexts at play, the real power differentials. I do understand the point of translingualism, that we are all of us given to different languages and different ways with language. That is, of course, true— from cultural differences to idiolects. But what do we do with that in the classroom, especially the basic writing classroom? We walk into the classroom and try to figure out how to hold on to our politics, the politics before us, without hurting our students. And while I understand the distinctions Vershawn Ashanti Young, Rusty Barrett, Y’Shanda Young-River, and Kim Brian Lovejoy make in distinguishing

code-meshing from code-switching— all of it requires doing what we can to have students be aware of language-as-language, language-as-language in real political contexts, with clearly understood power dynamics. While we continue to speak of language in abstract terms, our students are keenly aware of the power. So let's acknowledge it. The terms are there, have been for a while: code, register, dialect, language— and consciousness, especially as a Portuguese term, though the term has fallen out of our discourse on basic writing: *conscientização*. I like to joke that I could “hear” Mina Shaughnessy speaking in a New York working class dialect: “This here is your basic writing.” We can come up with new terms: “mesh,” “trans,” and the like. But let's stick to, in that old New York dialect, your basic writing: the conscious use of language, conscious of powers always at play.

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Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty: Finding and Enacting a Professional Identity in Basic Writing

Karen S. Uehling

ABSTRACT: This essay considers the critical need for pre-service and in-service basic writing faculty to define and enact a professional identity, specifically within the context of faculty development and graduate course settings. The essay describes a graduate course in teaching basic writing offered primarily online with four in-person weekend workshops. As a result, the course has faculty development implications. Key features of the class are professional mentoring through participation in the Council on Basic Writing discussion list, which offers visibility for students as emerging basic writing professionals; creation of Composition Frequently Asked Questions wiki material on basic writing, which serves as a kind of intermediary “publication”; and encouragement to present at conferences and submit manuscripts. The essay also explores the issue of faculty development generally for emerging and current basic writing professionals who are often working as contingent faculty and asks how a professional identity can be developed given these realities.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; digital community; faculty development; graduate courses; graduate education; professional identity

Current basic writing faculty are quite diverse, holding degrees in rhetoric and composition, literature, or linguistics, as well as English education, reading, or developmental education; others have an MFA or a general degree in humanities of some kind. We have MAs and doctorates (PhD, EdD, DA), and, in some cases, people with a bachelor's degree may be hired. Similarly, graduate students may be working toward a degree in any of these fields. I view our diversity as a strength. Indeed, the professional organization which

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Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty has been my academic home since 1981, the Council on Basic Writing, has played a shaping role in welcoming practitioners and theorists of any kind at any level, from beginner to highly experienced, and celebrates the work of all who take on the critical task of teaching basic writing. The varied academic histories faculty bring to the field offer a democratic, inclusive approach to teaching and research.

Yet the diversity of backgrounds weakens the claim that basic writing is a field that requires special preparation. If everyone with broad education and experience in the humanities and education can teach the course, then anyone can, and no special training is needed; further, faculty can be hired at the last minute without benefits, resulting in contingent working conditions and undermining claims to professional identity.

Complicating the question of diverse education and experience are our diverse local situations: particular student demographics and campus profiles—urban or rural, two-year or four-year, public or private—as well as departmental structures, resources available, and much more. Further, since about 2010, basic writing has increasingly been folded into first-year writing through the adoption of accelerated and add-on studio models of delivering basic writing. A prominent example is the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP); as of October 2018, 300 colleges had adopted the ALP approach to instruction or similar models, in which basic writing is linked directly to first-year writing.¹ With this model, basic writing students take first-year writing and a smaller linked support course; both courses work toward a single set of outcomes, those of first-year writing (Adams, Gearhart, Miller, and Roberts).

Given this reality, some may ask, do we then still need basic writing instructors and graduate courses in teaching basic writing? My answer is yes. I view the ALP model as situated well within earlier models for basic writing course delivery identified by William Lalickler in his classic article; the accelerated model with concurrent support derives from the studio model, the intensive combined basic writing and first-year writing course, and other formats that directly support first-year writing. If for no other reason, the sheer number of students formerly identified as basic writing students who are now taught by an acceleration approach compels us to provide the best available teaching. In an attempt to differentiate first-year writing from basic writing, I have argued that in basic writing we slow down instruction, demonstrate more, work more directly on active, engaged reading, on the writing process, and on editing (Uehling, “Creating a Statement”). Accelerated models of teaching call upon these unique skills of the basic writing instructor; in what might be called “responsive teaching,” the instructor

responds directly to student needs and is likely to slow down, provide more examples, as well as preview and review course materials. Thus, the need for basic writing teaching strategies remains critical, as even more first-year writing instructors teach the ALP sections.

While I continue to value Basic Writing as a field and celebrate our diverse faculty, I believe we must develop a broad consensus about the skills and abilities needed to teach basic writing if we are to survive as a discipline. A greater sense of disciplinary identity would strengthen our argument that basic writing needs resources built into institutional budgets, resources that support our students and allow faculty to perform their jobs adequately. Questions of diverse professionals, working conditions, and disciplinary identity are not new within our field. Jeanne Gunner, in her address to the Fourth National Basic Writing Conference in 1992, called for a statement of professional identity to improve the status of basic writing faculty; such a statement would say “who we are, what we do, and why we matter” (61). Twelve years later, Ann Del Principe described the “paradigm clashes” of basic writing faculty, noting that “the varying background experiences of faculty . . . rather than creating a richly diverse group of pedagogical approaches that enhance the quality of basic writing classes, . . . are often obstacles to building strong basic writing programs” (65). On the other hand, in 2016, Edward M. White and William DeGenaro assert the value of the Writing Program Administrators Outcomes Statement (OS) and related threshold concepts in defining the teaching of writing; they believe that the OS context is enough to sustain basic writing and argue for the value of “serendipitous engagement” within the field. Such engagement is attractive, and I admire the OS, but I feel basic writing will be stronger if we work to create a greater sense of professional identity specific to basic writing.

To strengthen our sense of identity, we might begin by building connections among our diverse current and potential basic writing instructors. We need the voices of those from many academic backgrounds to describe how they were drawn to this work, how they pursued a professional identity, and the kinds of bridges they see or have constructed from their original discipline to basic writing. Collecting our “origin stories” and analyzing them might lead to some sense of what we need as basic writing professionals. It would be especially helpful to know if faculty who have not had a course in the teaching of basic writing feel at a disadvantage and to learn whether they have any suggestions for what they may be missing. This special theme issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* on graduate courses and faculty development and its companion issue are welcome starting points for this conversation.

In addition to writing our own origin stories and analyzing them for patterns, we can turn to the basic writing literature for information on faculty development and graduate courses. I have found relatively few essays focused *primarily* on faculty development for basic writing professionals, and those that take up this issue, do not offer clear guidance.² An exception is Jessica Schreyer's "Inviting the 'Outsiders' In: Local Efforts to Improve Adjunct Working Conditions" in the *Journal of Basic Writing*. Schreyer, who focuses on a small liberal arts college of 1600 students with five tenure-track English faculty and six or seven contingent faculty, describes several possible faculty development strategies, including improved digital communication, improved scheduling of meetings, increased visibility for basic writing faculty through presentations that showcase their expertise, as well as increased personal contact between the Writing Program Administrator and faculty to learn their concerns informally. Although these strategies help develop a sense of community, there is no change "to the most critical working conditions such as stability, pay, or benefits" (96). Still, Schreyer contends, "It is worth the effort to make small, local changes ... [to] draw attention to the commitment and hard work of part-time faculty . . ." (97). I agree that small changes are better than no change, but I'm disappointed that "critical working conditions" were unaffected. I wonder how long minor improvements will sustain this or any faculty.

In an earlier study focused exclusively on basic writing, Carol Kozeracki considers how faculty view their preparation for teaching developmental English; she interviewed 36 community college instructors who taught at large institutions on the east or west coasts. Kozeracki reports "a substantial gap" between what graduate school offers and what community college instructors say they need, specifically in the areas of "instruction in how to teach basic grammar, pedagogical information on lesson planning and presentation, and strategies for recognizing and working with students with learning disabilities" (48). Kozeracki also learned that, to be helpful, faculty development needs to be practical and informal, presenting significant theories briefly as support for practice.

Of course, a number of authors touch on faculty development when focused on other basic writing topics, mentioning in-service workshops or faculty meetings. Others encourage all faculty to engage with the scholarship of teaching and learning: sensible advice. For instance, in their recent essay on a transcultural ethos in basic writing developed through code-meshing, Michael MacDonald and William DeGenaro describe how they plan to offer faculty development workshops on code-meshing for faculty across the

curriculum through their campus center for teaching and learning. In other instances, faculty development is offered as “consulting,” supported by grant-funded efforts, textbook publishers, or others. We find this example in Peter Adams and other ALP faculty who offer consultant services to colleges or college systems seeking to reinvent themselves. Such consultation is in the form of workshops, which run one to three days, and focus on topics like backward curriculum design, active learning, integrating reading with writing, thinking skills, non-cognitive issues, student editing skills, aligning developmental and first-year writing syllabi, selecting texts and readings, as well as grading (ALP website).

Faculty development and graduate courses in teaching basic writing are, I believe, inherently linked, and the need for graduate courses is apparent in the professional literature. Shannon Carter, in “Graduate Courses in Basic Writing Studies,” describes three such courses, while Barbara Gleason in her argument for more graduate education (“Reasoning the Need”), could find only ten courses being offered on campuses. Conference on College Composition and Communication panels have also addressed graduate courses: Gleason, Dudar, and Ferdinand; Kirk; Uehling (2012); Doddy, Goen-Salter, Troyka (2009); Goen-Salter, Rios, Troyka (2007).

Perhaps the most direct and useful work on graduate courses and faculty development is that of Susan Naomi Bernstein. Her anthology, *Teaching Developmental Writing* (four editions as of 2018), offers a range of historical, theoretical, and practical scholarship and includes apparatus for using the book in a graduate course or professional development setting, such as suggestions for keeping a teaching journal and guidance on writing conference proposals or articles. In addition, a number of full-length books on basic writing have been released over the years (for example, Kutz, Groden, and Zamel; Soliday; Sternglass; others—see Duttagupta and Miller and earlier editions of *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*); and most recently, *Basic Writing*, by George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk, which offers an excellent summary of basic writing scholarship in a readable, thought-provoking manner.

A GRADUATE COURSE IN TEACHING BASIC WRITING

I have taught a graduate course in teaching basic writing 11 times since 1990, with the most recent offering in 2017 as “English 540: Issues in Writing, Teaching, and Learning.”³ Originally my course was offered as an in-person senior undergraduate/graduate course, then as a hybrid course,

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty and, most recently, as primarily an online course. Prior to 2017, the course was “English 563: The Theory and Teaching of Basic Writing,” approved by my institution’s English Department in 2004.

My graduate course is situated, as all courses are, in a particular time and place. I live and teach in Boise, Idaho, and I originally designed the 2017 course for the intermountain west or other areas characterized by distance and open space, although it could be adapted to any environment where people lack the time to meet in person regularly. The course can enroll up to fifteen participants and is offered primarily online with four weekend workshops; the workshops meet on the university campus. This delivery system targets graduate students in our English MA programs as well as current basic writing instructors who may have previously lacked access to such a course. The larger goal is that together these combined audiences will work to build a basic writing community within local regions.

Like the field of basic writing generally, recent students have diverse interests in English studies, and have tended to be full- or part-time graduate students at Boise State pursuing an MA in English, especially the MA with emphasis in rhetoric and composition, MA students emphasizing literature, or those pursuing an MFA or an MA in teaching. Some were simultaneously teaching assistants in first-year writing or graduate consultants in the writing center. Others were currently teaching or had taught a variety of classes, including online basic writing courses, in-person writing workshops, writing and humanities courses, as well as secondary English. Most lived in Boise or in surrounding communities, but not all. A recent student commuted in from the eastern side of the state to take several courses. Because we meet in person four times, the course is designed to fit the needs of a region, but could be adapted for a wider online audience. Within this diverse group, I want to cultivate excellent and committed basic writing faculty for the future.

Texts and Assignments

The main texts for the course are the Bernstein anthology and Otte and Mlynarczyk’s book (noted above). Students discuss essays and chapters from both texts in threaded discussions on Blackboard. We also read *Lives on the Boundary*, by Mike Rose, and sample excerpts from other print and digital literacy narratives, such as Keith Gilyard’s *Voices of the Self*, Joyce Carol Oates’s *Them*, and Victor Villanueva’s *Bootstraps*.

The final course project, originally developed by Linda Adler-Kassner and worth 50 percent of the course grade, asks students to create a wiki

entry collaboratively on a topic of significant local, regional, or national importance and post it on the Composition Frequently Asked Questions (CompFAQs) wiki. The posting, a simplified form of “publishing,” provides students visibility as emerging basic writing professionals. Other course assignments include online discussions, familiarization with digital technologies, as well as presentations, discussions, and group projects at weekend workshops. Within this framework we explore important issues in the field, such as adult learners, assessment, diversity and valuing difference, English language learners, the history and politics of basic writing, learning styles, reading and writing instruction, the teaching of grammar, and teaching and learning perspectives.

The structure of the course, online with some in-person meetings, allows for building a sense of community through both digital interaction and in-person meetings. Each “place”—the digital space and the in-person workshop—has its own strengths and weaknesses, its own “place-based pedagogy,” requiring the instructor to decide which activity is best suited to an online or an in-person workshop environment.

The Digital Community

The digital space allows for conveying information, viewing materials, responding, and collaborating online. At the beginning of the course, when students read *Lives on the Boundary*, they discuss this book online and that discussion helps build community as students move from not knowing other class members to learning about their peers through their online responses to the text. Each student chooses a chapter, character, or theme that resonates for them, for instance, the chapter “Entering the Conversation” on Rose’s experience as an undergraduate; or Sergeant Gonzalez, a student in the veteran’s re-entry program; or a theme like error as a sign of growth. In this early post, students explain why that item is memorable and how they might use some portion of *Lives* in their own teaching (or might not).

Later, students continue to develop a sense of community by leading two relatively formal online discussions, one an essay from the Bernstein anthology and the other, part of a chapter from Otte and Mlynarczyk’s text; students also participate in all the discussions others lead. The leader posts an introduction that includes a summary of the piece, some representative quotations with commentary, an overall response and evaluation, the connection of the piece to basic writing teaching, and “something about the

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty author”; the leader also poses four to six questions for discussion and keeps the discussion going over the course of a week.

In addition to discussing texts online, students view digital materials and discuss these informally. Sample digital materials include narrated presentation slides on teaching strategies, such as how I have used an excerpt from *Lives on the Boundary* in a basic writing class, especially how these strategies support active, engaged reading. Another digital component is Mike Rose’s blog, which contains recent, substantive posts and links to interviews. I have also tried a digital narrative, Frontline’s “Country Boys,” a publicly available video that tracks two young men from Appalachia during their senior year at an alternative high school—both boys seem destined for college, yet only one actually enters the next fall. “Country Boys” may provide insight into one sector of our student population—those who come from remote, isolated places and have experienced what Marilyn Sternglass calls “difficult lives.”⁴

Not only does the digital environment include online discussions and digital learning materials, but also the opportunity to develop digital skills; such skills are incorporated into the course through several learning activities which provide incentive for students to immerse themselves in specific technologies and explore how they work. Students first familiarize themselves with the resources of the Council on Basic Writing and sign up for the council’s listserv, a process that opens the door to this professional community. The listserv is not only a source of information about teaching, but also a place where teaching jobs are posted, so it has particular relevance for those soon to enter the profession. I encourage students to “lurk” for a while on the list and get a feel for the discussion, then make their presence known. They often enter the dialogue when they reach the major research project and need to pose a question about their research.

Other digital technologies include Composition Frequently Asked Questions (CompFAQs), crucial for the final course project, and Composition Pile (CompPile), a rhetoric and composition search engine and the parent site of CompFAQs; both are “go to” places for composition researchers. We also review digital archives of literacy narratives, specifically the *Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives* and the companion analysis tool *Stories that Speak to Us* (Ulman, DeWitt, and Selfe), which offers frames for analyzing literacy narratives. Another digital archive we consider is the National Survey of Basic Writing Programs, developed by the Council on Basic Writing. We examine professional survey tools like Qualtrics, Survey Monkey, or Google forms; and collaborative digital platforms (GSuite, perhaps Dropbox, others). Inceas-

ingly, our profession depends on digital media to create materials jointly. Those who can navigate such tools or are willing to try are more apt to thrive in the current professional climate than those who cannot.

The In-Person Community

While the digital space offers asynchronous collaboration and community building, the in-person aspect of the course is collaborative and interactive in the moment. The four weekend workshops are face-to-face meetings held roughly a month apart on Saturdays, on the university campus. I envision each workshop as a kind of mini-conference, similar to an informal professional conference or workshop. In a sense, this approach “flips” the classroom by making the most of face-to-face time and the personal interaction afforded by workshops.

Weekend Workshop One: Introduction. This workshop occurs at the end of the first or second week of classes. I preview the course, answer technical questions, and distribute free professional resources, graciously provided by Bedford/St. Martins.⁵ Students bring a journal entry on their literacy narrative of choice (Gilyard, Oates, or Villanueva) to this first workshop and, as they introduce themselves, they share at least a portion of this piece of writing with other class members. Students also read Mina Shaughnessy’s “Diving In,” and we view “A Conversation with Mike Rose,” a Bill Moyers video interview from the PBS Series “A World of Ideas.”

Weekend Workshop Two: Faculty Panel. The second workshop, about a month into the course, offers a live resource: a panel of faculty who teach developmental writing at the local university and community college. To prepare, students read everything available about local programs (websites, catalog copy, published histories and discussions of the course). This panel has several goals: getting to know current faculty, understanding the day-to-day realities of teaching the course from instructors’ perspectives, becoming familiar with local conditions, and identifying possible research topics for the major course assignment.

Weekend Workshop Three, first half: Grammar and Language. Grammar and language, the focus of the first half of this workshop, are complicated, potentially polarizing topics with many “answers,” and we need time to talk in person about practice, method, and process. I emphasize the decisions that instructors must make about if, when, and how to focus on language issues (Uehling, “Teaching about Language”). Students must become aware that there are no easy answers for language learning, that this is a topic they

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty will have to return to again and again and will need a perspective from which to view and evaluate linguistic innovation and other language work. Actual demonstration of how some editing techniques function is helpful, especially after students have read various theoretical approaches to language. For instance, I show a video of the late Professor Jay King, a talented former colleague, as he patiently coaches a student in editing her work using an adaptation of Rei Noguchi's "writer's grammar."

Weekend Workshops Three-Four: Research and Publishing. In the second half of the third workshop, students meet with others with similar research interests to form groups of two to four for the final course project. Afterwards, students meet independently in person or online to further plan and collaboratively carry out their projects, including digital or in-person conferences with me as projects develop.

At the end of the term, we meet to "publish" and celebrate the work research groups have done. Each group makes an oral presentation of their research findings as posted on the Composition Frequently Asked Questions (CompFAQs) wiki. For example, in 2017, one posting focused on threshold concepts and basic writing (*CompFAQs, Basic Writing*, "Threshold Concepts and Basic Writing"). A 2011 posting offered the first analysis of data from the CBW "National Survey of Basic Writing Programs" with graphic representation (a spread sheet and bar graph analysis) (*CompFAQs, Basic Writing*, "CBW Survey Results by Type of School"); other postings have ranged from the varied ways basic writing courses are counted for college credit to such topics as service learning, placement, and Generation 1.5 learners (*CompFAQs, Basic Writing*, "Course Credit," "Service-Learning and Basic Writing," "Best Practices for Basic Writing Placement," "Generation 1.5 Students").

These posts, like others, represent the diverse interests of students in our graduate programs. In 2017, those who were working as Writing Center consultants considered similarities and differences between writing centers and basic writing courses, as well as how Writing Centers can serve basic writing (*CompFAQs, Basic Writing*, "Using Writing Centers"). Those interested in technology explored the concept of "techno-pragmatism" in 2015 as a way into the use of digital materials in basic writing (*CompFAQs, Basic Writing*, "Google and Web 2.0"). In short, the workshops provide students with an opportunity to experience and "practice" interacting in a semi-professional space of dialogue, discussion, and collaboration.

BUILDING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY CONSIDERATE OF CONTINGENCY

Our richly diverse faculty can undoubtedly offer a variety of innovative approaches to assist students. But too often the unique teaching skills of faculty are undercut by the realities of contingency; instructors may lack the time, energy, or resources to perform this work to the best of their abilities. And, although faculty development and graduate courses may help foster prepared faculty, this effort is also often undermined by the larger issue of contingent working conditions. Graduate students and early career faculty may perceive contingency as the main form of basic writing teaching, and consequently have little incentive to stay in the field and develop an identity as a basic writing specialist.

The use of contingent faculty in first-year writing is well documented; according to the American Association of University Professors, "Today, more than half of all faculty appointments are part-time," while "non-tenure-track positions of all types now account for over 70 percent of all instructional staff appointments in American higher education" (n.p.). Basic writing, often less valued than even first-year writing, is of course dependent on contingent faculty. Moreover, as I noted in a history of the Council on Basic Writing, contingent faculty are often given "the complex job of teaching [basic] writing to students who desperately need to write well to survive in college and attain their goals" (Uehling, "The Conference," 10).

This teaching assignment is particularly challenging because the students "represent a diverse and shifting population," including first-generation college students, people of color, English language learners, refugees or immigrants, reentry students, and those who have experienced erratic secondary educations, among others (Uehling, "The Conference," 9). Such students are especially dependent on their instructors to promote best practices in writing instruction. Depending largely on contingent instructors devalues these students we serve. If we are willing to hire people at the last minute to teach under exploitative conditions, we are saying that that is all the planning and support that students deserve.

Eliana Osborn summarizes this reality of contingency in the title of her 2012 blog posting: "Faculty Working Conditions Are Student Learning Conditions." Eileen Schell also articulates this idea as early as 2002, when she writes, "quality writing instruction cannot happen when [contingent] faculty do not have quality working conditions" (183). Similarly, student learning and faculty culture are linked by Carol Rutz, William Condon,

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty Ellen R. Iverson, Cathryn A. Manduca, and Gudrun Willett in their 2012 study, "Faculty Professional Development and Student Learning: What Is the Relationship?" Rutz et al. look at the effectiveness of faculty development generally and find that "the development of a culture that values ongoing learning about teaching, coupled with the development of skills that support reflective teaching based on observations of student learning, is as important as the individual lessons learned in a particular [faculty development] workshop" (47). Poor working conditions demoralize faculty and undermine this kind of culture.

A culture that values teaching and learning is essential for faculty development and graduate courses in teaching basic writing. A number of professional organizations have issued position statements in support. Sue Doe and Mike Palmquist note:

Professional organizations relating to English studies have published more than two dozen position statements [on contingent faculty], with the highest number coming from the Modern Language Association (MLA) and a steady stream of others from the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC), the Association of Departments of English (ADE), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), the Association of Writing Programs (AWP), Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). (24)

These statements focus on working conditions, compensation, and shared governance. They also call for faculty development.

We might particularly consider recent position statements of the Two-Year College Association (TYCA) for guidance on faculty development and graduate courses in teaching basic writing. For instance, the "TYCA Guidelines for Preparing Teachers of English in the Two-Year College" (Calhoon-Dillahunt, et al., 2016) argues for graduate courses and programs that provide professional development opportunities and community college partnerships with graduate programs (7). In addition, there is follow-up discussion in an entire special issue of *Teaching English in the Two-Year College* (September 2017) on the theme of "Preparing Two-Year College English Teachers."

Perhaps the factor that has most influenced my recent thinking about faculty development and graduate courses is the almost impossible challenge for basic writing faculty to find and enact a professional identity. A

key issue is time: how much time and energy is it realistic to ask for faculty development, especially of contingent faculty, those instructors who may be teaching many classes often at more than one institution, who may commute between sites or work another job? I hope to open a dialogue on these issues with this essay.

I am committed to identifying practical, doable methods of publishing and gaining visibility for pre-service and early basic writing professionals, endeavors that graduate students and overworked beginning faculty, especially contingent faculty, can actually accomplish and be motivated to finish, given the exhausting nature of their work. We need, for example, venues to spotlight teacher research or means to contribute to basic writing scholarship, such as abstracts for *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*, a Council on Basic Writing project, or other public bibliography. Early career instructors of basic writing quickly appreciate the reality of their positions, especially the time- and labor-intensive work of response. Too often such faculty may, by practical necessity, come to view basic writing as a step toward other kinds of academic work; yet if they are aware of ways to frame that work and make it visible, perhaps they will remain in the profession and commit to it. We need those with experience and financial stability (tenure track faculty and full-time instructors) to publicize, encourage, and support the professional efforts of early career faculty. See the appendix, “Gaining Visibility: Connecting through Public Conversations and Gaining a Voice,” for ideas.

Whatever ideas we come up with for enacting a professional identity and gaining visibility, these strategies must be specific and focused enough to complete within a relatively short period of time. Teaching-oriented contributions are especially valuable, such as collaborative teacher research projects or practical examples of how the theoretical ideas in a larger collaborative piece have played out in particular teaching sites. Such projects acknowledge that the survival of beginning and contingent faculty depends on everything working together to support both the reality of teaching and the need for visibility. Somehow, often within the reality of contingency, current and pre-service basic writing faculty must define a professional identity that can sustain them over the years.

I have no illusions about the difficulty of this challenge. Skyler Meeks, a 2017 student in my graduate class who had previously taught basic writing as contingent faculty, became in 2018 a full-time Coordinator of Academic Support services at Utah Valley University; he explained, “As an early career scholar, there’s not really a reason to have any more than a casual engagement

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty with basic writing. I love teaching basic writing, and I'm a better teacher because of my time with those students, but it just isn't a prudent decision: it's not likely to sustain my career as a teacher."⁶

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

And so, what to do? As I consider these topics, I am left with more questions than answers:

- Respectful of our rich diversity as basic writing professionals, can we develop at least a broad consensus about the skills and abilities needed to teach basic writing, principles that will guide graduate courses or faculty development efforts and shore up our claim that basic writing is serious work?
- What exactly do we mean by "faculty development"?
- Is there a way to consider working conditions and faculty development together, perhaps by linking faculty working conditions to student learning conditions, and bringing them to public consideration?
- What opportunities are possible for defining and enacting a professional identity as basic writing instructors and creating visibility?

Let me sketch out some areas we might consider in response.

Respectful of our rich diversity as basic writing professionals, can we develop at least a broad consensus about the skills and abilities needed to teach basic writing, principles that will guide graduate courses or faculty development efforts and shore up our claim that basic writing is serious work? The critical work of articulating the kind of education and experiences that may be ideal for the teaching we do must acknowledge our differing educational backgrounds and teaching contexts; this effort will necessitate difficult conversations and require generous, patient listening, a process that will take time. Key stakeholders in this conversation are current basic writing professionals from a range of backgrounds, contingent faculty with little time for faculty development, graduate students who trust the field of basic writing to provide a quality and necessary background for teaching and research and making a life, and, most importantly, basic writing students themselves who depend on faculty for quality instruction.

What exactly do we mean by "faculty development"? That is, what specific teaching methods are essential to basic writing? A broad consensus about skills and abilities are essential to answer this question. I would identify,

for instance, demonstrations of drafts in process; active, critical reading methods; approaches for multi-lingual learners; knowledge of non-cognitive issues; ways to handle the response and assessment load of student papers, and creative, interesting practices to develop editing skills, among other approaches. Further, what generally applicable teaching methods might be useful in basic writing? We might consider active, “flip” the classroom teaching strategies or engage-the-community teaching strategies (through something like service learning) often offered by a college’s center for teaching and learning, as well as skill with digital platforms that support collaboration, as described above in my graduate course.

Faculty development also brings up the issue of who is involved, where, and for how long. Leaders might be experienced teachers who design and present material. Perhaps beginning faculty themselves should identify areas they wish to learn about, research, and then present their findings. There are also grant-funded projects, whether supported by public nonprofits or corporate entities, which may (or may not) be useful sources of faculty development. Another question is whether faculty development should be a function of textbook publishers. In what formats might we create faculty development opportunities? Some options include online courses, professional conferences and workshops, local short-term workshops or presentations, or continuing meetings over the course of a semester or year. Most importantly, how much time and energy for faculty development is it realistic to ask of people teaching many classes, often at more than one institution?

Is there a way to consider both the pressing issue of working conditions and faculty development together, perhaps by linking faculty working conditions to student learning conditions, and bringing them to public consideration? Any such effort depends on the collaborative, joint efforts of stakeholders. Thus, the goal of creating a community of basic writing professionals is critical; in addition, we must think widely about who shares common interests: professional organizations like College Composition and Communication, the Council on Basic Writing, the Two-Year College Association, the National Association for Developmental Education, the Accelerated Learning Program and similar projects like the California Acceleration Project, perhaps secondary English teachers, as well as teachers’ unions.

Joint efforts might focus on publicizing the working conditions of contingent faculty. Sometimes students are shocked when they learn how little their instructor is making and why their instructor cannot answer questions in a leisurely manner because she is rushing off to her next class on a different campus. Another option is to work collaboratively to create change through

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty persistent, continuing efforts to shape policy within a state or professional group; for an instructive example, see Heidi Estrem, Dawn Shepherd, and Lloyd Duman on “relentless engagement” within the state of Idaho.

What opportunities are possible for defining and enacting a professional identity as basic writing instructors and creating visibility? The ideas in the appendix offer a starting point, and I look forward to learning other ideas readers may have; I hope that the creation of such a resource will be an ongoing project of Basic Writing as a field.

To begin to answer these questions, we must return to our primary reason for being: *what do we owe basic writing students of the future?* Our concern for students has been a motivating force throughout the history of basic writing and has drawn a richly diverse set of professionals, yet diversity can be seen as lack of special preparation or professional identity. By keeping students at the forefront of our thinking we may be able to develop some basic principles that undergird basic writing. Of course, every program and population of students differ, and this will be difficult, but the consequences of doing nothing may be worse: continued contingency and no time to even think about best practices.

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Notes

1. According to the ALP website, colleges “around the country have adopted/adapted ALP, and six states have launched wide-scale ALP adoptions: Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Indiana, Michigan, and Virginia.”

Boise State University where I teach adopted the ALP approach in 2013. We worked with our partner community college, the College of Western Idaho (CWI), to develop this method in a collaborative grant funded project in 2013-2014. Other public Idaho institutions also adapted the ALP model at that time to fit their student populations. At Boise State, we previously offered a non-credit developmental writing course, the equivalent of three credits, followed by two required first-year writing courses. With the new model, a one-credit Writer's Studio (maximum nine students) was added to the first of the two required courses for students previously placed in basic writing. Students in the studio receive four graded credits for their work, while those not in the studio earn three graded credits. See Michas, Newberry, Uehling, and Wolford for details.

2. In the early 1980's, the *Journal of Basic Writing (JBW)* issued two theme issues on training teachers of basic writing, which reveal diverse perspectives on what might be done. See vol. 3, no. 2, 1981, and vol. 3, no. 4, 1984. Sarah D'Eloia, editor, in her introduction to the first issue, notes "fundamental differences in perception about what basic writing teachers really need" (1). Twenty years later, Thomas Reynolds, in "Training Basic Writing Teachers: Institutional Considerations," offers training strategies to build a local basic writing community within a larger institution.
3. In 2018, I retired from full-time teaching and created an alternative form of the digital portion of this course, revised just for faculty development. Current instructors can use it to prepare for teaching basic writing; in this form, the digital material becomes an online study tool that instructors can undertake at their own pace. Each instructor will also have a faculty mentor who they will meet with, observe in class (and observe other classes as well), and shadow on the job.
4. "Country Boys" can be viewed online, but I also ordered the videodisks for our library reserves; I found that during times of heavy use, it was difficult to see the video in a timely fashion. In 2017, some students objected to the "Country Boys" Frontline video, arguing that it reveals too much about individual people and their poverty; this criticism introduces the issue of how much we should know about potential students. I am considering the students' criticism and whether to drop such videos or search for other widely accessible digital materials offered by a mainstream group like Frontline, and, which like Frontline, were made for use in schools and offered with full pedagogical apparatus.

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5. In 2017, Bedford resources included *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*, 4th ed., editors, Chitralekha Duttagupta and Robert Miller (2015); *Teaching Developmental Writing*, recent editions, editor, Susan Naomi Bernstein; and *Teaching Developmental Reading*, 2nd ed., editors, Sonya Armstrong, Norman A. Stahl, and Hunter Boylan.
6. Used with permission.

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Appendix: Resource List

GAINING VISIBILITY: CONNECTING THROUGH PUBLIC CONVERSATIONS AND GAINING A VOICE

Council on Basic Writing (CBW)

Council on Basic Writing listerv (CBW-L): A listserv focused on basic writing and related issues. To subscribe: send an e-mail message to: listserv@umn.edu. The content of the message should read subscribe CBW-L firstname lastname. For example, write subscribe cbw-l jane doe. Leave the subject line blank and remove your signature for this message. In response, you will receive e-mail confirmation of your subscription and instructions for sending future mail.

Council on Basic Writing Blog: Forum for discussion and information about basic writing policy, curriculum, news, issues, and classroom practice.

Council on Basic Writing Resource Share: Post teaching materials or search for ideas.

Council on Basic Writing Facebook Group: 1.2 K members as of October 2018.

Basic Writing e-Journal (BWe): Peer-reviewed, online, open-access journal sponsored by the Council on Basic Writing; publishes scholarship on teaching and learning in various basic writing contexts.

Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing: Abstracters and editors from the Council on Basic Writing; four editions as of October 2018; a free book and originally also digital.

Other Opportunities

Composition Frequently Asked Questions (CompFAQs) Resources for Basic Writing: Intermediary “publishing.” <http://compfaqs.org/BasicWriting/Home>

Faculty Development and a Graduate Course for Pre-Service and In-Service Faculty
Composition Pile (CompPile): Online search tool, offers projects for emerging professionals; Associate Editors are needed as CompPile moves into partnership with the WAC Clearinghouse, an open-access publishing site (May 2018). <https://wac.colostate.edu/comppile>

Two-Year College English Association (TYCA): Position statements including 2016 statements on placement reform and two-year college faculty preparation, 2014 statement on developmental education reforms, and others.

Teaching English in the Two-Year College (TETYC): Journal of the Two-Year College Association: publishes theoretical and practical articles on composition, developmental studies, and other topics.

National Association for Developmental Education (NADE): Conferences, blog, web site, publications.

Accelerated Learning Program (ALP), Community College of Baltimore County: Yearly conference; bibliography, sourcebook.

California Acceleration Project (CAP): Professional development network.

The Journal of Basic Writing (JBW): A national refereed print journal founded in 1975 by Mina Shaughnessy, who served as the journal's first editor. *The Journal of Basic Writing* is published with support from the Office of Academic Affairs of the City University of New York. Web site and archives hosted by WAC Clearinghouse.

Blogs

Teacher-Scholar-Activist: Award-winning blog, created in response to Patrick Sullivan's essay "The Two-Year College Teacher-Scholar-Activist," *Teaching English in the Two-Year College*, 2015.

Literacy & NCTE: The official blog of the National Council of Teachers of English—includes post-secondary issues.

Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care: A reviewed blog, maintained by the Conference on English Education.

College Composition Weekly: Summaries of Research for College Writing Professionals: Weekly summary of composition related research essays—guest bloggers may contribute.

Journal of Writing Assessment Reading List: Brief book reviews on assessment.

State Higher Education Policy Analyst for National Council of Teachers of English: Post reports on higher education policy affecting English studies in your state, providing information for national, state, and regional policymaking.

State or Regional Blogs: Example: Nebraska Developmental Education Consortium (NDEC) Blog: Start a blog if none exists in your region.

More Ideas on What Established Faculty Can Do

Ask contingent or full-time two-year college faculty to speak about teaching realities to a graduate class, as an individual or panelist, in person or through Skype. Little preparation involved: provides a short, focused way to gain visibility as a professional (Spiegel and Blaauw-Hara).

Forward textbook review opportunities, which usually offer honorariums, to early faculty.

Suggest collaborative conference presentations and collaboratively written essays; faculty with more time and experience should do much of the basic work. Perhaps contingent faculty can add a shorter section that still gains them authorship, such as a sidebar on the application of ideas in the essay to their teaching context.

Re-examining Constructions of Basic Writers' Identities: Graduate Teaching, New Developments in the Contextual Model, and the Future of the Discipline

Laura Gray-Rosendale

ABSTRACT: This essay extends arguments made by Gray-Rosendale in two earlier essays published within the Journal of Basic Writing (1999 and 2006), ones that focused on how basic writers' identities were being constructed in our scholarship. She traced developments in various approaches—developmentalist and grammar-based models (1970s), academic discourse models (1980s), conflict models (1990s), and contextual models (2000s). The present article outlines strategies for teaching “Teaching Basic Writing,” a graduate course that she has taught for over twenty years at Northern Arizona University. Gray-Rosendale also examines exciting recent trends in the contextual model by analyzing three key essays that have appeared in JBW. Finally, based upon what she discovers, she offers insights about the future of the contextual model, the future of her graduate course, and the future of the discipline.

KEYWORDS: academic discourse; basic writers' identities; conflict; contextualism; developmentalism; graduate education; self-constructivism

Since I first arrived at Northern Arizona University as a newly minted PhD from Syracuse University twenty plus years ago, I have been teaching various versions of a graduate course in our MA Program in Rhetoric, Writing, and Digital Media Studies (RWDMS) titled “Teaching Basic Writing.” Teaching this course over so many years—both face-to-face and online, both in full semester and half semester forms—has taught me a great deal about the field of Basic Writing, of course, its various twists, turns, and shifts. It's also provided me with many chances to enact and model flexible approaches

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to theorizing and teaching to my graduate students. Such approaches are increasingly critical to the professionalization of today's graduate students since the landscape they are encountering within their classrooms and administrative work is constantly changing. In large part I have designed my "Teaching Basic Writing" graduate course around a series of specific shifts—developmentalist and grammar-based models (1970s), academic discourse models (1980s), conflict models (1990s), and contextual models (2000s)—that I have witnessed in the construction of basic writers' identities over time. I also published two articles about these shifts in *JBW* over the years. The first, titled "Investigating Our Discursive History: *JBW* and the Construction of the Basic Writer's Identity," appeared in 1998. The second, titled "Back to the Future: Contextuality and the Construction of the Basic Writer's Identity in the *Journal of Basic Writing* 1999-2005," was for a 2006 special issue, marking the twenty-fifth volume of *JBW*. Both teaching this course and conducting this research have enabled me to educate a generation of folks who now teach basic writers themselves and even occasionally teach courses like "Teaching Basic Writing."

In these two previously mentioned essays, I drew in part from Joseph Harris's work in *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* and from Michel Foucault's understandings of discourse and writing history in *Archaeology of Knowledge*. As I noted in the first essay, such writing of history for Foucault aimed to expose the "epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to rational value or its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility" (1970, xxii). Not only does such writing of history look at key moments where discursive forms solidify and concentrate upon certain ideas. It also investigates moments of historical disjuncture and change so as to better examine both the past and the present while paying close attention to the social and political issues that inform them. As I mentioned in this first of the two essays, I turned to *Basic Writing* (the earlier title of the journal) and the *Journal of Basic Writing* for two reasons: it has always been the "main organ of the Basic Writing movement, and therefore it provides by and large a sustained view of such changes" and "placed within this journal this history may offer the opportunity for self-reflection, a recognition of where we've come from, the paths we've taken, and the adventures upon which we have yet to embark" (1999, 109).

In this present essay, I provide an overview of this graduate class in "Teaching Basic Writing" in which we trace the history of constructions of

Basic Writing students' identities. As I show, learning about such shifts not only conveys a crucial history to graduate students. It also encourages them to remain more open in both their theorizing about as well as teaching of Basic Writing students. In addition, I explain the major assignments and readings I use in this course to model, expose, and explore changes that have occurred in these constructions. This close examination of how the field constructs basic writers' identities encourages our graduate students to engage in a kind of deep reflective inquiry that asks them to continually look at the past, present, and future of our research and teaching. It also demands that our graduate students put Basic Writing students at the very center of their inquiries. And, ultimately, as I reveal, this results in ongoing, project-based strategies that will help graduate students as they both create scholarship about Basic Writing as well as teach basic writers themselves.

I then return to a question I have addressed in those two aforementioned articles that have appeared in the *Journal of Basic Writing*: In the years since I last examined this question (2006), how are basic writers' identities being constructed in our scholarship, specifically within the *Journal of Basic Writing*? And I ask other questions too. Is the contextual model for constructing basic writers' identities still operating? Or, is something new taking its place? These are particularly important issues for graduate students and other scholars and teachers in Basic Writing Studies to continue to examine because they reveal the kinds of investments that have shaped our pedagogies historically, how exactly we have perceived our students, their lives, and their capabilities. Specifically, I investigate three essays (2013-2016) from *JBW* that indicate exciting developments in this area. Finally, I explain the value of these essays and their implications to the future of Basic Writing Studies. I describe some of the crucial student projects that have come out of my "Teaching Basic Writing" class over the years, suggesting how they might develop further given the compelling changes I am seeing in Basic Writing Studies altogether. I also consider some alterations I hope to make to my graduate course in "Teaching Basic Writing" given the new approaches I am witnessing, and I offer some tentative thoughts on the future of the discipline. My sincere hope is that readers will leave this essay with a renewed sense of the importance of articulating our history, of conceiving of our present, and of celebrating all that lies ahead.

Course Structure, Readings, and Assignments

In the earliest years of teaching “Teaching Basic Writing,” a graduate course that is based around these historical changes, most of my students had little experience actually teaching basic writing. They had certainly encountered basic writers in teaching composition classes, in working in The NAU Writing Commons, or perhaps while working as instructors or supplemental instructors in The STAR Program (Successful Transition and Academic Readiness) I direct. But those were usually their main experiences. Today many of my on-line graduate students in particular are already teaching Basic Writing at community colleges across the country, many for quite some time, and have never taken a course of this kind that exposes them to both the history and theory of Basic Writing as well as its various teaching applications. Some of these students are in our RWDMS MA Program. Some are getting Certificates in RWDMS while pursuing graduate degrees in Literature, Creative Writing, TESOL, Professional Writing, or English Education. Still others are getting doctorates in Education. And a growing number of these students already have doctoral degrees and are returning to school to gain a Certificate in RWDMS or to just take a few key classes that might improve their teaching.

These students, no matter who they may be or what backgrounds they bring to the course, often have very strong reactions to taking the class. Many say that they wish that they had been required to take such a course before ever beginning to teach any students—and especially basic writers. A number have actually taken the materials from my class and have, with my permission, shared them with all of their colleagues who also teach basic writers and will never have a chance—due to time and/or money—to take a course of this kind. In some cases, I have actually heard back from their colleagues as well, thanking me for teaching the class, for the reading materials, and for the assignments. For my graduate students who are on campus, taking the “Teaching Basic Writing” class has had other effects as well. As a result of the course, they are better able to help the struggling students that they encounter in their writing classes and tutoring situations.

The discipline’s constructions of our basic writers’ identities propel our detailed studies within the “Teaching Basic Writing” course. Our class covers the various cohesions and disjunctures within the history of the construction of those identities. Therefore, the scaffolded assignments in the course involve learning our complex and sometimes contradictory theories and histories. Next, we directly apply what we have learned to real teaching

situations and experiences. In this way, graduate students are better prepared to enter the world of teaching writing whether at the community college or four-year university. And, if they are going on to doctoral programs, they have far more theory and experience in Basic Writing than many of their counterparts who will be applying.

I have long structured versions of my graduate course “Teaching Basic Writing” around those key shifts in the construction of basic writers’ student identities that I saw occurring over time in both the *Journal of Basic Writing* and in the discipline of Basic Writing Studies generally. Essentially, it’s been my own winding journey through the discipline that has inspired exactly how and what I teach. As part of this, I have tried as much as possible to remain very adaptive in my approaches. This has meant sometimes focusing more on certain areas than on others, as a way to model this thinking to my graduate students. I want them to understand that the best teaching of Basic Writing students comes not from adopting one set of theories or practices alone but rather from being open to creating a sort of patchwork quilt, a cobbling together of various crucial pieces of knowledge from our long history. We need to always be open to utilizing the strategies that will best help us to reach our students in a given situation or context. This requires both deep knowledge as well as a kind of a spontaneity in our teaching. As noted earlier, these varied approaches have often included developmentalist and grammar-based models (1970s), academic discourse models (1980s), conflict models (1990s), and contextual models (2000s).

“Teaching Basic Writing” both examines these pivotal historical moments as well as traces various disruptions that occurred within each approach. I have chosen to construct the course around these shifts for a number of reasons that relate to my key goal for the course—to help to create the most informed past, present, and future teachers of Basic Writing that I can within the time afforded by the class. My key goal is, of course, informed by some other assumptions I make. First, my course begins from the premise that Basic Writing Studies theory and practice are deeply interconnected, that one must know theory and history in order to be an effective teacher and that the best pedagogical practices also reinform our theories about teaching. Second, I believe that if graduate students understand the theories and histories—and specifically the ways in which basic writers’ identities have been constructed—they can be more self-conscious about their own pedagogical choices with their Basic Writing students and more compassionate about the various needs and identities that their Basic Writing students bring with them into their classrooms.

The version of “Teaching Basic Writing” that I now teach is on-line and seven and a half weeks long. It has seven modules.¹ Each of the first six modules receives a week of focus while the seventh module receives a week and a half, leaving extra time for students’ final projects and project presentations. In each module I include both the required readings and a set of additional readings. In this way, students can read the primary texts I assign and then delve into subjects more deeply as they wish.

Early in the semester (1970s): The beginning of the course provides an extensive historical framework. I find that this is important to do because my graduate students have varying levels of knowledge about Basic Writing Studies and also need to understand its relationship to the larger discipline of Rhetoric and Composition. I want my students to emerge from these modules confident in themselves as well as their historical knowledge. We read pieces from Theresa Enos’s *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* and Kay Halasek’s and Nels P. Highberg’s *Landmark Essays in Basic Writing*. Once George Otte’s and Rebecca Mlynarczyk’s *Basic Writing* came out, that also became a significant addition to the course. We also read introductory pieces from Susan Naomi Bernstein’s *Teaching Developmental Writing: Background Readings* and sections of Chitralekha Duttagupta’s and Robert Miller’s most recent version of *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*. My graduate students examine selections from the *Basic Writing e- Journal (BWe)*, too. *The Journal of Basic Writing*, however, is perhaps the backbone of the course, the set of texts to which we keep returning over and over again.

In the first two modules, students write a detailed “Literacy Autobiography” about their own experiences. This helps them to conceive of how their reading and writing experiences have shaped them as students and teachers as well as enables them to consider how such experiences may have shaped their own students. They also write “A History of Basic Writing Studies” piece in which they situate their own teaching and learning experiences within this larger history. We have several discussions related to their own writing struggles and their teaching experiences with struggling writers. All of these things help to set the stage for the upcoming modules that ask them to consider their own identities as students and teachers alongside how the identities of basic writers have been constructed historically. I introduce the idea of their final projects for the course very early on as well, so that they have ample time to begin jotting down their ideas and thoughts.

In the middle of the semester (1980s and 1990s): Midway into the course we concentrate on the developmentalist constructions of basic writers’ student identities. I want my graduate students to understand the earliest

formations of Basic Writing Studies within Rhetoric and Composition and to think about how focusing on issues of grammar and cognitive development may have shaped the various ways in which scholars and teachers viewed their students. We read Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* alongside her essay "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," Adrienne Rich's "Teaching Language in Open Admissions," and Jane Maher's *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work*. We also read John Rouse's "The Politics of Composition," Patricia Laurence's "Errors Endless Train," Min-Zhan Lu's and Elizabeth Robertson's "Life Writing as Social Acts," John Brereton's "Four Careers in English," and selections from Joseph Harris's *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*. There is a discussion about unpacking and analyzing various constructions of Shaughnessy and also about applying Shaughnessy's ideas to our own teaching. Then there are two writing assignments. The first focuses on "Shaughnessy's Rhetoric" and the second on "Maher's Constructions of Shaughnessy" as well as various uses of biography for the discipline of Basic Writing Studies. Finally, my students produce a project proposal and literature review for the Final Course Project. Since this is a 600 level topics course, I give my students quite a bit of latitude in terms of how they approach the project. However, it needs to examine an issue in Basic Writing Studies and/or offer an application of some of the histories and theories we are studying.

Next, we begin to focus on narratives and storytelling. I want my students to understand that personal experience as a form of evidence can be central to the kinds of research and theorizing we do within Basic Writing Studies. My students often find this section particularly valuable because they can see particular examples of literacy acquisition in action. We read selections from Keith Gilyard's *Voices of the Self: A Study of Language Competence*, bell hooks's *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary: A Moving Account of the Struggles and Achievements of America's Educationally Underprepared*, and Victor Villanueva's *Bootstraps: From an American Academic of Color*. There is a discussion about both analyzing these narratives and applying what the graduate students are learning from reading them to their own teaching. There are two writing assignments on "Narratives" that help the students to better understand the situations of individual people by explaining how social, cultural, and contextual factors have shaped their lives and their writing. In both cases, my students have the option to answer a series of detailed questions about these specific literacy narratives.

It is during this part of the course that my students begin engaging more fully in online discussions about their Final Projects for the course. It's also at this point that students concentrate on academic discourse models for understanding basic writers' student identities. I want them to consider how these constructions might impact the ways in which they teach their own students. We read David Bartholomae's and Anthony Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* and Patricia Bizzell's *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*. We also read a crucial exchange from the *Journal of Basic Writing* that involves Myra Kogen, Janice N. Hays, as well as G. Genevieve Patthey-Chavez and Constance Gergen where the developmentalist paradigm for understanding basic writers' student identities begins to break down in favor of an academic discourse model. There is a discussion about academic discourse and how it is defined across these texts and my graduate students describe how they have utilized or might utilize this model within their own teaching. Next, there is a writing assignment on "The Kogen/Hays Debate" in which my graduate students are encouraged to articulate the different positions taken by the two thinkers in their exchange with one another—the first favoring more of an academic discourse model, the second a developmentalist—as well as to consider how this debate fits into the larger history of Basic Writing Studies.

Toward the end of the course (Late 1990s, 2000s, and Beyond): In the home stretch, we investigate conflict constructions for basic writers' student identities, or models that consider issues of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, region, as well as disability, and identify how such models might shape their approaches to teaching their students. We read Min-Zhan Lu's "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence" as well as "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" We also read Joseph Harris's "Negotiating the Contact Zone," Deborah Mutnick's *Writing in an Alien World*, and Pamela Gay's "Rereading Shaughnessy from a Postcolonial Perspective." Finally, we read selections from Lu and Horner's *Representing the Other* and Adler-Kassner's and Harrington's *Basic Writing as a Political Act*. There is a discussion about what constitutes effective teaching given each of the models that we have discussed thus far in the course and students offer their final assessments of the developmentalist, academic discourse, and conflict approaches for understanding basic writers' identities. There are two writing assignments. One focuses generally on issues of "Politics and Basic Writing" while the other focuses specifically on "Mutnick and Identity Constructions." In both cases, my graduate students are encouraged to apply what they have learned from

their readings and our discussions to their own teaching experiences by also examining case studies and scenarios. Confronted with a specific student writing problem, the larger social, cultural, and political issues that might give rise to it, as well as a specific context in which it occurs, how exactly might they respond and why?

Finally, we examine contextual models for basic writers' student identities as well as investigate various attempts at constructing what the "future of Basic Writing" might look like. I want my graduate students to consider what basic writers' student identities look like when constructed in terms of specific institutional contexts as well as to think about possible next directions for the discipline. In this module, we read a wide range of texts and also focus on the very latest issues from the *Journal of Basic Writing*. We read parts of Shannon Carter's *The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and Basic Writing Instruction*, Keith Gilyard's "Basic Writing, Cost Effectiveness, and Ideology," George Otte and Rebecca Mlynarczyk's "The Future of Basic Writing," Lynn Quitman Troyka's "How We Have Failed the Basic Writing Enterprise," and Edward White and William DeGenaro's "Basic Writing and Disciplinary Maturation: How Chance Conversations Continue to Shape the Field." We also watch a YouTube Seminar, "The Future of Basic Writing II: Liz Clark and Heidi Johnsen." Finally, we watch a series of YouTube videos that feature my now retired colleague Gregory Glau and I having conversations about various developments within Basic Writing as a discipline, where it has been, and where we imagine it going in the future. My graduate students engage in a discussion about their assessment of their own work in the course as well as the course itself. Oftentimes, they conclude the course much more willing and able to see multiple approaches as valuable to their teaching of basic writers, and they have a better sense of the fact that they are not working in isolation but rather come from and are contributing to quite a long and rich history of Basic Writing teaching and theorizing. They also sometimes surprise me and themselves, I think, by the extent to which they deeply wish that the class was longer, that there was much more time to explore these ideas. In short, none of us seem to want the class to come to an end, though of course it always must. They offer a Final Presentation of their Final Projects to the group as well as submit them for all of us to read and comment upon. There is one final writing assignment in which they consider the potential futures of Basic Writing in light of their readings and all that they have learned from the course.

Problems within the Contextual Model

As late as 2006, I was arguing in my scholarship that the contextual model for understanding basic writers' student identities was beginning to dominate our discourses. While this was a positive development in various ways, there were also some distinct problems in this approach, making it more necessary than ever for us to more fully take students' complex identities into greater consideration when we represented them within our scholarship and created pedagogies with them in mind.

Examining how this model was operating from 1999-2005 in the *Journal of Basic Writing*, I saw essays falling into three major categories: "the Basic Writer's identity as constructed *in situ*; the Basic Writer's identity constructed as a theory, academic discourse, and/or history reformer; and the Basic Writer's identity constructed as a set of practices in action" (2006, 7). In some ways, this was an encouraging turn of events since earlier models "sometimes risked delimiting the Basic Writer's identity according to a deficit theory model, a 'problem' that the Basic Writer endured, be it cognitive, discursive, or social" (2006, 18). The contextual model was different from earlier models in that it mainly examined local institutional sites—rather than making more global statements about basic writers—as a way to construct basic writers' identities. For all teachers of Basic Writing—my own graduate students as well as those many other teachers of Basic Writing—this meant that our teaching and our claims about teaching would be more related to the everyday contexts within which we and our students found ourselves.

But I was quite cautious about my findings, writing and thinking as I was from within that historical period itself. I made note of the fact that the focus on the local had perhaps resulted in the loss of "some of our ability to describe relevant institutional, political, and social trends in broader, general terms within basic writing scholarship" (19). I worried that this could result in some insularity among programs and interrupt the building of crucial coalitions across programs at a time when national and global concerns were seriously impacting our teaching.

It also put a lot of pressure on basic writers' student identities to be responsible for saving us all from our troubled history. The roles seemed to have changed: "In contrast to times past, one might argue that now the teacher/researcher has been recast somewhat as the flailing victim in need of rescue—our students in the new narrative now acting as our figurative, if not our literal, saviors" (20). This focus on basic writers' identities, while valuable, ran certain risks we had to struggle to avoid. Finally, I urged that "in

sometimes unreflectively privileging direct student voices, actions, practices, and perspectives, we may seem to assume their transparency" (20). Instead, student voices "are always mediated by our students' previous experiences, their oftentimes incredibly complex and conflicted cultural positions, the multi-layered institutional spaces within which their discourses are produced, and their generational affiliations" (20).

Tracing Basic Writers' Student Identities from 2006-2017

Since I published that essay, I have not had a chance to engage in a sustained examination of the latest developments within the contextual model. So this present article affords me a rare opportunity that promises to impact both my graduate teaching and my scholarship in very meaningful ways—to examine what has happened since I last looked carefully into how basic writers' identities are being constructed in the journal. As I studied *JBW* from 2006 to the present, I wanted to explore answers to certain questions, questions that seemed more critical than ever in light of our increasingly conservative political environment, this era of "fake news" and what increasingly feels like a reality television culture in which we find ourselves, as well as the ever-constant budget cuts to and eliminations of Basic Writing programs. How we think about basic writers' identities as well as how they think of themselves still matters greatly. Was the contextual model continuing as the predominant approach for how basic writers' identities were being characterized in the journal? Had other approaches begun to change or perhaps challenge it as well?

As I considered these questions, I found myself thinking a good deal about George Otte's and Rebecca Mlynarczyk's excellent 2010 "The Future of Basic Writing" that appeared in *JBW* and then in slightly revised form in their book *Basic Writing*. They note that imagining the future of Basic Writing is always in part about more fully understanding our past. They write that "There are lessons to be learned from that history, some hard and some inspiring. Some may have lost their relevance with the passage of time. But some may make the past of basic writing a guide to building its future" (28 in article; 188 in book). So, I decided to look at our recent past for clues as to where we have been and where we are headed. Learning such things, I knew, would inevitably impact both my future teaching of "Teaching Basic Writing" as well as my own scholarly work.

What I discovered through this process—I read and took detailed notes on each essay written within the journal from the 2006 issue on—is

that some crucial issues have come to the fore. Repeated themes involve the redefinition of key terms; concern with assessment practices; a focus on technology and Basic Writing students; the importance of L2 Learner issues; challenges to the private/public split in Basic Writing students' and teachers' lives; a focus on rethinking questions of standards and access; various challenges to the personal/academic writing binary; and the professionalization of the Basic Writing discipline.

I also discovered that there is still a great focus on contextual constructions of basic writers' student identities. This is a metaphoric investment that remains absolutely critical from 2006 to our current historical moment. It should certainly still be a significant part of how I approach teaching the "Teaching Basic Writing" course and how my graduate students think about working with their students—how they design lessons, create curricula, and advance their scholarship. However, the ways in which this contextual model is now manifesting itself are myriad, complicated, and quite intriguing. Basic writers' identities are now being quite self-consciously analyzed and constructed within the pages of *JBW*. When essays offer contextual constructions centering on specific students and programs, they more often also do the following:

- Make important gestures toward and connections with larger public, political, and social issues
- Relay an ever-greater commitment to outreach, collaboration, communal work, public policy, and coalition-building
- More fully integrate basic writing students' identities and voices into our research while at the same time perceiving them as always mediated, constructed, as well as multi-layered and differing greatly from context to context

Though there are certainly other examples to which I might turn, a few more recent essays from 2013-2016 hold a special place in the history of the journal, making very strong cases for paying closer attention to exactly how our Basic Writing students are constructing their own identities within our classes—Barbara Bird's 2013 "A Basic Writing Course Design to Promote Writer Identity: Three Analyses of Student Papers," Patrick Sullivan's 2015 "'Ideas about Human Possibilities': Connecticut's PA 12-40 and Basic Writing in the Era of Neoliberalism," as well as Emily Schnee's and Jamil Shakoor's 2016 "Self/Portrait of a Basic Writer: Broadening the Scope of Research on College Remediation."

Academic Writer Identities: Barbara Bird's Analysis

Barbara Bird's 2013 "A Basic Writing Course Design to Promote Writer Identity: Three Analyses of Student Papers" is an important essay to introduce to our graduate students in a class like "Teaching Basic Writing." It reveals the ways in which teachers might both honor the identities our Basic Writing students bring to our classrooms while also helping them to effectively enact and construct other kinds of identities in their writing, ones that will ultimately enable them to become more effective academic writers.

Drawing on research from David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University" and a body of work about writers' identities published by Roz Ivanič, Bird examines how students can come to better understand academic writing not by parroting academic discourse conventions back to their teachers but rather by adopting certain kinds of textual identities or dispositions. For Bird, ideally three textual components must be present in her students' writing—"1) autobiographical writer identity: generating personally meaningful, unique ideas, 2) discursual identity: making clear claims and connecting evidence to claims, and 3) authorial writer identity: performing intellectual work, specifically through elaboration and critical thinking" (71). Her own Writing-About-Writing (WAW) course is specifically designed to encourage the adoption of these identities.

Next, Bird produces three comparative analyses with forty-seven student papers collected over a two-year time span to gauge the effectiveness of this course in terms of creating these specific types of academic writer student identities. She engages in three comparisons. First, Bird compares the first paper her students wrote in the WAW Basic Writing course with the final papers that they produced. She finds a small but noteworthy "increase in the percentage of both authorial and discursual components" or that the students had expanded the "percentage of words to discuss their claims"(82/83). Second, she compares the final papers that her students wrote to their "most significant" paper produced at the end of their freshmen writing classes. Here she finds that students had increased one essential authorial element in their writing—"logical development" (85). Third, she compares that "most significant paper" for the Basic Writing students to a similar paper produced by typical freshmen writing students. In this comparison she discovers that the Basic Writing students evidenced "more of their own ideas (autobiographical component) and more of their own authority as academic thinkers (the authorial component)" (86). In other words, based on her empirical study, Bird discovers that "basic writers demonstrated improvement

(first study), short-term transfer (second study), and expanded intellectual contributions—their authority—as compared with freshmen writers (third study)” (87). As a result, Bird suggests that the self-conscious construction of basic writers’ student identities in our classes can definitely help them to achieve some of our key writing goals in our Basic Writing writing courses.

Several things make this argument especially valuable to the question of professionalization and graduate education as well as to how basic writers’ identities are being constructed in the discipline generally. Bird is self-consciously acknowledging and valuing both the identities basic writers bring to our classes as well as those we as teachers would like them to take on. It’s important for our graduate students to see that basic writers’ own identities prior to taking our Basic Writing classes can be utilized to help them try on other identities, identities that they often need to take on in order to be successful in their Basic Writing classrooms. Bird is also carefully connecting her discussion of basic writers’ identities to larger trends as well as concerns that she sees operating in Basic Writing scholarship and in the academic world generally. Her work suggests the overall value of WAW courses in Basic Writing or of immersing students in a rigorous, self-reflective writing classroom experience. As Bird notes, it is an approach that “intentionally invites students to participate as scholars—emphasizing high-level academic participation and dispositions toward writing” (88). If we can foster students’ adoptions of such academic writerly identities in our Basic Writing classrooms, her argument also suggests, our students are likely to carry those identities and their textual productions into their other college classes and beyond. Her work also advances research in “writer identity theory” and therefore has implications for the larger discipline of Rhetoric and Composition (88). These are new possibilities around better understanding basic writers’ identity constructions that are wonderful to see.

Due to the fact that Bird’s work has these kinds of far-reaching implications, it might also pose prime possibilities for understanding students’ academic writerly identities across programs as well as across various academic institutions. If Bird’s approaches to student identity have such value for Basic Writing courses, surely they have the potential to aid writing in other disciplines and within other schools as well. Bird is also quite reflective about students’ voices and identities, clearly understanding that they are always complex and mediated by larger factors. Her hope is to foster a pedagogy in which students “can authentically perform their academic writer identities as those who belong” and not as continual outsiders trying unsuccessfully to find their way in (89). And, finally, Bird is suggesting the

various ways in which these two sets of identities—the ones our students bring with them and the academic ones we ask that they take on—might be brought together thoughtfully and self-consciously such that neither set of identities are necessarily privileged over the others.

Not only does this essay offer us some critical suggestions about Basic Writer student identities, however. For our graduate students, in particular, this essay reveals how one author in the discipline of Basic Writing Studies is self-consciously examining Basic Writer student identity not for how she can construct or change it but for the powerful ways it can manifest itself in students' own writing. Her aim is to harness and foster those student-generated identity constructions rather than as some scholars in the past have done—requiring that students simply adopt academic discourse conventions that do not match their own lives or identities. Bird's essay also reveals the ways in which the contextual model—with its typical focus on a small set of classes or papers—is increasingly having larger repercussions for all of our teaching.

Hopeful Identities: Patrick Sullivan's Analysis

Patrick Sullivan's 2015 "‘Ideas about Human Possibilities’: Connecticut's PA 12-40 and Basic Writing in the Era of Neoliberalism" is a vital essay that might be used to introduce our graduate students not to how basic writers might come to adopt academic writer identities but instead to how basic writers construct their own identities in response to various political and socioeconomic situations. Sullivan traces changes in Connecticut legislation that "appeared to establish a 'floor' for matriculation into open admissions institutions in Connecticut—thereby effectively abandoning students who scored below cut-off scores which were at or below the 8th grade level" (45). He offers an ethnographic study of a group of students who were in a transitional studies class that was implemented during this time to aid these specific students. Sullivan taught and designed the English 9000 course where he works at Manchester Community College.

Sullivan's text makes note of the important fact that "students who test poorly on standardized tests and enroll at community colleges typically bring with them rich and often 'non-traditional' life histories that have helped them shape both what they have learned and how they approach the academic enterprise" (47). Drawing on research in neuroscience, psychology, and intelligence, he takes us into these students' lives through an analysis of their responses to an assignment he refers to as "Journey Essays." These

specific essays “invited them to talk about their family history and document their journeys to MCC” (50). Sullivan includes quite large excerpts from their essays so that the students really get to speak for themselves through their own written texts, to construct their own identities for his readers. Sullivan explains too that the stories that they tell are “complex” and “deeply embedded in global political movements, national and international history, economic realities for the poor and working class, and gender issues, along with more personal histories, aspirations, and ambitions” (51).

As Sullivan indicates, we simply cannot consider basic writers’ identities without taking both local and larger issues into consideration, especially those that have to do with such large changes in educational policy. Drawing on the work of Stephanie L. Kershbaum, Sullivan especially makes note of the importance of recognizing how student identity is always contingent and in flux (Kershbaum 9). In other words, we cannot and should not understand basic writers’ identities as one thing—they are always complicated and changing, shaped by development, context, as well as greater social and political concerns. Sullivan’s idea is that we should work especially hard not to construct identities for our Basic Writing students. Rather, we would do far better to look closely at the intricate identities that they construct for themselves.

Next, Sullivan unpacks the various issues with which his students have to contend in their lives, something about which we and our graduate students always need to be conscious. He makes note of the many jobs that his students have to hold in order to attend school in the first place, many working close to 40 hours a week. Sullivan characterizes the key role that scarcity plays in his students’ academic success as well. Their lack of access means that “most of the students in this class were living more tenuously than traditional college students, who were able to attend a residential college for four years” (60). Sullivan also describes students’ struggles with reading, pointing to the fact that the students did not have access to a “wide and diverse variety of cultural references” (61-62). He examines the fact that many of his students grew up in poverty and that such students “often develop a much more limited vocabulary than children who grow up in professional families” (63). Finally, many of the students disliked reading and had limited experience with it—“many claimed never to have completed reading a full book” (64). Important to highlight for our graduate students who are studying the histories and theories of Basic Writing, all of these analyses help to situate Sullivan’s basic writers’ identities both within the context of Sullivan’s class and within broader socio-cultural and political concerns.

Also important for our graduate students taking classes like "Teaching Basic Writing," Sullivan suggests that we should not consider basic writing students to be incapable of college-level work but instead embrace Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade's thoughts on "critical hope." Sullivan quotes from Duncan-Andrade's essay titled "Note to Educators: Hope Required When Growing Roses in Concrete," indicating that critical hope "rejects the despair of hopelessness and the false hopes of 'cheap American optimism'" (West, 2008, p. 41). Critical hope demands a committed and active struggle "against the evidence in order to change the deadly tides of wealth inequality, group xenophobia, and personal despair" (West, 2004, pp. 296-297) (5)" (66). According to Sullivan, this is a kind of hope that allows students to really have the "potential for agency and control of destiny" (66). In other words, Sullivan contends that when we think about basic writers' identities and write about them we should do so with an eye toward this critical hopefulness, taking their own agency and control of their identities to be central to our mission. This is consequential for our graduate students to keep in mind when they work with Basic Writing students, especially those whose writing struggles may seem insurmountable.

Sullivan goes on to describe that there are lessons to be drawn from his study that may be relevant to a discussion of Basic Writing students and programs at other institutions across the country. In particular, he calls attention to a need for "equity, agency, and social justice" over things like "test scores" (70). Again, as Sullivan shows, basic writers' identities need to be understood both within the local contexts within which they occur but also in terms of their larger social and political import. This is indispensable for our graduate students to keep in mind both as they learn the history and theory of Basic Writing Studies as well as teach their own Basic Writing classes.

The last section of Sullivan's essay, which is quite fascinating, focuses on "Activism." He argues that many state legislatures are now too often dictating our educational goals and curricula. According to Sullivan, there is a "neoliberal economic model at work here suggesting that developmental education itself is the problem, rather than a host of economic, social, and cultural variables that can slow down or stop progress toward a degree for some students" (71). He argues that we need to fight against this trend and that, in spite of the difficult situations in which many developmental writing programs now find themselves, we should have some genuine optimism for the future, a crucial message for our graduate students as they go forth to continue their work teaching basic writers or, in some cases, to just begin it. And Sullivan's closing words are a tremendous call to action for us all: "Let us

engage this important work in classrooms across America with hope—and determination in our hearts” (74).

There are many things to admire about Sullivan’s article and its placement in *JBW*. There are also numerous ways in which teaching such an essay may impact our graduate students (and their own teaching of Basic Writing) positively. While Bird decisively examines how basic writers can come to adopt their own academic writerly identities, Sullivan self-consciously allows basic writers the space within his own essay to construct their own identities, letting them literally speak for many pages of his text. Simultaneously he calls for us to give basic writers more agency in their own educational processes. These student voices that he cites, however, are not understood to be transparent. Rather, they function as complicated, mediated, and necessarily shaped by larger discursive issues. Sullivan also acknowledges the tough local situation in which he finds himself and that increasingly many Basic Writing teachers and administrators are finding themselves. Many of our graduate students may find themselves in similar situations. In the face of this, Sullivan does not waver or buckle. He instead calls for a greater understanding of what he is witnessing, one informed by looking at broader institutional, political, and social concerns relevant to our Basic Writing students’ lives. Finally, Sullivan’s approach is ultimately an extremely optimistic one—one that is crucial for our graduate students in classes like my “Teaching Basic Writing” course to understand. He calls for coalition-building and a focus on how broader concerns impact local contexts. If we can acknowledge the complex construction of basic writers’ identities and the forces that shape them, we can intervene to both help them learn more effectively as individuals as well as help bolster our Basic Writing programs altogether.

Academic Soldier Identities: Emily Schnee and Jamil Shakor’s Analysis

Emily Schnee and Jamil Shakoor’s 2016 “Self/Portrait of a Basic Writer: Broadening the Scope of Research on College Remediation” could also be very usefully taught to our graduate students in a course like my own “Teaching Basic Writing.” The writers do not just examine how basic writers might come to adopt academic writerly identities. They do not just show how basic writers construct their own identities in response to various political and socioeconomic issues. Rather, they offer a great example of both possibilities *as they occur*. They too use the contextual model, in this instance a case study of an individual student, as a way to make an argument for broader

issues related to Basic Writing teaching and theory. But, in this example, that individual student is in fact one of the co-authors of the text, Jamil Shakor. As a result, Jamil is able to very directly construct his own identity for the discipline and argue for the value of Basic Writing altogether.

As the two writers assert, we live in a world in which college remediation courses, particularly those in community colleges like Kingsborough Community College, CUNY where Schnee works, are constantly under fire. As they attest, "What gets lost in this highly contentious, politically charged debate are developmental students themselves—their stories, their voices, and perspectives" and their essay aims to change this: "we hope to broaden the scope of what counts as research on college remediation (beyond and beneath the numbers); expand the borders of authority and authorship in scholarship on Basic Writing to include student writers; and contest the notion that developmental education is a detriment to students" (86). They note that too few studies "directly engage the student-participant as a partner in setting the research agenda, analyzing data, or co-authoring the findings of the research" (89). The aim of the essay is to, through dialogic inquiry, learn from Jamil's success story *in his own words*. This is a very important essay for our graduate students in a class like "Teaching Basic Writing" to read and understand because what the essay offers is not another construction of a Basic Writer's identity through a contextual model but rather a Basic Writer's construction of his own identity through various examples of his own written discourse, written discourse that he himself controls.

Schnee and Shakoore also utilize a unique discursive structure—one that could provide graduate students with alternative ways to approach their own scholarship—in that their article includes two sets of voices and two sets of identities in making its argument, weaving Emily's and Jamil's changing voices together. In particular, the article "intersperses Jamil's retrospective personal narrative, excerpts from his college essays, and our analysis of his writing organized chronologically—to parallel his development—around four emergent themes: *the power of motivation, the importance of writing after remediation, the value of academic rigor, and the significance of time*" (90). The essay traces each of these four themes carefully. The text does not just look at the work that Jamil completed within his Basic Writing course in isolation either. Importantly, the authors examine it within the context of his larger academic life. For example, while they note that Jamil credits college remediation courses with aiding his writing, they also attest that in order to successfully move to a four-year college, Jamil found a "rigorous academic summer program" to be especially helpful (99). Jamil's attitude is particularly

salient to notice and to highlight for our graduate students here. As he states, “I will struggle, but through struggling, I feel like I will develop some kind of endurance for studying. I like to call it becoming an academic soldier” (99). Hearing Jamil’s voice directly here can crucially shape the ways in which our graduate students approach teaching their own Basic Writing students. The writers also focus on the importance of time in Jamil’s development as a writer, citing Marilyn Sternglass’s work on this subject. In effect, these are all critical building blocks to helping Jamil become the writer that he is today. As the writers further advance, “Jamil’s two semesters of basic writing provided him a foundation of confidence and academic skills without which he is convinced he would have ‘failed miserably’ in college” (104).

Schnee and Shakoor close their essay by making connections to broader issues from this single case. As they argue, “the significance of time to Jamil’s development as a writer conflicts with both his own initial desire to move through developmental English at a rapid clip and the growing body of research advocating for the speed up of remediation” (106). They also once again note that Jamil’s “firm conviction that developmental education laid the foundation for his future college success is an important piece of the remediation story—one that must be heard by those contemplating dramatic policy changes that will fundamentally alter who can attend college and how” (107). In addition, and importantly for our graduate students to witness, Schnee and Shakoor show the value of joint authorship in allowing basic writers to construct their own identities for the discipline: “We hope that our experiment in co-authorship inspires others to invite students into the scholarly circle as the protagonists of their stories, the researchers of their educational experiences” (107). Finally, they broaden their discussion even further to offer some thoughts for all of us to consider, regardless of the local contexts in which we teach: “college remediation must be sanctioned and valued, academic skills take time to harvest, writing development requires a long view, exposure to academic rigor is crucial, transformation is ‘a lot to ask’” (107-108). Schnee and Shakoor close with this statement: “College remediation, as Jamil’s experience affirms, may be one of the few remaining times and spaces in higher education in which building one’s confidence, while laying a previously missed academic foundation, is a sanctioned and valued educational pursuit” (110).

Several things are clear about this essay’s importance in *JBW* and its importance in terms of educating our graduate students in Basic Writing Studies. Like some other contemporary essays that utilize the contextual model, it raises broader institutional, social, and political implications as well

as issues for the discipline and beyond. Taking Jamil's experiences as a crucial example of a Basic Writer's experiences in action, we can better understand the value of Basic Writing Programs for all such students. In addition, reading this essay will help graduate students who are teaching and researching in Basic Writing Studies to think further about the value of Basic Writing classes in students' long term learning. This article accomplishes this in a very unique way—through a Basic Writer's construction of his own identities for himself, his teacher, as well as the discipline. It does not do so in a static way either, as we learn who Jamil is at various points within his academic career and witness the various struggles and successes that he experiences. Jamil's identities are multiple and diverse, revealing the incredible complexity of who a Basic Writing student is and can be. The essay also utilizes a narrative structure that challenges our traditional research. The text is polyvocal, weaving two sets of voices and two sets of experiences together. It also features many kinds of texts—Jamil's written essays for class aside his reflections of his writing experiences at different stages within his academic career. This essay is a particularly promising example for graduate students and the future of the discipline because the attempts to construct the Basic Writer's identities are in large part being authored by the student himself.²

The Future of the Course and the Discipline

In light of how basic writers' identities have been constructed from 2006-2017 in Basic Writing Studies within the pages of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, I am genuinely hopeful for the future of my "Teaching Basic Writing" course and the future of our discipline. I will certainly build significant readings like the recent ones I have analyzed here into my class. In upcoming versions of the course, I will include a separate module on the latest developments within the contextual model. In addition, I will encourage my graduate students to think further about how their particular Basic Writing students construct their own identities and help my graduate students to create both scholarly projects and pedagogies that honor these constructions.

It's clear that the contextual model and its various iterations, while still very much in use, have expanded to include myriad other ideas and approaches, many of which greatly honor basic writers' constructions of their own identities and allow basic writers to use their own voices while always acknowledging that these voices are themselves in flux and mediated. Increasingly, I see these trends also operating in Rhetoric and Composition as a larger discipline with a renewed focus on embodied rhetorics and more

complicated understandings of both identity construction within Literacy Studies as well as how both teachers and students “write the personal.”

I might be tempted to call these new developments in Basic Writing Studies that we are witnessing within the contextual approach something novel, different, to suggest that a new model is indeed emerging. If hard pressed, I might even term it “self constructivist”—a title that attempts to honor that what we are increasingly seeing in our scholarship are students’ own complex self constructions and not our constructions of them. But, I am not yet entirely sure about this. Time will tell if it becomes a larger model or is just a new feature of the contextual model itself.

As I noted earlier, in my 2006 *JBW* article as well as in my “Teaching Basic Writing” graduate class, I have at moments cautioned that basic writers’ student identities were sometimes being turned to as “capable of overhauling our theory, the problems within academic discourse, our troubled history.” I noted that “the teacher/researcher has been recast somewhat as the flailing victim in need of rescue—our students in the new narrative now acting as our figurative, if not our literal, saviors.” But the three essays I have just analyzed make clear that we can turn to and feature our basic writers’ constructions of their own identities in ways that do not put pressure on them to solve the many problems of the discipline but instead feature their fluctuations, their messinesses, their moments of contradiction. If we do so, our students may themselves provide us with unique ways to rethink such problems (including things like how to best argue for the existence of Basic Writing programs themselves) collaboratively as well as help us to push beyond them.

In addition, these new contextual understandings of the Basic Writer’s identities as articulated in the three articles provide excellent models for our graduate students studying Basic Writing theory and practice. My graduate students have produced very intriguing projects as part of the “Teaching Basic Writing” course for many years now—ones that have treated basic writers’ identities as central to our inquiry. In just the last few semesters alone, they have created specific lesson plans for Basic Writing classes as well as larger curricular projects for Basic Writing programs; made arguments about how to best teach Basic Writing to Native American students; suggested ways to bridge high school Language Arts teaching and the teaching of college Basic Writing classes; examined how to best structure Basic Writing in community colleges; traced debates of various kinds about theory and history within the discipline as well as offered analyses of them; investigated how to create effective peer review group work in Basic Writing classes; examined the economics of the technology divide and considered what the best uses are

for technology in Basic Writing classes; used Creative Writing exercises to teach argumentation to Basic Writing students; and composed administrative documents to argue for the value and continuation of Basic Writing Programs for specific community colleges and universities.

Some of the projects that my students have produced for the "Teaching Basic Writing" class have resulted in thesis and capstone projects focused entirely on Basic Writing. Some of these projects have resulted in scholarly publications within the discipline. For example, two of my graduate students, Loyola Bird and Judith Bullock, co-authored an essay with me on teaching Native American Basic Writing students that appeared in *JBW*. Some of these projects have become writing samples in applications for doctoral programs. Some of these projects have been the kernels that resulted in doctoral dissertations and even book projects.

But, as much as my own graduate students have made basic writers' identities central to their studies, I believe that we can encourage all of our graduate students to take such projects further still. One of our aims of professionalization for the field of Basic Writing should be to continue to help our graduate students to better articulate the kinds of Basic Writer identities their students themselves are creating and what the potential effects of them are. Such knowledge will inevitably feed back into our classrooms, impacting the assignments we create and how we assess them. Another aim may involve championing collaboration across students' differences and across different Basic Writing programs. Our graduate courses in Basic Writing can foster these things by exposing graduate students to the sorts of articles I analyze here, of course, and encouraging them to produce projects in this vein. Finally, I do think that the kinds of thoughts about the history of the discipline and basic writers' identities that I have addressed here lay the foundation for a new relationship between basic writers and their instructors/professors—ones in which we are increasingly collaborators, facilitators, and co-researchers. Here I am not calling for blurring the lines between students and teachers so much as recognizing the many things we share in common—oftentimes issues of institutional marginalization, desires for greater agency, and concerns about having stronger voices both within the classroom and within larger institutional spaces.

Basic Writing Studies has come a long way since 1998, when I first took up the question of how basic writers' identities were being constructed in the *Journal of Basic Writing*. We have experienced many changes, the most recent of which, as I hope I have shown, seem extremely promising and important to include in the education of our graduate students. It has been

a tremendous thing to witness such changes over these years. And it has been a joy to teach the “Teaching Basic Writing” graduate class for so long, to continue to revisit it and alter it as the discipline has itself changed and grown. Part of revising this class, of course, is about continually studying our history in this very detailed, concentrated way, about looking at how basic writers’ identities are being constructed by the discipline, especially within the *Journal of Basic Writing*. So, I look forward to perhaps revisiting this question again at some point, perhaps years from now, also within the pages of *JBW* itself.

Notes

1. While I do not supply my detailed assignment sheets for this course here due to space considerations, instructors should feel free to contact me if they would like to see them.
2. There are two other recent essays that I seriously considered analyzing for how they construct basic writers’ identities in this new way but could not because of time and space. I think that they are also very well-conceived articles that I will likely add into the final section of my “Teaching Basic Writing” class. Wendy Pfrenger’s “Cultivating Places and People at the Center: Cross-Pollinating Literacies on a Rural Campus” examines the value of using students’ home literacies as ways to bridge to/interact with academic literacies, featuring stories of how student consultants accomplish this as well as the impacts on the student clients in terms of their own learning. Likewise, Lucas Corcoran’s “‘Languaging 101’: Translingual Practices for the Translingual Realities of the SEEK Composition Classroom” suggests that we work from students’ own languaging processes in their everyday lives to create a metadiscourse that helps them to make fuller sense of those processes.

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