EDITORS' COLUMN

Recent studies of the disparate impacts of writing placements for students designated as in need or underprepared, at both two- and four-year colleges, are revealing an underside of placement-driven remedial education in new ways. There are long-term impacts: students who don't complete remedial programs or whose progress is delayed; lower retention rates; unsuccessful transfer. For populations whose languages and English varieties are excluded or devalued in the writing classroom, the disparate impacts play havoc with the stated social justice missions of many open access institutions.

Pictures showing the long-term impacts of these programs, which do not take account of the support and attention we provide in our classrooms, should challenge us. They should also wake us to the fact that our classrooms, however supportive, may be unique experiences amid a wave of obstacles that students must navigate to meet the promises of education in today's America. The articles of this issue all recognize the same sobering reality: that the supportive, responsive pedagogies of our classroom do not stand on their own. This fact is especially relevant for the students our authors focus on—students of racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. Placed into programs that are yet to "reimagine the meaning of 'college readiness' in ways that advance student agency" and "fairness" (Poe, Elliot, and Norbert 2019), these are the students most likely to bear unintended harms in a range of placements.

In our first article, "A Developmental Writing Experiment: Mixing ELL and NES Student Writers," Cheryl Comeau-Kirschner and Jed Shahar challenge the designations for writing students, in particular those designations between English Language Learners and Native English Speakers. As faculty at a large urban community college, Comeau-Kirschner and Shahar experienced the separation of students, all highly diverse, into "nonnative" or "native"-speaking classrooms as questionable. During a summer intervention, student groups were reconfigured to learn in mixed-group settings, utilizing themes and practices around translingualism, gateway course materials, and supplemental instruction. While the program's previous run-throughs showed NES students faring better than ELLs on exit measures, students labelled ELL had a higher median improvement than did their NES counterparts, with both groups demonstrating "improv[ement] at a relatively equal pace." The intervention fostered broader linguistic experiences alongside writing success, proving the value of translingual ethos and practices. It was also effective in encouraging long-range reform: the

English department has since added regular conversation hours to its writing center offerings, and two departments, one for English and one for reading and writing support, have merged. As the authors note, work of this type adds support for ALP programs that similarly elide stigmatizing distinctions of many kinds, and questions "the point of keeping remediation separate from English." (The authors' institution, City University of New York, has since eliminated the standardized measure as sole criteria for remedial exits.)

In our second article, "Binary Structures in a Translingual Age: Investigating Community College Writing Placement to Support Linguistic Diversity," Jennifer Maloy uses a translingual context for arguing the need to reform placement practices to reflect and support the linguistic diversity of community college students. In line with Comeau-Kirschner and Shahar's mixed-group intervention for ELL and NES populations, Maloy reveals the weave of ELL and NES backgrounds that flow through all the ESL and NES lower and upper level courses at her institution. Maloy reminds readers that, while seen as key for tracking students, the typical attributes of language background (for example, language spoken at home and time since arriving in the United States) do not always reflect how "the lived experiences of individuals influence the ways in which they use English(es), and the ways in which all students are learning—and creating—the relationship they have to academic discourse in English." Courses dividing language learners from one another according to categories of linguistic competence actually become blocked pathways, circumventing support. Since all groups of language learners in her setting were "mixed" groups, all students were subject to "static linguistic identit[ies]" and experiences. A familiar picture emerges—of categories and structures working against our pedagogies. As Maloy observes, "From a translingual perspective, any isolation of a particular group of students based on language practices would need to be investigated in order to understand whether such positioning of students is based on assumptions about language and use of English(es) more than on established needs of students."

In our third article, "Directed Self-Placement, Corequisite Models, and Curricular Choice," Becky L. Caouette troubles the drive toward categories in writing placement by elaborating the ways a new directed self-placement structure positively impacted sequence, curriculum, and culture for writing at her institution. As a new "plus" version of the first-year writing course and DSP arose simultaneously, Caouette as WPA was in a prime position to help shape an array of course offerings from which students could freely choose. Welcome surprises surfaced: some students chose FYW 010, College Writing

Strategies, the college's four-hour weekly non-credited course, while others chose FYW100, first-year English, in its plus version. While students could speedily satisfy the writing requirement by way of one four-credit course, students had the option to take more time: a two semester sequence of FYW 010 and FYW 100, or FYW010 and FYW100Plus. Even Honors students had the option of slowing down. The effect was to give real form and meaning to student agency. In the process, Basic Writing, in the guise of FYW010, was destigmatized: inside the classroom, students retained their agency, having chosen the placement, as in the case of the FYW100Plus option. Programmatically, administrators, instructors, and advisors/counselors saw their role(s) stretched beyond that of spokesperson for policy and standards. And during the time of advisement and decision-making, DSP engendered conversations about writing that put students at the center. Today, as the program evolves, Caouette writes, "Students, faculty, and staff are talking about writing at Orientation—about the FYW courses, about student preparedness, and about what it means to write" at her institution. Caouette grasps that change linked to agency links directly to "fairness" and other aspects of social justice. She adds, "Like those who have instituted corequisites, I appreciate the opportunity to disrupt the easy sorting of students into binaries (BW or mainstream) and prefer, instead, to have a conversation with them. In addition, all instructors in the FYW Program are now part of the DSP process."

Finally, in our fourth article, "Designing Rubrics to Foster Students' Diverse Language Backgrounds," Amanda Athon highlights "classroom artifacts," in this case her institution's rubric for evaluating student writing, for their ability to "shape the way that students think about writing," communicate value, and establish priorities for writing across settings. In this context, rubrics metaphorically and materially constitute the boundaries of writing, giving way to the categories by which students writers are defined. In her study of the impact of rubrics on two sections of first-year writers, Athon surveyed students' attitudes on writing prior to their engaging the rubric; students used words like "creativity" and "ideas" to capture the core of writing. When surveyed again, their writing fit to the rubric's measures, students "learned to view good writing in terms of what was assessed and only what was assessed." Since it "overvalu[ed] mechanics and sentence-level issues," the rubric effectively "muted differences in language variation likely to function as assets." Thus the rubric erased differences and diversities among students while elevating standards and structure. Not least, the rubric presented a highly inaccurate view of writing, "as either correct or incorrect" and "focus[ed] on what not to do rather than what to do." Alternatively,

Athon shares the "Community Rubric" of University of Southern Florida, which values language diversity and writers' agency and accounts for the development of writing over time.

It is the nature of teaching in Basic Writing to understand our work in terms of connections that always seem to "go beyond"—beyond individual teacher-agency or time-limited resources. The limitations, we must recognize, may include the classroom as well. This issue of *JBW* prompts us to grasp the limiting aspects of many structures we live and work within, their potential to cause unintended harms. Fortunately, each article presented here offers new directions for getting past limiting categories, enabling student agency, and, we hope, seeing Basic Writing closer to a new decade.

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

Work Cited

Poe, Mya, Jessica Nastal, and Norbert Elliot. "Reflection. An Admitted Student is a Qualified Student: A Roadmap for Writing Placement in the Two-Year College." *Journal of Writing Assessment*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2019.