It's Not Just About the Teaching: Integrating Basic Writing History and Theory in a Master's Level Graduate Seminar

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ABSTRACT: This article describes a version of the Seminar in Basic Writing Theory and Pedagogy, a Master's level course that Marcia Buell taught in summer 2017 at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. Buell argues that because many MA students enter graduate courses in Basic Writing expecting that the course will show them how to "fix" problems in the texts that basic writers produce, it is necessary to design MA courses which promote a theorized pedagogy, *to show how history, theory, and social or institutional contexts drive pedagogical approaches. In addition to discussing the concepts that graduate students in the course learned and sometimes struggled with, Buell introduces resources and hands-on activities used to help graduate students address key questions such as what makes a student a Basic Writer, or how we might tap linguistic understandings of basic writers instead of assuming a lack of knowledge about language.*

KEYWORDS: Basic Writing; deficit notions; definitions of basic writers

Graduate courses that focus specifically on Basic Writing theory and pedagogy are relatively rare (Gleason), despite the large enrollment of students who are classified as basic writers in community colleges and some university programs. Even when such programs exist, graduate students may come into such courses seeking ways to "fix" the grammar and structure of basic writers, adhering to a commonly held view that basic writers should be taught to eliminate surface grammatical errors from sentences before moving to paragraphs, which also follow circumscribed forms, so that fuller discourse is not introduced until these building blocks are mastered (Otte and Mylnarcyzk). This deficit view of basic writers lays blame on the students'

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cognitive abilities or lack of willingness to learn, and disregards how marginalizing factors such as racism (Inoue), or restrictive educational policies (Glau), impact writing practices. Since graduate students in composition programs may view themselves as reasonably adept in writing, and may not have had to struggle especially hard to develop their writing skills, it can be hard to see that basic writers may feel like outsiders in higher education because of institutional practices, and even teacher perceptions, on the one hand, and identity questions on the other.

To mediate against potentially debilitating deficit stances, it is necessary to design MA courses which promote a *theorized pedagogy* that explores how history and social or institutional contexts drive pedagogical approaches. Theorized pedagogy means making decisions about practice that rely on thoughtful and reflective applications of theory. Such applications encourage educators to not only seek methods that work, but to also question why and how they should be applied to particular contexts in order to best serve basic writers. In applying theorized pedagogies, graduate students can learn to address easily recognizable concerns, such as the basic writer's need to develop a better command of grammar or organizational structures, while also learning to recognize and work with the intellectual and social strengths that basic writers bring to their academic endeavors, despite the often harsh realities of their lives.

The need to foster sensitivity to the intersections of institutional and social influences on Basic Writing became very clear to me a few years ago when I taught an earlier version of the Seminar in Basic Writing Theories and Pedagogies. One of my students had suggested that the class watch the PBS video, *Discounted Dreams: High Hopes and Harsh Realities at America's Community Colleges*, which depicts how community colleges offer the hope of higher education to otherwise disenfranchised students, but also shows how the policies of some community colleges, such as little institutional investment in training and support for instructors in developmental classes, limit those hopes. One section of the video illustrates developmental math and English classes across several community colleges with examples of ineffective or disengaged teaching, and instructors who express that "students have the right to fail." The adjunct teachers express that they are not trained for their positions, and that remedial classes are offered to newer instructors because others do not want to teach them. In one scene, a new and relatively inexperienced adjunct teacher is shown reading to a few students in the front of the room and pointing out the placement of a semi-colon in a sentence, while the rest of the class sits in the back listening to music or

sleeping. The disengaged teaching is juxtaposed with another scene where there is institutional support for two experienced full-time tenured English professors to team-teach a dynamic class that includes cooperative learning and games where students take ownership of their own learning. Interspersed with these views of classes are depictions of dismissive administrative attitudes suggesting that since "anyone can teach basic writing," resources for supporting and training of adjuncts are better used elsewhere; also there are illustrations of how complex the lives of basic writers can be.

Despite the video discussing institutional constraints on the community college students and teachers, several graduate students in a previous seminar responded viscerally only to what they saw as the poor teaching illustrated in the video. One student commented that the disengaged instructors had no business teaching, which, while perhaps a reasonable reaction to what was shown, disregarded the contexts of inequality and institutional disdain for developmental courses which fostered such teaching. One graduate student, who had gone from adjunct teaching to full-time teaching, did note with dismay that it is always the adjunct teachers who get blamed, and spoke in support of strong adjunct instructors, but she still overlooked administrative factors that might prevent instructors from fully engaging with their students. Though the class with collaborative learning suggested that the instructors thought of their students as capable learners and problem solvers, the other settings suggested that the instructors mirrored the institutional view that developmental students were not fully worth the efforts to educate them.

Given the goal about making a class about Basic Writing be more than an introduction to teaching approaches for "fixing" student writing, what follows is a discussion of how I designed the Seminar in Basic Writing Theory and Pedagogies to allow students to explore social, institutional, and pedagogical aspects of Basic Writing in an integrated way.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR COURSE DESIGN: DEFINITIONS OF BASIC WRITERS AND BASIC WRITING

Students enroll in the Seminar in Basic Writing Theory and Pedagogy for a mix of professional and educational reasons, and with widely different understandings of who basic writers are. Some students who are enrolled in our Masters of Composition program typically have little teaching experience, but aspire to teaching composition at the community college or university level. The course also attracts high school teachers and current

community college instructors who enroll in master's courses for professional development credit or added validation, especially when they can take it in the summer outside of the regular school year. Occasionally, an MA literature student will join the class primarily to gain an added boost in a highly competitive job market. Students in the MA literature program tend to be strong in analyzing published texts, but have little or no knowledge of composition or writing studies theory. The various backgrounds of the graduate students point to key differences in perceptions of who basic writers are and what they may need.[1] Such variety in backgrounds has the potential to generate rich discussions and break down barriers of understanding between high school and college instructors, or composition and literature majors.

At the same time, while there is a diversity in professional orientations, often the Seminar in Basic Writing Pedagogies draws largely middle class white students, which influences how members of the class might understand uptake of standard language. Many students who enroll in this graduate course feel confident in their general writing abilities. If these students admit to struggling with more complex writing, they attribute the difficulty to the topic and not to the act of writing itself. However, they come into the class believing that basic writers struggle with all aspects of writing, regardless of the topic. They also tend to express a love and appreciation of reading, at least in terms of reading literature, but feel that basic writers do not have such an affinity for reading.

Consequently, when asked to define a basic writer, I have found that MA graduate students might make skill-based comparisons to themselves, without accounting for class or ethnic backgrounds, or life experiences. Some definitions offered on the first day of this course were that a basic writer was someone who does not know, or failed to learn, grammar and basic essay structure, or that a basic writer is someone who does not read enough and therefore does not know how texts work. These assertions are not necessarily wrong in themselves, but incomplete and limited, stemming from the notion of deficit that Basic Writing theorists and practitioners have been fighting against for years (see Rose; Bartholomae "The Tidy House"; McCrary; Inoue), and importantly, from seeing basic writers as having impoverished literate and language practices compared to those that they have acquired.

In setting up the course, in addition to taking into account the professional and lived experiences of the students, I also needed to decide how to address the varied scholarly voices in the field. Basic Writing as a discipline has a relatively brief, but highly complex history, so in course design, it is necessary to decide how much of the course should reflect recent scholarly

developments and how much should rely on texts reaching back a few decades. Though current scholarship addresses concerns with definitions of basic writers, inequities in education, and changes in program design, graduate students may miss the nuances of current debates if they do not have a sense of how those debates played out over the past five decades. For instance, now, as was the case when Mina Shaughnessy was writing *Errors and Expectations* in the 1970's, there are questions about who should have access to higher education and how higher education could equitably address cultural difference while still maintaining academic standards. In the not so distant past, disenfranchised students had to fight for educational access and programs, and then had to fight for resources to accommodate their needs (Otte and Mlynarczyk). Now states seek to eliminate remedial courses in higher education, but without readily providing resources for learning support. Consequently, defining basic writers shifts in relation to the goals and needs of different institutions. By viewing access, equity, and definition as continuing issues, graduate students can better understand their own teaching contexts or potential teaching contexts in terms of what policies are being put into place for what reasons, and which historical patterns repeat.

One set of conflicting definitions from the 1980's and 1990's that I continue to use centers on how students see themselves and are seen in higher educational contexts. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae proposes that basic writers at an elite university might have good structural command of written language, but may not be able to articulate complexities of thought through their writing. In contrast, in *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose, who has worked with and advocated for a very different population in adult education, suggests that basic writers might not have had the life opportunities to engage with academic reading or writing.

This contrast of views illustrates how conceptualizations of cognitive ability, personality, identity, and social contexts suggest approaches for Basic Writing courses, assignments and support structures. Some approaches may work explicitly with texts while others may advocate for addressing affect and life experiences.[2] Some approaches seek to erase cultural and linguistic difference in writing, while other approaches seek to build upon it (Otte and Mlynarczyk; McCrary; Elder and Davila). How Basic Writing and basic writers are defined impacts the extent to which innovations in pedagogy can be realized.

A growing concern with course design centers on the shifting relationship that higher education has with secondary schools. Scholarly discussions that are relevant to graduate students teaching in or planning

to teach at community colleges or universities may not address the needs or interests of high school teachers. Since much of the scholarship tagged Basic Writing discusses higher education contexts, it makes sense that the emphasis would be here, but it is also a legitimate concern since high school teachers work with underprepared writers and have a mix of students who are going to college or seeking other paths. Additionally, high schools now push to have students be college ready, and that often means expecting that students will circumvent developmental courses in college, blurring the lines between preparatory and developmental instruction. Additionally, as there is a tendency for college level instructors to blame weak writing ability on high school teaching, conversations across the educational levels must be encouraged. Though currently there are no readings on the syllabus addressing the connection of high school to college, the experiential activities are designed to foster that exchange.

Basic Writing does not exist in an educational vacuum. It is part of the broader context of culture (Clark and Ivanič), and so exists within other cultural and political conflicts. For example, a few years ago, the field was asking about the place of Basic Writing in universities, when state funding for developmental courses was being pulled away or severely restricted, even as standardized assessments and narrow definitions of literacy permeated high school curriculum. Currently, though stand-alone non-credit courses focused on grammatical structure or rhetorical modes still exist in community colleges and universities, some institutions responded to changes in funding and to the perception that the non-credit classes contributed to student attrition with innovations such as ALP courses (Adams, Gearheart, Miller, and Roberts), Stretch courses (Glau), or Studio models (Lalicker),[3] and more flexible placement assessments (Blakesley). As graduate students prepare to teach in various contexts, or as teaching contexts shift, students have to at least be aware of the approaches that are gaining traction in colleges and universities across the country. They need to understand that curricular choices depend on the structures which house them.

TEXT AND MATERIAL OVERVIEW

To connect issues from the past to those of the present, the narrative of the course roughly followed the layout of George Otte and Rebecca Mlynarczyk's book titled Basic Writing*, and then picked up some of the key texts referenced therein.* The chapters in their book are: "Historical Overview"; "Defining Basic Writing and Basic Writers"; "Practices and Pedagogies";"Research"; and "The

Future of Basic Writing." However, in some cases I also used relevant texts not mentioned in their overview. Often the supplemental articles were used for experiential activities to give students hands-on experiences with some of the concepts discussed. Additionally, I also made some modifications to the sequencing of the course around the chapters in *Basic Writing*. The main changes were that I did not have the class work with the chapter on Research, for reasons that will be explained below, and that I moved "The Future of Basic Writing" to be discussed earlier in the course, right after the introduction and first chapter. This made sense in my course because teachers now are entering programs where credit-bearing extended or support models are in place or are being implemented. The chapter "The Future of Basic Writing" offered a good overview for how the field had been shifting, but in my view, served well as an introduction to the field.

Below is a list of texts used in addition to Otte and Mlynarczyk's chapters which allowed the class to go into depth about key questions such as how institutional contexts shaped definitions of basic writers, how working from narrow definitions of basic writers could inhibit rather than foster learning, and how instructors could learn to tap basic writers' linguistic practices and knowledge to set up inclusive classrooms with cognitively engaging activities. For each section, I list the main theme from *Basic Writing* and the texts selected that addressed that theme. The reasons for each choice will be explained with each set of texts.

Historical Overview

Introduction *Errors and Expectations* (Shaughnessy); Excerpt from *Lives on the Boundaries* (Rose); "Inventing the University" (Bartholomae)

Central to any historical discussion of Basic Writing would be Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*. What I find most useful to current students is not necessarily her detailed discussion of the grammatical forms, but her argument that basic writers make errors because they are actively working with language and means of expression as opposed to being lazy or careless. Consequently, I decided to put the introduction to *Errors and Expectations* on the syllabus, but to leave out the more heavily error-focused chapters of the book. The introduction offers a view on how Basic Writing began as a field and of the complex social situation that surrounded its implementation. This complexity is addressed in the tensions between opening the doors to higher education and then managing the influx of students that the schools had not

been fully prepared to handle. Despite Shaughnessy's showing that students with Open Admissions came from many different kinds of backgrounds, the chapter illustrates a general perception that lacking a command of grammatical structure of written language was the root of writing problems for basic writers regardless of social context. David Bartholomae and Mike Rose each argue that social context has an impact. Bartholomae argues that basic writers might have good control over grammar, but in an elite university, may be unable to engage with topics in nuanced or in-depth ways. Rose argues that the way academic tasks are set up can derail a student's ability to process and produce text, particularly among working-class students.

Defining Basic Writing and Basic Writers

Discounted Dreams: High Hopes and Harsh Realities at America's Community Colleges (Glasser, Isaacs, and Merrow); "Tidy House" (Bartholomae); "Remediation as Social Construct: Perspectives from an Analysis of Classroom Discourse"; (Hull, Rose, Losey, Fraser and Castellano); Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer (O'Hearn)

Discounted Dreams offered an overview of community colleges in general, and provided a window on complex intersections of school policies and student lives. While the previous section on the history of Basic Writing largely established definitions of basic writers as being tied to characteristics of the students, in this section, each of these texts challenged definitions of Basic Writing by illustrating the uncomfortable notion that sometimes our teaching practices and perceptions impose deficit labels on students in Basic Writing classes. The ideas from these texts align well with concepts from the video. To address these concepts, small groups of students have a chance to read one of the texts in depth and share their insights with the rest of the class.

Practices and Pedagogies

"Grammar Games in the Age of Anti-Remediation"(Rustick); "Represent, Representin', Representation: The Efficacy of Hybrid Text in the Writing Classroom" (McCrary); CBW Research Share (Baldridge)

Here the supplemental materials moved beyond what Otte and Mlynarczyk present. Though the course was designed to bring up considerations beyond pedagogy, it was important to examine how pedagogical processes

can move focus away from deficit notions and toward social considerations and cognitively challenging, communicative tasks. With this chapter, we worked through contentious issues in the field, exploring what it meant to look at grammatical knowledge through a lens of student world knowledge and capability as opposed to a lens of deficit. We did so by tapping tacit understandings of grammar and the potentials of hybrid discourse. We also explored the CBW Resource Share to see how other instructors designed engaging and challenging lessons that allowed students to show their perceptions in their writing.

Research (No texts used- not covered in this session)

Previously, I had included the chapter on Research, along with examples of research in Basic Writing, but in a very short summer session, I justified the removal of the research section, because, though reading the research that accompanies shifts in pedagogies, policies, and attitudes is certainly important, students needed to start work on their own open-ended final projects, so that they could explore topics relevant to their own contexts. These projects included a feasibility study in establishing a writing center in a high school district, an exploration of ways to incorporate creative processes in composition classes at a community college, and a proposal for better articulated vertical alignments of composition classes between freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior classes in a high school district with the end goal of preparation for college writing. In place of reading about established research practices, several students e-mailed questions to experts in the field, who had generously responded to my request on the CBW-listserv for people willing to be interviewed. Details about this approach will be discussed later.

The Future of Basic Writing

"A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures: A Baseline and Five Alternatives" (Lalicker)

Lalicker's text gives a general description of the kinds of programs that had been emerging from the late 1990's. He also lays out considerations for adopting one configuration over another depending on context. Community Colleges in the Chicago area, and lately NEIU itself, have been restructuring basic writing classes in the last few years. At times though, some of the graduate students who taught in community colleges said that it seemed as if faculty would only learn about an approach through an administrator who

would tell them that a new model would be adopted, and that they then needed to figure out how to make it work. Otte and Mlynarczyk, along with Lalicker, set up definitions of program innovations and provided a context for graduate students teaching at community colleges to more broadly understand programmatic options.

Readers might notice that some key texts were omitted from the course reading list or that not as many newer texts were included. In setting up a critical focus, I chose texts that illustrated how social perceptions might play out in classrooms instead of working with texts that offered a larger social critique. I have found the graduate students in this seminar to be school- focused and therefore I chose the classroom and institutions of higher learning as sites through which to explore perceptions of equity and privilege. I have also found that some of the texts written previously lay out foundations for discussion of current issues, so that reaching back a little further helped students find a lens through which to view current questions. Future versions of the course might use more current texts as situations in higher education shift.

ACTIVITIES FOR A THEORIZED PRACTICE: FOUR AREAS FOR IN-CLASS EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

In addition to reading and discussing texts, I sought to incorporate in-class activities where the graduate students could actively engage with writing or pedagogical problems, so that they could use shared experiences to build upon the insights they gained from reading and from their own out of class experiences. The goal of the activities was either to have students look at their own writing and thinking processes or to have them engage as teachers or learners for some of the concepts discussed in class. With some activities, the students needed to write in class, or articulate grammatical or textual choices. In other activities, they had to teach material to each other, or articulate their work to professionals in the field beyond our classroom. These activities allowed the class to develop their insights with reflections from how they felt in the moment of engagement. (Individual activities will be described in more detail later.)

Area 1: Questioning What Causes Difficulty of Written Expression

Exercise 1: "Becoming" a Basic Writer

To challenge the idea that inadequate or tangled text comes solely from a lack of knowledge of how written language works, I put two activities on the syllabus for early in the course. Before engaging with any reading, on the first day of class, I asked my graduate students to provide their own definitions of basic writers. Once we shared definitions which tended to center on lack of knowledge of grammatical structure, or lack of interest in reading, I asked the class to write to a prompt which was designed for most of the class to have difficulty addressing with any fluency. This prompt asks the students to make an argument about whether or not South Korea should maintain a ban on Japanese animae and other elements of Japanese pop culture, given the cultural imposition of Japan on Korea during the second World War (see Appendix). Students are asked to discuss specific animae, which might either show aspects only of Japanese culture or present a broader pan-Asian cultural perspective. Students have about 15 minutes to write on this topic. In all of the times I have used this activity prior, and as was borne out with this class, students did not take the full time to write, but instead, stopped writing early in frustration, produced simplistic statements about television, spent time explaining how much they did not know about the topic, or wrote in circles about a vague idea. Students in this class gratefully accepted the offer to stop the clock early, and generally expressed embarrassment about what they wrote. Many of them decried how they then felt like basic writers because they had produced very short, and in some cases, highly repetitious text, offered ideas that did not progress, and in some cases ignored the prompt because they had nothing to say about it.

The prompt was designed to make composing difficult, illustrating that as we move from familiar topics or contexts, anyone can become a basic writer. The inability to write in a certain way and at a certain time may not come only from a lack of knowledge about writing, but also from challenges presented in contexts. At the end of the writing period, students shared how they felt about their performance on the prompt. Many said that if they could have researched more, they could have done better, and this led them to acknowledge how beginning writers feel when they are pushed to write without enough background information. Some also felt disoriented because their sense of identity as students who usually showed themselves

to be comfortable writers was shaken. The discomfort they felt writing also lead to discussion about how identities might clash with writing tasks. The activity served as a preview to the idea that ways to define a Basic Writer are not stable and set, and that deficit notions do not account for challenges found in some writing contexts.

Exercise 2: Analyzing Content and Grammatical Error

While the animae writing activity was intended to give students a chance to reflect on their writing practices when they did not have a solid way into the topic, another area that merits reflection is whether or not what we define as a lack of grammatical knowledge really is just that. Working through complexity or developing an idea more deeply can lead to an increase in grammatical error (Bartholomae, "Inventing the University"), as shown on pages 7 and 8 of *Errors and Expectations.* On these pages, there is a portrait of student writing which Shaughnessy argues is a student losing control of grammar to discuss a fairly complex idea about infant and adult perception. I used the projection screen to show each successive sentence attempt in isolation, so that the students could analyze what was going on from sentence to sentence. The question then was whether the sentences suggested lack of command of grammar or whether a change of perspective was impacting the writing. The following is an analysis of what we observed. In the first two attempts, the student wrote:

> Start 1: Seeing and hearing is something beautiful and strange to infant.
> Start 2: To a infant seeing and hearing is something beautiful and stonge to infl (p.7).

Though these two sentences have a few grammatical errors such as the missing article "an" in the first sentence before "infant," or an incorrect article, lack of a comma after "infant" and the spelling of "strange," they have a basically correct structure and suggest that seeing and hearing may have different meanings for parents and infants. This sense of difference continued in Start 6, where the student wrote: "I agree that a child is more sensitive to seeing and hearing than his parent because it is also new to him and more appreciate. His. . . " (p.8). In this instance, the idea was being elaborated on as the writer was adding reasons for his agreement. However, by Start 8, the student's ideas were changing to a mix of agreement and disagreement and, by the final start listed, Start 10, the student wrote:

> I disagree I fell that seeing and hearing has the same quality to both infants and parents. Hearing and seeing is such a great quality to infants and parents, and they both appreciate, just because there aren't so many panters or musicians around doesn't mean that infants are more sensitive to beautiful that there parents. (p.8)

Certainly, the grammatical correctness has deteriorated in the text, but the complexity of the idea has also increased. Shaughnessy did not say if this was a series of starts in one sitting or if they came over time with discussion. When read within the context of the whole chapter, the situation does look like one of a student struggling with structure. But when looked at in isolation as a progression of writing, it can also look like a writer who was struggling with a shifting or developing stance on the topic. Seen this way, the original point was refined, which might account for revisions that seemed to double back over themselves and result in more grammatical errors. Graduate students in the class noted that they had not really read the examples as the progression of an idea when they just saw them in the chapter, but rather as a set of individual sentences with various errors, as was perhaps what Shaughnessy had intended to show. They also noted how attention to the grammar had kept them from seeing that what the writer was saying was also shifting. Teachers and teachers in-training sometimes have trouble understanding how expressing a complex thought might lead to deterioration of grammatical control, so this was one way to show how grammatical knowledge is not necessarily a set or stable ability. It is my hope that these two activities broadened the definition of what it means to be a basic writer, and how factors other than command of the surface structure of language could come into play.

Area 2: Questioning Whether We as Instructors Are Perpetuating Deficit Labels

Another way that deficit notions can be challenged is to examine our own ingrained attitudes about intellectual abilities and diligence when we encounter students whose writing does not follow academic norms. While many instructors support students through their writing struggles, others, even well-intentioned ones, can quash motivation and knock down, instead of build up, confidence among basic writers. The texts used here illustrate how we as instructors (including myself) might draw on deficit notions of basic writers, even if we are not aware we hold such views. These texts also illustrate how deficit notions of student performance also graft onto social attitudes

about race, ethnicity, class, gender and ability. David Bartholomae's "The Tidy House" discusses a student who is a critical thinker, but presents his critique in an angry, swear-word laden way that pushes against academic writing conventions, and at first makes Bartholomae confused about how to read the essay. Glynda Hull, Mike Rose, Kay Losey Fraser and Marisa Castellano's "Remediation as Social Construct: Perspectives from an Analysis of Classroom Discourse" shows how an instructor's strict adherence to a teacher-controlled discussion pattern where the teacher initiates, responds to, and evaluates student contributions, and judges students based on their adherence to this structure, causes an engaged and enthusiastic student to lose confidence in her own abilities, even though she is a strong writer and a critical but divergent thinker. Carolyn O'Hearn's "Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer" discusses how instructors might deem the writing of dyslexic students as lazy or careless. O'Hearn's article is a bit outdated in that it focuses on spelling errors that can largely be addressed by spell checks now, but it still portrays the concern that a writer's effort and engagement might be discounted because of surface errors.

These articles encouraged reflection about classroom expectations and instructor attitudes that may be socially normalized and therefore invisible to those who hold them. Each of these articles addressed different aspects of these attitudes. However, with the abbreviated term, to assure that my graduate students had a chance to consider at least some of the issues in depth, instead of having all the students read all three articles, I assigned the readings in a format that I call "Each One Teach One." In this format:

- Students selected one of the three articles to teach to other students in small groups.
- At the start of the class session, students who read the same article met and discussed what they read and what they wanted to share with their classmates.
- After that, we once again divided the class so that they were mixed in with students who had not read the same texts. Generally, these were groups of six, with two people who had read the same article in each group. Students took turns introducing their articles and raising points for discussion, so that all the students were at least exposed to ideas from all of the articles.
- Consequently, each student attended to one article intensively, but could learn about and discuss issues from each of the articles.

This format for reading and discussing these articles yielded many talking points. Based on "The Tidy House," students questioned the way our assignments might shut some students out, even though we are trying to invite them into a way of thinking that we deem valuable. Students also commented on how we might not recognize critical thinking when we see it written in an unexpected form. In a similar way, with "Remediation as a Social Construct," students questioned how classroom discourse might limit rather than invite the free flow of ideas. "Recognizing the Learning Disabled College Writer" generated robust discussion from high school teachers questioning how learning disabilities were addressed in college classes. They noted that students with IEP's throughout K-12 received a lot of guidance and support, so they felt that such students would be lost when they entered a college environment where they had to self-disclose and seek out assistance to obtain accommodations. Through the Each One Teach One activity, we found that though examining our own attitudes in the classroom could be uncomfortable, it was eye-opening to see how we as instructors or future instructors might be complicit in creating doubt among our students, and making them feel unwelcome in colleges and universities, despite our intentions to do the opposite (Ybarra).

Area 3: Activating Latent and Conflicting Knowledge about Standard Language

Another way of looking at linguistic ability is to tap what basic writers may know about Standard English, even if it does not yet come through in their writing. Margaret Rustick offers approaches for uncovering tacit understandings of grammatical knowledge through games. In her article "Grammar Games in the Age of Anti-Remediation," Rustick argued that many people who become writing teachers like to play with language and may have been encouraged to do so since childhood in the forms of word games or puzzles, but basic writers have had fewer opportunities to play with language in school settings (though such play may have occurred orally outside of school). She suggested that if students were offered a non-evaluative space to explore aspects of language, they could test their understandings of multiple grammatical rules that might be in conflict with each other. Rustick introduced several classroom games with a grammar focus that pushed students to articulate grammatical knowledge and defend their judgments on sentences. As one of the hands-on activities in the class, we modified Rustick's game called

"Sentence Survivor" and played it in class. Actually playing the game, rather than just reading about it, forced players to articulate what made a sentence correct as well as what made it incorrect, and to use their understanding of grammar to argue for their perceptions.[4]

To play the game, the instructor creates a multi-clause sentence with many adjectives and descriptive phrases or clauses. Then:

- Students in groups take turns to eliminate up to three consecutive words while still maintaining a grammatically correct sentence.
- Meaning can shift in the sentence, which sometimes occurs in disconcerting ways, as long as the grammar remains intact.
- In teams, students get points for each word they eliminate, unless opposing teams successfully challenge their grammatical correctness.

Rustick suggested writing each word on an individual card which students hold up in the front of the room and which they place down when their word is eliminated. I modified this so that the sentence was projected in a Word or Google Doc. To keep track of how the sentence changed, I projected two copies of the same sentence. We kept the first copy as a reference and eliminated words from the second copy. Below is the sentence that I created for the game, following Rustick's guidelines of using multi-clausal sentences with an abundance of adjectives.

> Though many educators and other public employees in the state of Illinois are deeply concerned about budget cuts to elementary, high schools, colleges and universities across the state, we tend to forget about the sad plights of the poor multi-million dollar lottery winners, who because of reasons beyond their control, will not be receiving the much anticipated winnings due to them by taking a risky chance at playing the lottery and having their correct number selected by a machine with bouncing ping- pong balls, because the state says that checks cannot be written at this time.

With this sentence, as often happens in this game, the graduate students first removed adjectives or phrases that kept the basic structure intact, such as the word "many" in the first line or "much anticipated" near the end of the sentence. However, as the game progressed, meaning was affected when a team nominated removal of word sets such as "other public" (resulting in "though educators and employees") or "bouncing ping-pong"

(making the phrase "machines with balls"). Students tended to object to some meaning shifts, so we would then have to read the new version of the sentence out loud to check that the emerging sentence was still following grammatical rules. Often we would argue about whether a phrase was grammatical and why we would say that it was or was not. So, for instance, if a team nominated removing the first word "though," suggesting that the sentence can begin with "many,"other teams could challenge this choice by saying it was then creating a comma splice since two complete sentences were then separated by a comma, and that the word "though" made the clause dependent. Graduate students might use grammatical terms, such as "subordinate clause," but such terms are not necessary in explanations. In this case, it would suffice to say something like, "If you do that, you have a comma separating two whole sentences." When we played with this sentence, the end result, after much debate was:

> Though employees are concerned, winners will be receiving winnings due to having their number selected, because checks cannot be.

Although the final version of the sentence lacked meaning, the class determined that the clauses followed grammatical rules, but they also noted that even grammatical sentences could result in nonsense. The process of deriving the final sentence, with much good natured arguing, forced students to draw on their latent grammatical knowledge and to explain why the revised sentence followed grammatical rules. The game helped illustrate that we have latent understandings of grammar that we take for granted, but that these understandings can be accessed when students are tasked with articulating what they know as opposed to being shown what they did not write correctly. Also the game illustrates how intertwined meaning and grammar are, as most of the arguments arose when nominations violated the meaning of the sentence as opposed to grammatical rules, illustrating how grammar enhances but does not embody meaning.[5]

While the game Sentence Survivor offered opportunities to display a knowledge base and deep linguistic understandings of standard grammar, the graduate students resisted exploring how use of non-standard dialects and other languages might also position basic writers as linguistically adept as opposed to linguistically deficient (Shaughnessy; Rose; McCrary; Elder and Davila). However, viewing standardized English as the only acceptable written form negates the communicative and cognitive skills necessary for

negotiating across language differences, and as Asao Inoue points out, often sets up basic writers, and especially basic writers of color, for failure in that their stronger language abilities are not recognized, but their challenges are amplified. Upon seeing non-standard formats and discourses, teachers and teachers in training may not look for, and therefore may not appreciate, the thought that goes into such writing. Donald McCrary argues that if basic writing students have opportunities to use hybrid language in at least a few assignments, there would be opportunities for teachers and students to learn about the rhetorical value of fluidity in moving across dialect and standard styles.

Nevertheless, the graduate students noted that inviting non-standardized dialects into classroom writing butted up against institutional constraints. For instance, when reading McCrary, some of the graduate students expressed interest in incorporating hybrid writing assignments into their classes, but wondered out loud about the negative responses of colleagues and department chairs who might view such assignments as counter to the mission of the writing program. Putting the question on the table at least allowed students to see that questions of language diversity needed to be addressed in ways that moved beyond a school-home dichotomy. The games, in connection with these readings, helped the graduate students appreciate that linguistic knowledge took many forms and worked in many kinds of applications, even if, in the case of hybrid language, they found such writing would be hard to implement.

Area 4: Finding Pedagogical Approaches

Though the course brought up many questions that should inform pedagogical choices and understandings, the students in the seminar still needed to build up their own repertoires in implementing cognitively and socially engaging activities, which challenged narrow representations of form and correctness. To provide interesting and user-friendly teaching approaches, I directed the graduate students to the Council of Basic Writing Resource Share, designed by Elizabeth Baldridge. I introduced this site fairly early in the term and invited students to explore whatever approaches or activities they wanted, and then to present one or two to the class, when we covered the "Pedagogies and Practice" section of *Basic Writing.* In presenting to the class, the graduate students had to show the activity (and, in some cases, have their classmates do the activity) and link it to theoretical concepts discussed in class. For the presentations, I allotted the bulk of two class days (6+ hours),

so that students would have time to really discuss the activities and imagine them within their own teaching contexts or potential teaching contexts. Generally, students in the class enjoyed sharing what they found and enjoyed taking part in the activities, although the hands-on experiences with these activities sometimes bolstered, and sometimes challenged, the theoretical concepts discussed in the course.

One activity that promoted language play in offering and supporting interpretations was an open-ended activity called "Finding Your Inner Morgan Freeman," created by Isabel Quintana Wulf. This activity showed a soundless introduction to a nature video and asked the viewers to write what they thought would be said in the voiceover. When engaging in this activity, the graduate students appreciated the variety of writing and ideas generated from a shared but ambiguous text that invited higher-level thinking. They noted that this activity encouraged students to play with language and draw on interpretative skills without insisting on standardized language, since a voiceover can take standardized and non-standardized forms.

However, not every presentation aligned with theorized practice. One student in my class presented an activity requiring that participants underline the topic sentences of an essay, with the assumption that it would be the first sentence of every paragraph. When I questioned whether this would lead to mechanical underlining without regard to topic development, some students thought about ways that discourse could vary from the "topic sentence as first sentence" pattern and still be unified. Others in the class favored a more mechanical approach, arguing that it would reinforce a "correct" pattern for writing, even if not all writing followed that pattern. As a class, we debated if rote mechanical work positions the basic writer as incapable of discerning organizational or cohesive devices to establish relationships in texts or whether such rote work might in turn build a stepping-stone for deeper understandings of texts. These kinds of debates were productive to have because they illustrated how views of theory and views of practice might compete against each other in basic writing classrooms and programs.

FINAL PROJECTS: ENTERING DISCUSSIONS IN THE FIELD

Previously when the seminar was offered, the culminating project had been a group role-play, where students in the class took on roles of different stakeholders, such as poorly served basic writing students, tenured literature faculty, or adjunct instructors who by teaching in different places had upwards of one hundred students a week, to discuss the place of asic Writing

in a fictionalized university (See Buell). However, the focus of the simulation was outdated, and given the short time in the semester,[6] I had to weigh how much time we would spend with a simulation versus time spent on other things, such as the Each One Teach One readings and the Resource Share discussions. In the end, instead of a group simulation, I revised this final project as an individual or group research project, calling on students to write a proposal for a programmatic assessment or pedagogical approach, which they could see applied to a specific context. The proposal could cover any aspect or combination of aspects we had looked at in the course to encourage integrated thinking about policies and practices. This opened up the option for students to explore support structures for basic writers, connections of assessment to pedagogy, configurations of programmatic policy or, for some, a more theorized approach to their own teaching. I encouraged students to view the proposal as something they would like to see implemented in their own workplaces or possibly at schools they had attended. Students presented their research proposals to the class as drafts, and then wrote up final versions with a reflection about the process which included steps that they might use for implementing their ideas.

On the programmatic level, since I was only familiar with some recent developments through reading, I decided that once I knew student topics, I would put out a call to the Council of Basic Writing listserv to see if experts in the field would be willing to be interviewed online by the students in the class about these topics. Members of the CBW-listserv were extremely generous with their time and advice. Not only could they direct my students to other key resources but also, more importantly, they could speak from direct experience to the questions posed by the students. For some of my students, this was their first time engaging in professional discussions with practitioners in the field outside of their immediate academic circle and they found these conversations exhilarating. In addition to help with their immediate projects, I think these exchanges helped my graduate students to feel more of a part of the broader Basic Writing community, and I hope they will use the listserv again for other purposes.

Darin Jensen and Christie Toth have argued that graduate training programs overlook community college contexts, but graduate training programs in universities may also pay little attention to pressures on high school writing teachers. Facilitating communication across universities, community colleges, and high schools is valuable because we grapple with the same issues, and all of us, including myself, had a chance to learn about how shared concepts played out across the different contexts. From one

student teaching in the community colleges, we learned of the positive aspects and the tough challenges in designing co-curricular classes, loosely following the stretch model, across the seven community colleges in the city of Chicago. The city colleges are moving toward a greater integration of reading and writing courses and are trying to implement directed self-placement assessments across the seven colleges. However, implementation was similar to what Warnke and Higgins noted, in that administrators imposed approaches that work in other programs without adequate attention to variations and nuances across institutions. Nevertheless, one graduate student reported that this was an encouraging move away from treating writing as an isolated skill and from using narrow definitions of reading and writing ability as a yardstick for student placement so that at least some of the rigid gatekeeping grammar and structure parameters were slowly breaking down. His work well illustrated the complexity of these elements and was bolstered by his interviews set up through the listserv, where he could ask how other programs had implemented new curriculum and assessments.

From the high school teachers, we learned about shifting access concerns for basic writers at the high school level. Recently in a few of the area high schools, local studies had uncovered low numbers of students of color in Honors or AP classes although the districts had large minority or immigrant populations. The schools then mandated that teachers nominate students to the Honors or AP classes, though they may have currently been in developmental classes instead of standard classes. While such students initially felt honored to have the opportunity to take high-level classes, after essentially being "dropped" into the classes, they struggled with the material, not because they could not learn it, but because they had no scaffolding for how to approach the expectations of the course. Teachers of some of these advanced classes, accustomed to students who knew very well how to succeed in school and whose family discourses aligned well with the standardized English expected in the course, complained that the new students brought down the quality of the course. The questions Shaughnessy highlighted about equality and access being seen in conflict with quality of instruction in City College reverberated in northern Illinois nearly fifty years later. One of the students opted to use this situation for her final project, discussing how the courses needed to consider a more articulated vertical alignment in the high school, so that students could have a better sense of what was expected from freshman to sophomore, sophomore to junior, and junior to senior years. She also argued that better resources were needed to help

students succeed in advanced courses and to help teachers understand how to reach these students and tap their potential.

REFLECTIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In laying out the course for the Summer 2017 version of the Seminar in Basic Writing, I tried to show some of the topics and issues that graduate students needed to develop a nuanced view of issues in Basic Writing. At times in professional journals, when I have read class or activity descriptions, I had the impression that everything worked as it should; I do not mean to leave that impression. Though I feel a lot of learning and growth occurred in the class, there were areas that did not succeed with all the students. Seeing that there was not a universal definition of Basic Writing was hard for some students in the class to internalize. Even with analyzing how the definition of basic writers might vary, and with the experience of not being able to express themselves in the first day activity, a few graduate students wanted to talk about basic writers in terms of how they might perform within a level category, such as English 099. The variety in how basic writers are defined and how writing instruction might be approached frustrated some of the graduate students, who perhaps sought more of a guide in how to "fix" textual errors. Nevertheless, by exploring the Resource Share and interacting with professionals in the field though the CBW-listserv, along with the other readings and activities, the graduate students in the course gained greater awareness of how pedagogical choices could highlight growth and foster deep learning for basic writers, even in the face of institutional and social constraints.

As Barbara Gleason noted in 2006, and as Jensen and Toth reiterated in 2017, especially in connection to preparing graduate students to teach in community colleges, and as this special issue and the previous special issue of *Journal of Basic Writing* illustrate, there is a need for graduate classes which introduce Basic Writing history, theory and pedagogy. As we design these courses, we have to balance the important insights gained from our academic history with sensitivity to changes in how the field fits into the shifting landscapes of secondary and higher education. Basic Writing theory has always called for the consideration of local contexts and constraints, requiring that we not see Basic Writing as one entity. Furthermore, Basic Writing concerns are part of an academic continuum. In my classes, we sometimes joke about how the level above always blames the level below for what their students cannot do— the content area professors blame the Basic Writing or first-year composition teachers if students cannot write at the expected

level; college professors and instructors place the blame on high schools; high school teachers blame their colleagues in middle school. Though we have to look at local contexts, we also have to foster discussion across different educational levels so that we can better coordinate our efforts across secondary schools, community colleges, and universities. We need to better articulate curricular vertical alignments from high school to college level introductory writing courses, and from Basic Writing courses and first-year writing courses in connection with Writing Across the Curriculum. At the same time, we need to be mindful of ways that academic discourse could bar rather than welcome marginalized students and instead seek ways to be more linguistically inclusive.

As I look at the course design for the future, I hope to incorporate more ways for those teaching in high schools and community colleges to facilitate discussions across contexts. I also hope to further explore how institutional constraints within high schools influence possibilities for college level writing courses, and how community colleges and high schools can better communicate with universities. As institutions implement new programs, we need to critically interrogate rationales and actualizations of practice and policy (Warnke and Higgins). Finally, within and beyond the class, we should use the resources of the Basic Writing community and contribute back where we can. The graduate students in this class were impressed by the CBW Resource Share and by the responses through the CBW-listserv. Along with the helpful information and techniques, I think a key benefit was that they felt ready to participate in the larger professional community. In laying out the design for one version of a Seminar in Basic Writing, I hope that others will find insights into the design of their own MA courses.

Notes

1. For example, high school teachers may be accustomed to a wide range of writing abilities and challenges and may be able to read past structural difficulty in a given text, while a literature student with little exposure to the texts of developmental writers may find the same piece of writing incomprehensible. Or, an MA composition student with a fair knowledge of theory may feel ready to teach in any situation, but may be surprised when classmates who already teach at a community college caution that writing instruction must be tied to demonstrating improvement on a narrow performance assessment.

2. Rose and Bartholomae give telling examples of how these differences in definition impact how classes are designed and taught. Rose describes writing where students draw on their own experiences and those of their classmates as sources for largely narrative tasks. Bartholomae has students use complexly written texts as sources for analysis. Both define their courses as Basic Writing. More broadly, a program or institution that views basic writers as lacking grammar skills in standard English might limit discourse to isolated sentences to practice repetition of forms. In contrast, a program or institution that views grammar as more integrated into other communication systems may design writing activities that explore grammatical structures rhetorically.

3. At the time that I was teaching this seminar, we had not overhauled our developmental non-credit program, but in the intervening time, we are experimenting with a studio model where the highest level developmental non-credit course is combined with an English 101 course with additional support. However, the courses for this pilot have been under-enrolled, so it is unclear where this innovation will go.

4. In my experience, I have noticed that college writing teachers, as well as second language teachers, are sometimes hard-pressed to offer meaningful grammatical explanations, so they either rely on saying that this is "just the way English works" or point students to handbooks which may have a lot of examples but offer rules in isolation.

5. We play it in the Basic Writing Seminar so students can work with their own perceptions of how grammar works. Additionally, as Rustick points out, it also works well and in a surprisingly similar way with Basic Writing or first-year composition students. I have set up Sentence Survivor games in my Seminar in Basic Writing class and in my freshman composition classes, which have a fair number of basic writers. In all settings, classes become loud and active with debates about why a form is or is not correct - and such debates are essentially the point of the game.

6. I like this activity, especially in how it can bring perceptions of teaching conditions and priorities to the fore. But in planning the course, I felt that my focus was outdated in that now the question may be less about the place of a Basic Writing program in a university and more about what form a program can take to allow students the support they need

with increasingly shrinking resources and low public and institutional support. I tried to think of a way to modify the simulation to still keep the question of how differing stakeholders would view programs, but I found it hard to frame this in a form that would allow a whole class exploration of these issues in a simulation format. However, after reading Warnke and Higgins' article about critical form, I see the potential for building these issues into a simulation.

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APPENDIX

Prompt

What It Might Be Like to Be a Basic Writer

Assume this is a writing prompt for a program in cross-cultural communication that you would like to apply for as additional validation to your Master's degree. Read the scenario and write in response to the writing task. You have 15 minutes.

Scenario

According to Time International, Japanese *anime*, along with other Japanese pop cultural exports, has enjoyed wide popularity in other Asian countries such as South Korea. Along with its quality of production, *anime* has become popular because characters have Asian features, and many stories take place in non-specific but primarily Asian settings, although some stories are specifically located in Japan (Poitras, 1999). Young Koreans are said to feel that they can relate better to the characters they see in these stories than the ones presented in more westernized portrayals found in Disney, and that more broadly, Japanese popular culture portrays styles that they want to emulate.

Nevertheless, not long ago *anime* and other forms of Japanese popular culture were banned in Korea, in part because of the fear of cultural imposition by the generation who experienced colonization and cultural domination before and during the Second World War. To them, modern Japan's position in the cultural sphere elevates Japanese styles and sensibilities and undermines efforts to develop local pop cultural products and artists.

Writing Task

Write a short essay supporting either the position that Japanese popular culture and more specifically, *anime,* represent and inspire young Asians because they present accessible characters and perspectives, or the opposing position that *anime* primarily serves to expand Japanese cultural hegemony by infiltrating Japanese values and lifestyles through its characters and stories, at the expense of local cultural appreciation.

Use specific evidence and details to support your thesis. Consider Japan's past and current position in Asia. Also as evidence, cite Japanese *anime* or other movies that sold well in other parts of Asia, and analyze features that show it to be representative of either perspective. (Remember, you should not consider the effect of *anime* on an American market.)

Once you decide whether the culture portrayed in *anime* is general Asian or specific to Japan, make recommendations for whether the ban should be upheld, modified or done away with.

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