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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to the complexities of providing writing support across contexts. All manuscripts must focus on basic writing and/or must situate settings of instruction or institutional agency in explicit relation to basic writing concerns. A familiarity with the journal and its readership should be evident through an introduction that engages with recent and ongoing debates, open questions, and controversies in and around basic writing.

We particularly encourage submissions that draw heavily on faculty voices, student voices, or student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research written in non-technical language; and co-authored writing that provocatively debates more than one side of a central controversy. Recent *JBW* authors have also engaged more deeply with archival research. Work that reiterates what is known or that is mainly summative or overly practical will not be considered. Articles must work to substantively add to the existing literature by making explicit their central claims early on and by devising a clear and thorough methodology. Before submitting, potential authors should review published articles in the journal that model approaches to methodology and organization.

JBW scholarship reflects the full range of frameworks applied to composition and rhetoric, two-year college, and literacy studies. We invite authors to engage with any of the following methods or approaches: antiracist approaches; second-language theory; the implications of literacy; first-generation studies; discourse theory; just-writing and access studies; two-year college literature and student support; writing center theory and practice; ethnographic methods and program studies; program histories and critical university studies; and/or cross-disciplinary work. In addition, the journal is in active dialogue with the scholarship of translingualism and multilingualism, multimodality, digital rhetorics, and justice studies. Authors should be explicit about their choice of framework and its appropriateness to the article's subject matter, including reference to how such choice models or revises a particular theoretical approach.

In view of basic writing history, we value submissions that help basic writing reassess its original assumptions, question its beneficence, and posit new and informed futures for writing support. We invite prospective authors to view the latest issues in our web archive at wac.colostate.edu/jbw.

Manuscript Submission Information

Submissions should run between 25 and 30 pages (7,500-9,000 words), including a Works Cited, and follow current MLA guidelines. To assure impartial review, include name(s), affiliation(s), mailing and email addresses, and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page only. The second page of the manuscript should include the title but no author identification, an abstract of 250-300 words, and a list of five to seven keywords.

Endnotes should be kept to a minimum. It is the author's responsibility to obtain written permission for excerpts from student writing, especially as this entails IRB review, which should be made transparent in an endnote for readers.

Contributions should be submitted as Word document attachments or Google links to jbwcuny@gmail.com. Authors will receive a confirmation of receipt. The next communication will be on whether the manuscript, if geared toward a *JBW* audience, will be going out for peer review. If so, review reports generally follow in six to eight weeks. The editors also welcome proposals for guest-edited issues.

EDITORS' COLUMN

The start and end of each academic year offer opportunities to step back and reflect on our experiences, professional priorities, and goals. We do our best to find moments to evaluate our wins and setbacks in the classroom, to reflect on the relationships we've formed with students and colleagues, and to reconnect with the values that steer us.

In this issue, all of the authors are engaged in processes of reflection and re-evaluation across a number of fronts. The inquiries they have embarked on in the pages that follow prompt questions about key practices and pillars of our work: what does true equity look like for developmental writers and for developmental educators? Are our placement practices equitable? What about our institutions and our hiring practices? Our authors reflect on the paths that lead developmental educators to and away from the profession, and the attitudes and expectations that encourage us to stay.

In "Bringing a Folding Chair to the Table: Building Towards Authentic Equity In Professional Conversations about Developmental Education," Emily K. Suh and Bethany E. Sweeney do a deep dive into what equity means in the context of basic writing by examining key documents of four organizations that have sought to articulate a relationship between developmental education, equity, and their organizational values. They urge us to become more engaged in a time of resistance to higher education more broadly, arguing that developmental educators can't sit back and wait for professional organizations to recognize and validate us. Their analysis offers insights that can be applied to our own contexts, encouraging us to examine what we ourselves mean by equity, and prodding us to become more involved in shaping professional discourse at our own institutions and beyond.

Jennifer Burke Reifman highlights challenges with student self- placement in "It's Not a Neutral Choice: Implications of Student Self-Placement in a Basic Writing Course." While self-placement is characterized in much existing scholarship as an equitable strategy, Burke Reifman argues that it places the burden of labor and proof on the students alone (53). She uses the concept of "Possible Academic Selves," or the way students imagine their future identities in college, including their ability and potential to succeed, to help explain some of the challenges with self-placement. Her analysis of the short essays students wrote to challenge their placement at the University of California Davis suggests that placement in basic writing can disrupt students' envisioned academic identities, even undermining

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their sense of themselves as students who belong at the institution to which they have been admitted. She challenges us to consider how deeply academic placement can affect students' self-perceptions and the degree to which our placement processes can work against the equity they intend to promote.

Candace Chambers and Spencer Salas' article, "'I come from a different generation': Quare Dreaming and Career-Making in Basic Writing," looks at equity on a very personal level, examining the life and career decisions of "Deborah Welch" (a pseudonym). As a young Black woman from Little Rock, Arkansas, Welch came from a line of Black Southern school teachers and dreamed of becoming a professor, yet she ran headlong into the realities of the academic job market and contingent labor in higher education. Raised in an environment where she was surrounded by Black love and community, Welch nearly completed her PhD, but after teaching as an adjunct faculty member and starting an educational consulting firm, she ultimately chose a career working for Homeland Security. Using the concept of quareness, Chambers and Salas reframe her refusal of traditional teaching roles as a generational act of agency, reimagining of what it means to "be somebody" and challenging us to consider what equity means for our colleagues and ourselves.

Rounding out Issue 44.1 is William DeGenaro's "Errors & Excitations: William Steig's *The Bad Speller*." DeGenaro works in the vein of Mina Shaughnessy to reframe non-standard spelling as generative rather than as simply erroneous, not as a matter of convention but as a matter of style. DeGenaro extends Shaughnessy's inquiry into non-academic contexts, focusing on William Steig's 1970 children's book *The Bad Speller*, which features whimsical illustrations and captions with unconventional spellings, transforming error into playful expression. *Bad Speller* "embodies Shaughnessy's core argument about the internal logic and consistency of error" (105); in fact, DeGenaro characterizes it as "a companion piece to *Errors & Expectations*, a taxonomy of what we do when we stray from (or mock) convention" (112). DeGenaro argues that Steig's intentional misspellings demonstrate the aesthetic and affective potential of error, encouraging us to approach error and convention with a spirit of playfulness.

The articles in this issue showcase the range of research and storytelling that has defined *JBW* scholarship over the years. From compelling individual narratives that contextualize singular texts and experiences within larger questions facing our field to bird's eye views of our classrooms and professional organizations, these pieces are each calls to action in their own way. They urge us not to treat our professional choices as merely "neutral"; instead

they highlight opportunities to invite more power, agency, and playfulness into our professional lives.

This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (1975-2025), which we will commemorate next year with a two-volume anniversary issue that looks back at our history and forward into our shared futures. At this pivotal moment, we are honored to serve as *JBW*'s latest editors and want to acknowledge the talented team we have working largely behind the scenes. Seth Graves has served as production editor for the journal for the past several years and stepped down this summer, handing the reins to Zach Muhlbauer. Following a long-running practice at *JBW*, both are English doctoral candidates at the CUNY Graduate Center. Seth has brought his keen eye to the role as a former magazine editor and journalist; his good humor and editing skills have kept the journal on an even keel, and we're indebted to him for it. Zach brings a wealth of design, teaching, and tech training from the Graduate Center's Teaching and Learning Center and Interactive Technology and Pedagogy (ITP) Certificate program; we're fortunate to have him join our team this year as we set out to create a more nimble, accessible, forward-looking feel and design. Since 2023, we have also welcomed two Assistant Editors, Charissa Che, Assistant Professor of English at John Jay College, and Mudiwa Pettus, Assistant Professor of English at Medgar Evers College. Charissa brings expertise in English language learning and translingualism, and Mudiwa in rhetorical education and Black intellectual history. Beyond the scholarly range of their academic backgrounds, they both have brought new energy and insight to our broader vision for the journal, while helping us honor the journal's rich history.

Finally, in that vein, we acknowledge the amazing life and contributions of our late colleague Lynn Quitman Troyka, who passed away on September 11, 2024. Among her many notable roles in our field, Lynn served as editor of *JBW* from 1986-1988. Lynn was a changemaker at the journal, shepherding *JBW* into a formal peer review structure, broadening the journal's focus to engage with wider issues in the field, and publishing landmark articles, including David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University." Following her tenure as the journal's sole editor, the duties of editorship began to be shared by two people, which suggests the ways she expanded the responsibilities and vision of the editor's role. We are indebted to Lynn for the ways her contributions have shaped *JBW* for the last three decades.

—Lisa Blankenship and **Dominique Zino**

Bringing a Folding Chair to the Table: Building Towards Authentic Equity in Professional Conversations about Developmental Education

Emily K. Suh and Bethany E. Sweeney

ABSTRACT: Developmental education and equity work, both of which are foundational to the work of basic writing, are under attack. In this article, we present a critical discourse analysis of paradigmatic texts representing the unique perspectives of four organizations that have sought to articulate a relationship between developmental education, equity, and their organizational values. By explicating these organizations' conceptualizations of equity and uncovering their particular rhetorical approaches for explicating the connection between developmental education and equity, we invite developmental educators, including basic writing professionals, to consider our own equity language, our assumptions about the work we do, and our preparation for engaging others who do not share our perspectives about the relationship between developmental education and equity in order to advance our shared commitment to student success.

KEYWORDS: critical discourse analysis; developmental education; equity

As self-identified developmental educators and basic writing professionals, we have faced growing threats to our professional identities and the very understanding of developmental education. Accused by the right as being "woke" and part of a larger "grooming process" that is designed to indoctrinate students into narrow ideologies (Spindleman) and labeled by neoliberal policy-driving organizations as antiquated and anti-student (Complete College America, *Time*, *Bridge*; see also McGee et al.), our work to create inclusive, just classrooms is also often overlooked by administrators at our home institutions. As a result, we find it challenging not to exist in a constant state of defensive reaction (Armstrong).

Though understandable, such a state is neither viable nor sustainable as we continue engaging in the work of creating more equitable experiences and outcomes for students—and for society as a whole. We concur with other basic writing and developmental education scholars before us who have argued the need for a unified vision of our field which centers around an assets-based framing of our students (Armstrong; Paulson and Armstrong;

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Suh et al. *Raciolinguistic*) rather than popular deficit lenses ascribed to developmental education and the students it serves (Complete College America). In particular, we echo the need for developmental educators to articulate a proactive stance asserting the expertise and necessity of developmental education on its own terms. We acknowledge how all too often, frontline developmental educators do not hold high-status positions to contribute to or control the terms of the debate. Instead, these basic writing instructors, two-year college faculty, contingent faculty, and graduate teaching assistants with first-hand experience of the equity challenges facing students and faculty can feel silenced (and become complicit in self-silencing) in the face of the narratives about developmental education perpetuated by research centers, policy-driving organizations, and politicians (Armstrong; Suh et al. "Unvoicing").

In response to this current reality, we argue that the field of developmental education, including basic writing professionals, will not achieve validation from the comforts of our disciplinary silos or classrooms and further that developmental educators cannot passively wait for professional or policy-driving organizations to dictate the terms of our work. We draw particular inspiration from the late Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, who famously declared, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair" (Bring Your Own Chair). We see the work of making space as requiring developmental educators to proactively engage with other postsecondary stakeholders. This necessitates that we understand the language, goals, and perspectives of the stakeholders with whom we seek to engage and find ways to harness such while maintaining our own longstanding foundational values centering students and community.

As a first step in preparing basic writing professionals to engage in these conversations, we examine the meaning various postsecondary education stakeholder organizations ascribe to the concepts of *equity* and *developmental*

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education and explore the rhetorical tools these groups employ to engage their various audiences regarding the relationship between these terms. We begin by exploring our own positionalities and how our previous experiences have uniquely prepared us to engage in this work. We then present a critical discourse analysis of four paradigmatic texts representing the unique perspectives of distinct organizations which have sought to articulate a relationship between developmental education and equity as well as the organization's own orientation towards equity. By explicating these organizations' conceptualizations of equity and uncovering the related rhetorical approaches they engage, we invite developmental educators to consider our own equity language, our assumptions about the work we do, and our preparation for engaging others who do not share our perspectives about the relationship between developmental education and equity.

In particular, our analysis explored how authors of each text: (1) define equity, (2) use the term, specifically in relation to developmental education, and (3) situate their position on equity and developmental education within broader scholarly or professional literature.

POSITIONALITY

Our analysis and resulting recommendations are shaped by our own unique professional experiences. Emily began teaching developmental writing and reading in 2011 at a Nebraska community college where she worked within the English department and the writing center. The first professional conference she attended was the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE, now the National Organization for Student Success) which included content instructors as well as advisors, tutors, academic coaches, and placement testing professionals. Through NADE and her institutional colleagues, Emily came to identify as a developmental educator, a label which transcended disciplinary boundaries to focus on supporting the advancement of all students. Emily now teaches developmental literacy theory, research, and practice to graduate students and coordinates a developmental literacy program at Texas State University.

As a PhD-holding, cis/het Asian American female, Emily recognizes how her various identity markers have contributed to both her privilege and marginalization within the academy and vis-à-vis her undergraduate and graduate students—many of whom have experienced racial, linguistic, gendered, or social class-based exclusion within education. This awareness shapes her work as Equity, Access, and Inclusion Co-chair for the National

Organization for Student Success. Emily has also co-authored white papers on equity and inclusion in postsecondary education for the College Reading and Learning Association and the National Organization for Student Success. Most recently, Emily analyzed how developmental education scholarship engages with the term *equity* and the implications of our professional language around this topic (Suh "Miles").

Bethany, a queer, white, working-class woman and first-generation college student, began teaching basic writing in 2014 when she was hired as an adjunct at a multi-campus midwestern community college. Though she holds a PhD in literature and a master's in history and has no formal education in writing pedagogy, approximately half of her load was teaching basic and first-year writing when she joined the ranks of the full-time faculty in 2015. In 2017, as part of her institution's shift to largely replacing a traditional developmental writing sequence with a co-requisite model, Bethany began to consciously identify as a teacher of basic writing and saw an urgent need to develop her skills and gain more training to ethically and effectively serve her students. Now, though she primarily teaches courses outside the field, Bethany understands herself to be a developmental educator and believes strongly that this is a role that must be broadly acknowledged as an inherent part of the work done by two-year college instructors. She also believes that faculty have a duty to advocate for equity and justice for students and faculty alike, and due in large part to this conviction, Bethany serves as a founding co-chair of the Two-Year College English Association (TYCA) committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as TYCA Secretary, and as co-chair and co-founder of her institution's faculty, staff and student shared governance body.

For both authors, engagement within the field of developmental education is part of an intersectional commitment to antiracist practice and equity and educational justice advocacy that manifests in teaching, in service work, and in scholarship (Suh et al. "Unvoicing"; Suh et al. *Raciolinguistic*; Agyeman and Sweeney; Sweeney and Valenzuela).

METHODOLOGY

Both authors have engaged in significant institutional and professional service and advocacy that have enmeshed us in larger contexts. In this essay, we reflect and build upon these experiences through our application of a social constructivist lens. Specifically, we utilize the tool of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough), which allows us to present exemplary documents that

demonstrate our findings from each of the organizations we discuss in a way that is accessible to as broad an audience as possible.

Given our personal sense of connection to the topic and our close relationship with the texts, we sought to create a rigorous and trustworthy study design. Notably, Emily co-authored the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) White Paper analyzed below. While we might have found another text to represent an in-field professional organization's conceptualization of the relationship between equity and developmental education, we felt that the white paper most clearly articulated how a leading national professional organization took up the work of developmental education. Furthermore, we felt it was important to be able to hold our own scholarship up to the same critical standards by which we analyze other scholars who write about our work and our students. To maximize the trustworthiness of the study, we selected coding protocols which could be easily replicable and were grounded in rigorous methodological and theoretical literature (Fairclough; Swales; Zhang et al.). We also communicated frequently during data analysis, at times coding the documents together, and reviewing all coded segments multiple times.

Data Collection

We collected a representative document from each of four organizations that identify developmental education as a core aspect of their work, including national and local perspectives. The Community College Research Center (CCRC) is an independent, grant-funded research center focused on conducting high-quality research and explicitly espousing a commitment to educational justice.[1] Complete College America (CCA) is a policy-driving organization that has focused on state-level legislative reform through a stated equity lens.[2] Documents from these organizations present a non-practitioner perspective on developmental education and equity. To capture the practitioner perspective, we selected the most recent white paper from the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), a leading national organization focused on developmental education, and the strategic plan document from a community college currently undergoing developmental educational and equity reform inspired by the CCRC.[3]

Data Analysis

We utilized critical discourse analysis in our examination of these documents, focusing on description, interpretation, and explanation of the ways

in which the documents were produced, the ways in which they have been received, and the larger context of higher education and developmental education reform that structures both their form and their content (Fairclough).

In addition, we applied citation content analysis based on John Swales' philosophical assumptions that authors cite scholars whose work they rec ognize as legitimate (Swales). Using a citation content analysis procedure modified from Zhang et al., we designed an excel spreadsheet and logged each of the 329 mentions of the four documents' combined 190 citations (see Table 1). For each unique mention, we noted the reference, the page

Table 1. Number of Citations by Document

Document	**Number of References**	**Number of Unique Citations**
Community College Strategic Plan	0	0
Community College Research Center (Brathwaite and Edgecombe)	13	21
Complete College America	7	11
CRLA White Paper	173	305
Total	193	337

number where the citation occurred, and the type of scholar cited. We identified five types of scholars: Two-Year College Practitioner, Four-Year College Practitioner, Non-Practitioner Researcher, Policy-Organization Associate, and Government Author (see Table 2).

We identified scholar type by author biographies and affiliations as listed in the cited publication. When a citation had multiple authors, we coded each mention once by the first author, unless a subsequent author was a two-year practitioner. This decision was motivated by our desire to acknowledge and amplify the work of two-year college practitioner-scholars whose heavy teaching and service loads leave little time for scholarship and whose job requirements rarely include publication.

Citation analysis findings further facilitated our analysis across the documents.

Table 2. Type of Scholar

Scholar Type	Number of Unique Mentions	Definition	Example
Two-Year College Practitioner	18	Scholar's institutional affiliation is a two-year institution; scholar identifies as holding an instructional role	Jamey Gallagher (2020)
Four-Year College Practitioner (Within Field)	195	Scholar's institutional affiliation is a four-year institution; scholar teaches undergraduate students directly or works with undergraduate students in an administrative position related to student success (i.e., program coordinator)	Jeanine Williams (2021d)
Four-Year College Practitioner (Out-of-Field)	90	Scholar's institutional affiliation is a four-year institution; scholar does not identify as teaching undergraduate students directly or working with undergraduate students in an administrative position related to student success (i.e., program coordinator); scholar may identify with a related field (i.e., Education Studies, K12 Literacy)	Bettina Love (2014)
Four-Year College Non-Practitioner Researcher	18	Scholar does not identify as teaching undergraduate students directly or working with undergraduate students in an administrative position related to student success	Serena Klempin (2014)

(table continues on the next page)

(Table 2 cont.)

Scholar Type	Number of Unique Mentions	Definition	Example
Policy Organization Associate	15	Scholar's affiliation is a policy-driving organization; scholar does not identify as teaching undergraduate students directly or working with undergraduate students in an administrative position related to student success	Complete College America (2014a)
Government Author	5	Scholar's affiliation is with the state or federal government	Clifford Adelman (2006)

PRESENTATIONS OF DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION AND EQUITY

Below we present our critical discourse analysis of paradigmatic texts from four representative organizations' engagement with developmental education and equity. Looking across these texts and contexts, then we explore how each group articulates the connection between developmental education and equity and the perspectives and contexts they privilege in supporting their claims. Notably, we intentionally present the analyzed text's authors as the social actors (grammatical subjects) in our analysis of the documents. This language, while perhaps uncommon in academic prose, illuminates the authors of these texts and emphasizes their contributions to the scholarly conversation about developmental education and equity.

The Research Organization

For more than 25 years, the Community College Research Center (CCRC) has operated through grant funding at Teachers College in Columbia University. The center's research is cited in many efforts to reform or

eliminate developmental education. Indeed, CCRC describes developmental education as "a contributor to equity gaps" and notes "a growing consensus that traditional developmental education is ineffective" ("Why We Study Developmental Education"). On the center's developmental education webpage, the phrase "contributor to equity gaps" hyperlinks to a 2018 *New Directions for Community Colleges* chapter by CCRC researchers Jessica Brathwaite and Nikki Edgecombe.[4] Given the article's prominence, we analyzed it to illuminate CCRC's position on equity and developmental education.

Despite their stated purpose of "examin[ing] prereform to postreform changes in outcomes across race/ethnicity, gender, and SES" (21), Brathwaite and Edgecombe make only eight direct mentions of (in)equity. These mentions present equity as the goal of developmental education reform but do not explicitly define equity. Instead, the authors' discussion of equity focuses on their calculations of increasing inequity across multiple measures (i.e., students' race/ethnicity, SES, gender, and placement level) for an unidentified state's developmental reform. While the authors base their representation of the connection between developmental education and (in)equity on their own data analysis, their engagement with selected other scholars further illuminates their self-positioning vis-a-vis developmental education literature.

As noted in Table 3, Brathwaite and Edgecombe privileged policy organizations and four-year college non-practitioner researchers through their citation practices. None of the authors' 21 citations referenced a within-field scholar, as defined above. When combined with the authors' privileging of their data analysis and lack of a definition of equity (either by the authors or others) as the authors connected developmental education reform and *inequity*, these citation practices emphasized the authors' disengagement with, if not intentional exclusion of, developmental educator perspectives. These citation choices were unsurprising given that Brathwaite and Edgecombe largely addressed a target audience of policymakers and administrators whom they identified as "developmental reformers" (27).

Table 3. Citation Preferences by Text

Scholar Type (Total Number of Mentions)	**Community College Strategic Plan**	**Community College Research Center** (Brathwaite & Edgecombe)	**Complete College America**	**CRLA White Paper**
Two-Year College Practitioner (19)	0	0	1	18
Within Field Four-Year College Practitioner (195)	0	0	1	194
Out-of-Field Four-Year College Practitioner (90)	0	1	0	89
Four-Year College Non-Practitioner Researcher (18)	0	9	4	5
Policy Organization Associate (15)	0	8	3	4
Government Author (5)	0	3	2	0
Total of Unique Mentions by Analyzed Text	0	21	11	309*

* Total number of cited scholar types exceeds total of unique mentions by analyzed text due to inclusion of five two-year practitioners who were listed as additional authors

The authors' focus follows a common rhetorical practice in reform-oriented literature of erasing developmental educators from the work of placement, instruction, and reform (Suh et al. "Unvoicing"), such as in their claim,

> Reformed assessment and placement systems continue to assign a disproportionate percentage of black and low-SES students to developmental education—perhaps accurately, perhaps not. . . . Being assigned to the lowest levels of developmental education has profoundly negative implications for academic progression and completion. (Brathwaite and Edgecombe 27)

This statement illustrates how the authors' language choices present developmental educators as erased within or replaced by systems. Further, the authors centralize placement, rather than student preparation or developmental support, as the focus of reform. Such a perspective ultimately separates these reform efforts from the very developmental educators responsible for carrying them out. In fact, developmental educators have long raised concerns about how reform, particularly acceleration, may forestall developmental education's own equity agenda of providing individualized wraparound support for students (Armstrong; Hassel et al.; Paulson and Van Overschelde).

In the only statement to directly mentioned developmental educators, the reference is passing. Brathwaite and Edgecombe conclude, "It is essential for practitioners and policymakers to look for disparate impacts by student demographics as even the most well-intended reforms can have unintended consequences" (23). Ultimately, their postreform equity audit addresses developmental education reformers, with the implicit assumption that the vast majority of these reformers are not practitioners themselves. As such, the authors create a false dichotomy between developmental educators and equitable practice. This misrepresentation occurs primarily through the authors' repeated reference to developmental education reform as being driven by equity goals *despite* the inequitable outcomes of such reform. However, the authors' repeated erasure of developmental educators and developmental education scholarship (which goes virtually uncited in the piece) further separates developmental education practitioners from their field's ongoing equity-oriented work. For example, developmental educators have long argued—and continue to argue—that placement measures must

be considered within a comprehensive equity-rooted developmental education reform (Behrman; Good; Hassel et al.; Morante; Nastal et al.; Poe et al.).

The Policy-Driving Organization

As nonpartisan postsecondary advocacy organization ("About Us," CCA), Complete College America (CCA) is a major policy driver with a long history of critiquing developmental education—and of drawing from CCRC scholarship to do so (CCA *Time*, *Remediation*). The organization identifies developmental education reform as an equity issue (CCA 2.0). In 2022, CCA and the University of Southern California (USC) Race and Equity Center coauthored *Beyond Good Intentions: Steps to Craft Equity-Driven Policy* (CCA-led) and *Race-Conscious Implementation of a Developmental Education Reform in California Community Colleges* (USC-led). *Beyond Good Intentions* was funded by the Ascendium Education Group, a nonprofit which engages in developmental education reform as equity work (Ascendium). The 20-page report's coauthorship by a leading scholarly center on educational equity makes it unique from other CCA publications.

Beyond Good Intentions defines equity as "providing individual students the specific resources and services they need so that all students can achieve the same, or equitable, outcomes" (CCA *Beyond* 2). The authors focus on "equity-driven policies" (1), a phrase occurring nine times in the text as well as in the report's title as the authors offer recommendations to "guide policy development and ensure that all students in your state, particularly those who have been historically excluded, can complete college—and that your state has the educated citizenry it needs to meet workforce and economic goals" (CCA *Beyond* 4). In this context, equity is presented as a neoliberal rationale for developmental education policy reform.

The report repeatedly positions stand-alone prerequisite developmental education courses as the most significant barrier to educational equity. In "Step 3: Craft the Policy," eliminating prerequisite developmental courses is offered as four of the six provided examples. This recommendation differs from that of many developmental educators who nuance their support for co-requisite instruction by cautioning that replacing all standalone course sequences with co-requisite instruction is an anti-equity policy that forces all students into a one-size-fits-all pathway in which all students must attempt the college-level class regardless of their current skill level (Armstrong; Armstrong et al.; Hassel et al.). The report includes two practitioner references: one advocating wide-scale reform (Hern et al.) and the other a link to

a comprehensive program focused on racial equity (CUNY). Despite these citations in other sections of the report, the authors engage only in self-citation to discuss "Focusing on Equity," which does not include mention of developmental education—the focus of CCA's equity work.

Developmental educators themselves are also absent from CCA's explicit discussion of equity. In the same section on "Focusing on Equity," the authors note,

> At CCA, equity is the focus of everything we do. We envision a nation in which postsecondary institutions, policymakers, and systems of higher education welcome, invest in, and support students through and to on-time completion so that every student—regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or familial educational achievement—has equal opportunity to access and complete a college education or credential of value. (CCA 16)

Developmental educators may be included by defaults within "systems of higher education"; however, the erasure of those who labor to support students is noticeable and concerning. Similarly, in "Step 2: Determining Policy Recommendations," CCA recommends "Identify[ing] strategies that are proven to work," including "Go beyond systems and structures to include pedagogical solutions that happen inside the classroom" (9). Through nominalization, this recommendation erases the developmental educators who create and implement the pedagogical solutions to be scaled up—by other developmental education practitioners. This language practice is present in other literature about developmental education reform written by non-developmental educators (Suh et al. "Unvoicing"). When mentioned in the CCA report, developmental educators are presented as passive and un(der) trained (9). Ultimately, the authors' limited descriptions of developmental educators portray instructors who are familiar with state policy but unable or unwilling to go beyond its good intentions to implement real equity-oriented change; this description supports the report's larger message to policymakers that developmental educators are not legitimate partners in postsecondary equity.

In developing a sustained partnership with the USC Race and Equity Center, CCA has significantly increased its focus on and commitment to prioritizing equity. Still, CCA is largely dismissive of developmental educators, whom they represent as anti-equity and defenders of developmental courses at the cost of student success. CCA's report also incorrectly reduces

the comprehensive system of student support that makes up "developmental education" (Armstrong; Boylan) into standalone "remedial" courses (19). This misrepresentation ignores the multiple developmental educator-created models and pedagogies that have paved the way for CCA to erroneously argue that co-requisite instruction is the only equity-minded form of developmental education available (Adams et al.; Jenkins et al.). It is also unfortunately ironic that an argument intended to further equity is based on the inequitable exclusion and intellectual marginalization of practitioners who do the day-to-day work that is being scrutinized (Higgins and Warnke: Toth).

The Professional Organization

When the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA) sought to sponsor a white paper about "racial justice literacy" (CRLA May 21, 2021 Meeting Minutes 6), then-President Sonya Armstrong described the board's sense that such a paper would represent how CRLA members' professional identities were rooted in equity and developmental education. With this audience in mind, the board commissioned Emily to write the organization's sixth white paper. Emily invited in coauthors Dr. Jeanine Williams, an influential voice in developmental literacy with a longstanding focus on equity and racial justice, and Sam Owens, coauthor of the National Organization for Student Success white paper responding to critiques of developmental education as anti-equity, and the group outlined their critical examination of language standardization and the role of reading instruction in racial literacy.

The white paper's authors sought to introduce college literacy and learning professionals to theories and practices "offer[ing] concrete practices to support raciolinguistic justice for racially minoritized members of the academic community" (Suh et al. 2). This purpose was part of the authors' and CRLA's larger equity agenda of systemic change:

> Anything short of critically examining the larger system, identifying the policies and structures that perpetuate injustice, and intentionally and persistently working to build an equitable and just system will never result in the kind of change that acknowledges and reveres the humanity and birthright of the students and professionals who must operate within that system. (4)

The authors also explicated the connection between developmental education, raciolinguistic justice and equity, quoting Armstrong's CRLA Presidential Address: "Equity is about teaching the culturally and linguistically diverse

students who actually sit with us, not the students others assume are there. . . . It's about learners' rights to theoretically sound and evidence-based curriculum developed by expert educators. . . . at this moment, for me, that is at the top of my list of the most important social justice issues" (as cited in Suh et al. 6-7). This citation asserted developmental educators' authority as equity advocates. The authors made 207 unique mentions of in-field developmental education practitioner scholarship, including multiple examples of raciolinguistic justice in postsecondary literacy contexts. These citations typified developmental educators' central role supporting—and leading—equity-minded practices and reforms. This central positioning of developmental educators contrasts markedly from that of CCA and CCRC which vacillate between erasing practitioners' role in reform and equity initiatives and negatively portraying developmental educators as anti-equity. The white paper also included mentions of out-of-field practitioners (situating discussions of equity and raciolingustic justice within broader scholarship) and policy organizations, evidencing a level of engagement with scholarship not present in any of the other analyzed documents in this study.

The Multicampus Midwestern College

Policy and practitioner organizations often analyze higher education practices like developmental education and equity-based reform, but it is colleges and universities which do the actual work of developing, implementing, and applying such practices. For that reason, we examined how the practices enumerated above translated to a college setting. We selected a large, Midwestern community college spanning urban, suburban, and rural demographics that would offer an informative example of the affordances and limitations extended to equity and developmental education praxis at the institutional level. Based on our significant knowledge of the institution, we identified the selected institution as one engaged in ongoing examination of the institutional approach to both equity and developmental education. In keeping with our broader methodology, we selected for analysis a single college-generated document: "Changing Lives, Empowering Communities: 2023-2028 Strategic Plan." As a publicly available document, the strategic plan intends to both guide the institution and communicate its goals and values to external stakeholders. Despite the stated inclusion of several high-level administrators as stakeholders, the plan included no named authors and failed to list any of the faculty who participating in planning, drafting, or commenting on the document.

The first sustained mention of equity occurs in the plan's second High Level Initiative: "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (7). The initiatives were introduced to frame the strategic plan's purpose; despite its prominence, however, equity remains undefined throughout the document. It is was referenced as follows:

> [The college] will create a diverse and inclusive community committed to leveraging resources to dismantle structural barriers. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is central to our mission of empowering all communities. [The college] must ensure equitable access and success to serve underrepresented populations. Staff and faculty should reflect the student population, and the campus culture should foster inclusion and belonging. [The college] will respond to the changing demographics of Iowa by expanding support for diverse populations.

While the text might imply that equity involves "leveraging resources to dismantle structural barriers," the college offers no parameters by which to measure equity (or the adjacent terms "inclusion" and "belonging"). Indeed, although Strategic Goal 2 recognizes both that expanded resources are needed for "underrepresented populations" to be able to "be successful" and that the current population of students often does not see itself reflected in the college's employee demographics, the plan offers no benchmarks for defining the goals of representation or success or how they will be achieved. Neither does it explicitly identify the institution's underrepresented populations or the resources needed to serve them. This approach runs counter to equity-oriented developmental education scholarship which advocates for identifying the populations the institution seeks to serve and creating varied and dynamic resources to support students (Armstrong; Boylan, *Targeted*; Hassel et al.; Higgins and Warnke; Poe et al.).

Similarly, the text's explication of key strategies to "provide quality and excellence in all areas across the district" (Strategic Goal 3, n.p.), including "Bolster student enrollment, success, and completion to help students move in and move on" (n.p.) includes language that aligns closely with the field of developmental education (CRLA; CLADEA; NOSS), but there is no evidence that the authors applied a developmental lens to these goals and strategies.

The authors maintain an identical approach in the document's subsequent "Key Strategies for Student Success," the first of which reads, "Through Guided Pathways, advance student success" (6). The authors present Guided

Pathways as a means to "support career exploration and help students gain clarity on their futures, including career planning" (6). Through the section's four mentions of student "success," developmental education is completely absent and instead the concept of student success is tied to efficiency and career exploration. This framing is reinforced in four other areas of the plan, including Strategic Goal 4 which describes how "[The college] will educate, support, and provide resources to develop skills and talent for a competitive workforce. To meet this challenge, [the college] will improve its financial stewardship and economic development efforts" (9). Despite strong implicit connections to the field of developmental education, which focuses on student success, developmental courses and student supports are among the details missing from this section and the larger report text which instead emphasizes the institution's neoliberal focus.

Ultimately, despite indirectly engaging in the broader policy trends related to developmental education discussed above, the "Changing Lives, Empowering Communities'' plan never explicitly mentions or addresses developmental education. Instead, however, the influence of policy-driving and research organizations, and in particular CCRC, can be seen in the adoption of Guided Pathways by the college. Indeed, the college launched its shift to the Pathways model hosting a collegewide faculty and staff reading of *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, a 2015 book written by three prominent CCRC researchers.

Significantly, "Changing Lives, Empowering Communities" was developed at the same time that the college was undergoing developmental education reform, a process that remains underway as of the writing of this piece. After nearly a decade of departmental conversations about reorganizing developmental education, the college's English department began implementing a co-requisite model in Fall 2017 (McGregor). Since the advent of the strategic planning process, the college has doubled down in its commitment to the co-requisite model, establishing a Director of Accelerated Placement and a Director of Writing Placement, who have piloted several changes to the English course sequence. In personal communication with Bethany, the Director of Writing Placement indicated strong confidence in the results of the pilot program and the program's intent to revive the two-semester developmental writing sequence in order to better support the college's range of student ability (Tisdale). Finally, the revised implementation of the co-requisite model has involved the collection of data on gender, race, age, socioeconomic status, and other factors that will help the college

enact its equity goals of identifying the students being served by the model as well as analyze its effectiveness.

The work being done at the college as pertains to developmental education has some clear positives: English faculty members working on the project are engaged in practitioner research and are committed to providing students with the necessary resources to succeed in college-level English classes. They have also garnered administrative support by dovetailing their practices with the college's high-level initiatives. But notable challenges remain: faculty members who are hired specifically as full-time developmental educators have been sidelined by the college's administration, remaining unassigned to any specific pathway long after other faculty members were moved, and therefore unintentionally excluded from the developmental education reform process or, sometimes, even relevant departmental meetings (Doke-Kerns). The strategic plan does not lay out specific strategies tied to practitioner-based praxis but maintains vague, aspirational language rarely rooted in accountability. Since the college has not fully tied its equity goals to its educational reforms, it has not prioritized increasing outcomes for students of color even though their retention and completion rates are lower than those of white students, and it has not created publicly available measurable targets rooted in robust data.

Perhaps most notably, the college's strategic plan is not rooted in academic scholarship. It does not cite a single researcher, policy organization, developmental education practitioner, faculty member at the college, or even the team of local consultants who guided the process. Instead, it thanks the individual members of groups, all attached to the institution: the Executive Committee, Deans and Provosts, the Office of Planning, Assessment, and Data, and the Board of Trustees. Like the policy organizations who see administrators and policymakers as the authentic developmental education reformers in pursuit of equity, the college's administration sees its leadership as the ones making decisions about equity and access, without the need to acknowledge the voices of the practitioners engaging in the daily work.

Cross-Text Analysis

The intended audience across the analyzed texts included developmental education and equity-minded stakeholders from a range of professional affiliations and positionalities. Despite the stakeholders' and authors' shared interest in equity and developmental education, our analysis illuminated

significant differences between the developmental education practitioner-authored text (CRLA) and other analyzed texts.

First, while the authors' use of the term *equity* implied a shared conceptualization, only two texts (CCA; CRLA) included an explicit definition for this term. Stated and implied definitions suggested that the authors shared an understanding of equity as (1) recognizing diversity of students (implicitly or explicitly linked to racial diversity), their academic strengths and access to resources and (2) providing students with personalized support in order to maximize their opportunity for academic success (see Table 4). However, due its particular focus, the CRLA White Paper focused on classroom instruction

Table 4. Summary of Findings Across Texts

Organization's Paradigmatic Text	**Definition of Equity**	**Conceptualization of Equity vis-á-vis Developmental Education**	**Engagement with Within-Field Developmental Education Scholarship**
CCRC Journal Article	None provided	Developmental education reform efforts may perpetuate developmental education's existing inequities; developmental educators are erased from conversations of equity work	No mentions of Within-Field Practitioner Scholarship
CCA Funded Report	"Providing individual students the specific resources and services they need so that all students can achieve the same, or equitable, outcomes" (2)	Developmental education is inequitable and must be reformed; developmental educators are erased from conversations of equity work	Limited engagement with scholarship through citation; no mentions of Within-Field Practitioner Scholarship

(table continues on the next page)

(Table 4 cont.)

Organization's Paradigmatic Text	**Definition of Equity**	**Conceptualization of Equity vis-á-vis Developmental Education**	**Engagement with Within-Field Developmental Education Scholarship**
CRLA White Paper on Raciolinguistic Justice	"Teaching the culturally and linguistically diverse students who actually sit with us, not the students others assume are there.... It's about learners' rights to theoretically sound and evidence-based curriculum developed by expert educators" (Armstrong as cited in Author et al. 6-7)	Developmental education is an equity practice; developmental educators are experts who create and teach theoretically sound and evidence-based curriculum	Over-representation of practitioner scholarship through citation: 207/309 mentions were of practitioner-scholars with an additional four two-year practitioner-scholars cited as coauthors
DMACC Strategic Plan	None provided; implication that equity involves serving "underrepresented populations" (7)	None provided; developmental education is not mentioned in the text despite several references to student success	None provided

while the other three documents used a broader lens (sometimes nebulously so) to discuss equity.

The texts also differed in their representation of the role of developmental education, and particularly developmental educators, in promoting postsecondary equity. In fact, authors' presentation of developmental education provided the greatest variation between the texts ranging from claims that developmental education is inherently inequitable (CCA) to developmental education is an equity practice (CRLA). Significantly, erasure of developmental educators as engaged in the work of enacting equity and

student success practices was common among all three texts authored by non-developmental education practitioners.

Authors' citation practices followed a similar pattern as there was significantly greater engagement with *Within-Field Developmental Education* scholarship in the CRLA White Paper, including mentions of publications by both two- and four-year practitioners (see Table 3). The CRLA authors also included more mentions of *Out-of-Field Practitioners* although the piece had fewer mentions of *Non-Practitioner Researchers* at the two and four-year levels as well as *Policy Organizations* and *Government-affiliated* authors. While the included documents are not intended to draw definitive conclusions about the citation practices of an entire field or its detractors, we note the significant variation between these particular documents—all of which are purported to address a practitioner audience interested in equity and developmental education. Despite these differences in citation and conceptualization of the relationship between developmental education and equity, common threads existed between the within-field practitioner-scholars and non-practitioner scholars' conceptualizations of equity as specific, individualized support for students.

Across the texts—and the stakeholders they represent—a common definition of equity is a necessary starting point for achieving our shared goal of success for all college students. Our critical discourse analysis illuminates a growing commitment to racial equity amongst stakeholders within professional organizations, policy organizations, and colleges that directly deliver developmental education courses. This increased engagement, research, policy change, and pedagogical emphasis provides significant reason for optimism that equity will continue to occupy a central place in the work that we do.

Nevertheless, challenges remain, foremost among them the fact that many of these conversations continue to occur in relatively isolated contexts and with reliance on assumptions that, when examined closely, often undercut the equity work being championed. As we have demonstrated above, it remains common for policy-driving groups, research organizations, and educational institutions to approach developmental education using a top-down model in which policymakers and college administrators dictate policy (often based on quantitative data) that rarely integrates the qualitative experience of developmental education instructors and students. We highlighted repeated instances in which such actors either erase practitioners or present them as incapable, uninterested in, or hostile to the co-creation

of policy and praxis that would serve our developmental education students effectively, efficiently, and with compassion.

Our analysis uncovers how relative consistency in equity language does not yet ensure that the assumptions and actions behind this language are uniform across policymakers, scholars, administrators, and professional organizations in the field of developmental education. Further, our findings foreshadow graver concerns than incongruence of language: within a context in which equity is under direct political attack and in which administrators and policymakers seek to develop accommodationist strategies to avoid political attention or anticipated financial challenges such as cuts to state funding, it is clear that equity is under siege on multiple fronts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below, we offer recommendations for practitioners and policy analysts engaging in practices that promote genuine equity across the field of developmental education. There are no easy answers here. Instead, there are guidelines for commitments and actions that we believe will lead to the advancement of equity work. Above all, we offer an alternative set of priorities and a framing structure that we believe will be more effective and more ethical than the ones highlighted in our analysis above.

Recommendations for Scholarship

Although we intentionally write to a practitioner-oriented audience, we recognize our readers' engagement in scholarship and begin by noting how our findings further illustrate massive inequity in citation: if publications were genuinely committed to being inclusive of all voices, they would include more practitioner and practitioner-scholar voices. As noted in the College Conference on Composition and Communication (CCCC)'s "Position Statement on Citation Justice in Rhetoric, Composition, and Writing Studies," "Citation is about giving credit to those whose thinking has informed and preceded our own. It is also how disciplines determine epistemological legitimacy. It is thus crucial that we attend to the politics and social justice implications of citation." When developmental educators are not cited in scholarship on developmental education reform, their epistemological and practical contributions to equity work in the field are marginalized and erased. Therefore, it is essential that reformers, researchers, and policymakers engage in concerted effort and sustained commitment to

citational justice that includes such producers of knowledge as substantive voices in this work.

Recommendations to Actively Engage in, with, and for the Field

Although we sometimes reference practitioners in this piece with an insistent optimism that sees them as sharing in the overall set of values that drives our own work, we also recognize the long list of scholar-practitioners who have previously called for the need for increased engagement among Writing Studies professionals, particularly from the two-year college or other open access contexts (Andelora; Sullivan). For example, Toth and Sullivan concluded that the Teacher-Scholar model of two-year teaching is "more aspirational than descriptive of the majority of two-year college English faculty" (250). Four years later, Suh and Jensen reported similar findings among basic writing instructors across postsecondary institutional contexts. In response to the significant pressures facing many aspiring two-year college teacher-scholar-activists, Cheri Lemieux Spiegel advocates for embracing a "revolution-ish approach," which she describes as affording flexibility, aspiring to a culture of innovation rather than fixating on a single battle, and a gentleness towards self to recognize when "to press pause on my tactics and await the next right moment" (11). In his invitation to two-year English faculty to engage as developmental education teacher-scholar-activists, Sullivan encourages practitioners to (1) recognize their ability to contribute, (2) focus on little actions that can create compounding impacts, and (3) engage in the work of both enacting equitable practices and also communicating with other stakeholders about the value of our contributions (Suh et al., "Teacher"). Sullivan and Lemieux Spiegel remind us of the importance of our engagement with our profession and field in order to serve our students, and we call on our peers to prioritize this aspiration.

Recommendations for Accounting for Labor in Scholarly Production

The citational injustice discussed previously is magnified by the lack of equity that scholars face when engaging in the labor of research and publication. Therefore, an explicit effort must be made to value the labor that goes into scholarship and to consider whether such labor is valued by a scholar's institution. As many readers are well aware, the amount of labor required to produce a scholarly work is significant, particularly when such scholarship draws not only upon the literature but also upon classroom

experiences or observations, engagements with students, and interactions with colleagues. These lived experiences can nuance the writing of practitioner-scholars in impactful ways, and scholars should work to amplify the voices and expertise of practitioner-scholars who engage in publication on top of heavy teaching loads and in institutional contexts where scholarly productivity is not a measure for tenure or promotion (Klausman et al., see Toth's volume on transfer for an example of how a four-year scholar actively sought to amplify and engage with two-year scholar-practitioner perspectives in both scholarship and practice). Given the conditions under which many practitioner-scholars engage in scholarship, the erasure or silencing of their perspectives is especially problematic, yet much of their work has been undervalued and sometimes outright ignored in texts by non-practitioner researchers or policy-driving organizations (Suh et al. "Unvoicing"). Bethany has direct experience with practitioner silencing and erasure: like the other faculty who participated in strategic plan retreats, she was unnamed in her college's final strategic plan document and her academic presentations at conferences and her publications are not considered by her institution as necessary or as even meaningfully contributing to her faculty role.

Recommendations for Prioritizing Antiracism in Equity Work

Across the analyzed texts, equity was explicitly and implicitly connected to race. Indeed, fundamental to the concept of equity is the understanding that people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds face disparities in access to privilege, to resources, to opportunities, and ultimately to outcomes (USC Race and Equity Center). Two of the field's largest professional organizations, CRLA and NOSS, have explicated the connection between racial equity and developmental education (Armstrong, personal communication; Suh et al. *Clarifying*; Suh et al. *Raciolinguistic Justice*). Through white papers, official statements, and conference themes and strands among other professional development opportunities, these organizations have worked to foreground the role of developmental educators in promoting racial justice. In order for developmental educators to work with other student success stakeholders, it is essential that we unite behind a common understanding of our work as advancing racial equity.

However, antiracism cannot fall into the trap of prioritizing virtue signaling or performativity over authentic and holistic advocacy for equity. In some cases, this happens when organizations make vague references to increased outcomes for students across racial groups or when they use terms

like "inclusion," "belonging," or even "equity" without providing a clear definition ("Changing Lives, Empowering Communities").

Being intentionally antiracist means spending time doing the actual work and not focusing our energies on merely signaling that we are doing the work. That sometimes means compromising, accepting less-than-perfect solutions, and accepting that incremental change, while never the ultimate goal, can be a viable strategy along the way. After all, "*if* we want a world with less suffering and more flourishing, it would be useful to perceive complexity and complicity as the constitutive situation of our lives, rather than as things we should avoid" (Shotwell). Equity work is often messy and imperfect, and that's something we need to commit to embracing.

This means that we need to work intersectionally and sometimes even across ideological lines. There are a lot of challenges facing our students and our colleagues. They all matter, and they all tie back into core systems of oppression. As developmental educators, we see how these intersecting oppressions daily impact the lives of our students. However, we also see evidence of collaboration and reason for hope. On our own campuses, we intentionally seek to collaborate with food pantries, free clinics, and community resource groups that honor the humanity of our students and their full lives outside of our classrooms. We also partner with faculty who do not identify as developmental educators. Emily, for example, is collaborating with biology faculty and success staff to support students who are blocked from taking the entry-level course until they have completed their developmental coursework. Bethany is actively working to promote college policies that lower course material costs and expand access to support services that aim to lessen the impact of non-academic barriers for students.

As important as doing the day-to-day equity work of practitioners is, we believe that we all also have a duty to engage with the research and policy being created by reformers and policy groups. This is a challenging task because many developmental educators are spread impossibly thin. However, if we want to build a strong voice in developmental education reform conversations, we need to both ensure that we keep our intersectional, coalitional approach by prioritizing working with multiple groups, stakeholders, community partners, etc., and ensure that we are pressing for a place at the table with the groups that don't proactively include us.

To make this sustainable, we need to commit to devoting our full focus to one or two areas, but also to doing the work of lifting up other voices and other work as we focus on centering our own priorities, prioritizing collaboration and cooperation over competition. This means that we may need to

strategically alter our language at times. We may need to use the arguments that we know will convince our audience, even when the arguments that best reflect our own views are different. But we should never accept conditions that require equity to be sidelined or put on the back burner.

Always, working for equity means insisting on claiming our space and our right to be a part of the conversation and of the decision-making process. It is this principle that guided our decision to draw from Chisholm's legacy. After serving four years in the New York state legislature, Chisholm ran for the U.S House of Representatives without support from party leadership—and won. During her time in Washington, D.C., Congresswoman Chisholm introduced over 50 pieces of legislation to support people of color, immigrants, working class individuals, and women and children (Bring Your Own Chair). Chisholm's encouragement to "bring a folding chair to the table" calls upon us to provide insistent presence, even when—especially when—it makes people uncomfortable. As Chisholm's political career can attest, it is a strategy that works, and one we believe needs to be given a more prominent place in higher ed advocacy.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, we believe that if we rectify the inequity with which various stakeholders in this conversation have been positioned by removing existing deficit framings of developmental education, we can bring all parties to the table to develop a unified equity-minded practice. Our field has the potential to both thrive in its own right and to advance the cause of equity and belonging more broadly across postsecondary education for policymakers, faculty, and students alike. This kind of work has never been more critical: given the current political demonization of educators of all kinds at the national, state, and local levels, it is essential that we join forces to build meaningful equity and justice within our profession and for the students we serve.

NOTES

1. According to the "About Us" page on the CCRC website, the organization exists "to help community colleges enrich the lives of every student who passes through their doors. . . to promote a more just higher education system and a more just society."
2. In their About Us page, the organization states, "We believe higher education has a choice: to continue to reflect the racial, social, and economic injustice in society—or reimagine our systems to be engines

of equity, prosperity, and hope," and they enact this vision by scaling structural reforms and promoting policy changes.

3. Although we view these first two organizations as professional organizational homes for developmental education at the national level, we note that only CRLA explicitly names its ongoing commitment to developmental education, listing "Reading, Learning Assistance, Developmental Education, Tutoring, Mentoring" as its foci at the top of its webpage (CRLA). In contrast, we surmise NOSS' continued interest in developmental education based upon its previous name and engagement with Developmental Education, Developmental English/Literacy, and Developmental Mathematics (as evidenced by 2023 conference session titles and descriptions).
4. *New Directions for Community Colleges* is a quarterly, peer-reviewed journal of "evidence-based and research-oriented accounts that shape policy and practice" in community college education (New Directions). Articles often limit methodological and statistical findings discussions in favor of implications relevant to community college administrators and faculty leaders.

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It's Not a Neutral Choice: Implications of Student Self-Placement in a Basic Writing Course

Jennifer Burke Reifman

ABSTRACT: Research has indicated that students experience negative reactions to their placement in a basic writing course. Despite negative disposition toward basic writing, self-placement practices have become commonplace in higher education for advancing equity. Using the concept of "Possible Academic Selves," this article examines student writing produced in a placement process to challenge the neutrality of self-placement into a basic writing course. As statistical and textual analysis of student writing reveals, placement in a basic writing course could be viewed as a disruption to a student's Possible Academic Self, or the student they imagined they would be in college. Analyzing student placement challenge writing in this light, as well as considering the long history of the basic writer as "other," reveals the disruptions that can occur to a student's sense of self, complicating the nature of writing placement processes that rely on students to make choices about their own course placement.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; equity; possible academic selves; self-placement; student choice

INTRODUCTION

Basic writing scholars have historically pushed against deficit-based notions of the students in basic writing classes (Adler-Kassner; Bartholomae; Gray-Rosendale; Shaughnessy; Shor) and sought to remove basic writing from the margins of higher education to end the othering of students and classes (Inman 2). Despite this work, negative perceptions of basic writing classes persist, heightened by policy research that suggests that as many as one-third of students are misplaced in developmental courses to their detriment (Scott-Clayton 27). As a result, research on developmental courses across the country has routinely named placement, and particularly self-placement, as the site of reconciliation in addressing equity issues around remediation (Ganga et al.). Inherent in this push toward self-placement is the belief that students, when provided with choice, will place themselves more equitably than timed assessments and enter higher education more empowered (Blakesley; Moos and Van Zanen), even though terms like *development*, *remedial*, and *basic* carry deep implications around student preparedness and even capability (Toth "Two-Year Colleges"). Despite the push toward

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self-placement in post-secondary writing classes, particularly in two-year colleges (see Hassel et al.; Toth; Nastal et al.), scholarship on writing placement and perceptions of basic writing have not intersected to understand the complexity of choice in placement, particularly as it relates to the stigma surrounding basic writing and its association with an "outsider" status.

In this article, I examine the student writing produced as part of a collaborative placement model at the University of California Davis, inspired by Directed Self Placement (DSP) (Royer and Gilles) and Informed Self Placement (Bedore and Rossen-Knill). The DSP-inspired survey, called Writing Placement 2020, asked students to respond to 35 Likert-scale questions developed from commonplace DSP approaches where they reported on their in-school literacy practices, their confidence regarding academic writing, and their academic achievements. The placement mechanism provided students with a placement in one of the four credit-bearing course offerings (two sheltered language courses, an "entry-level"/basic writing course, and a "lower division"/first-year composition course) and included a chance to directly oppose their placement in the form of a post-survey "Challenge Activity." The Challenge Activity asked students to develop a written rationale where they could disagree with the survey's recommended placement and argue for placement in a different class. Many of the 239 Challenge Activity participants used this opportunity to argue out of a basic writing placement and forgo the the Entry-Level Writing Requirement (ELWR), a University of California system-wide requirement that can only be met through passing specific writing courses on campus or qualifying test scores.

As a popular version of self-placement, one where students are given an automatic placement and then provided with a chance to disagree, investigating this moment is key to understanding the complexity around this choice. By acknowledging that self-placing into a basic writing class is not a neutral social and political choice for students, especially when

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viewing the long history of basic writing as racially and linguistically other (Lamos; Royster and Williams), I reconsider the perceived simplicity of leaving the choice in students' hands, particularly as self-placement becomes a legislatively-backed panacea for equity in higher education. In reviewing the student writing produced for the Challenge Activity, I work to answer the following questions:

- What beliefs and understandings about basic writing did students espouse in arguing for a different placement?
- How does placing the burden of placement on students impact their sense of self and belonging in post-secondary writing spaces?

In this pursuit, this article presents a mixed methods analysis of the written responses produced by students placed into what the University of California system calls an "entry-level" (basic writing) course and examines the evidence they present in advocating for a movement to a "lower division" (first-year composition) course. Using descriptive statistics and coding via a grounded theory approach, a representative sampling of 91 student Challenge Essays were analyzed for prevailing themes and then compared for concurrences and statistical significance. As I detail, regardless of the students' ethnic/racial identities, their status as a first-generation student, or their identified gender, the language students used to describe the basic writing classes reveals ingrained schema and beliefs around basic writing classes and the students in them. In this analysis, I have found that many students see placement in a basic writing class as an impediment or condemnation of their studenthood, and I highlight how students leverage particular value systems around remediation and basic writing to argue their way out of a basic writing class.

Specifically, the submitted writing revealed how students, who had never experienced a basic writing course, believed their future student selves or Academic Possible Selves (APSs) were fundamentally mismatched from their constructed perception of the course. This mismatch reveals the disruption that placement in basic writing courses might have in student identity, reifying the complexity of student choice in placement and how this choice is mediated by social ideologies and common misconceptions around basic writing classes and students, as well as the potential double-bind students from multiply marginalized identities might experience because of their placement. Applying the concept of "Possible Selves" (Markus and Nurius 158) and specifically APSs to understand these responses, this

article forwards the role of personal perceptions of identity in understanding student response to placement and choice in that placement. "Possible Selves" have been described as "cognitive manifestations of enduring goals, aspirations, motives, fears, threats" (Markus and Nurius 158) and are related to "a compelling vision or conception of the self in a future state" (Wurf and Markus 39); the concept has been historically tracked onto the experience of students in transition, like those going through self-placement, in order to understand action and the guiding principles behind choice.

In complicating choice and challenging the neutrality of self-placement, the following section reviews literature around how the basic writer label is stigmatized, how this stigma can be especially damaging to students from historically marginalized identities, and how the "basic writer" label connects to the concept of Possible Selves to understand the reaction some students experience in their placement in a basic writing course. The findings section provides excerpts from coded challenge essays that detail the dissonance students experience between their connection to this label and their perception of this placement. Finally, I end with a discussion of these findings as representations of disrupted future selves.

The Stigma of Basic Writing

Basic writing has a long history of living in the margins of higher education institutions (Ritter; Stanley); teachers and scholars of basic writing courses know well that the label of "basic writer" is fraught. Early in the formation of basic writing as a subfield, Shaughnessy worked to first define the concept of a basic writer and to reframe how teachers approach the basic writing classroom because of the perceived negatives associated with the basic writing label. While basic writing classes had existed for decades prior to Shaughnessy's contributions (Otte and Mlynarczyk), her work defining and describing the basic writer gave way to a wealth of research exploring the othering of students with this label.

Notably, Rose discusses how the label comes with a narrow set of assumptions about the student: "remedial is to be substandard, inadequate, and…metaphorically connected to disease and mental defect" (349). Highlighted in the written debates of Ira Shor and Karen Greenberg in the 1990s, there has been a longstanding tension about the function of basic writing as a gatekeeping "apartheid" (Shor) versus a necessary steppingstone for disadvantaged students (Greenberg). Further, there is a long-documented presence of students of color and students from non-dominant linguistic

backgrounds being placed into basic writing classes at higher rates than their non-white peers (Henson and Hern; Shor), feeding into the conflation between students of color and basic writing students (Lamos; Royster and Williams). While scholars have pushed against the deficit-based perceptions of basic writing students (Cole and Griffin; Gutiérrez et al.; Hull et al.; Melzer; Parisi) or sought to dismantle remedial writing courses based on the inequity apparent in this construct (Bartholomae; Shor), the stigma of remediation remains, particularly in placement moments.

While teachers of basic writing have debated this stigma, students of basic writing are most impacted by the long legacy of basic writing being conflated with a diminished academic status and the possibility of being multiply marginalized (Adler-Kassner). Scholars in higher education have responded to this issue by calling for a reduction in basic writing in higher education and have examined how students perceive their placement in a basic writing or remedial course. Koch, Slate, and Moore's study of developmental courses at a Texas community college revealed that students initially expressed negative feelings toward being placed in a developmental class, relating their placement with a perceived lack of intelligence (72). In another study, Bachman found that many students experienced "fear, embarrassment, or disdain" (18) because of their placement in a developmental course. Bachman also found that some students connect "remediation with being 'dumb' or 'not trying' hard enough", while others saw it as a "'waste of time' or a delay of core coursework" (18).

In surveying developmental reading students at a Southwestern University, Lesley also found that students resented their placement in remedial coursework and that their resentment builds on a history of being labeled as remedial and in need of intervention. Importantly, Lesley's study reveals that the students who are stuck in a cycle of remediation are often treated with little intellectual value and were in fact subject to the remediation process as an inoculation, as Rose and others discuss. While this research is not solely located in the basic writing context, it does begin to reveal the ways in which students respond to the label and how they see their placement in basic writing classes. In fact, over 80% of the Challenge Essay participants choose to argue against their placement in a basic writing course and for a placement in first year writing, rejecting the label of basic writer.

Placement in Basic Writing & Misaligned Academic Possible Selves

Today, a wealth of higher education research explicitly names how students, particularly students of color and students of diverse linguistic backgrounds, are negatively impacted by placements in basic writing courses. Specifically, research has found that placement in lengthy remedial sequences and non-credit bearing courses have proven problematic for these populations, causing legislative reform across the country limiting basic writing offerings (Bailey; Bailey et al.; Hodara et al.; Scott-Clayton), reinforcing perspectives on basic writing as detrimental and punitive. Nonetheless, basic writing courses remain a mainstay of higher education.

As a result, many institutions have turned to contemporary placement practices that position students as agents of their placement. Directed Self Placement (Royer and Gilles), Informed Self Placement (Bedore and Rossen-Knill), and other various forms of placement that center student-experience (Lewiecki-Wilson et al.) are forwarded to ensure that students are not punitively placed in basic writing courses. This effort is both to counter the inequitable impacts of standardized placement practices like COMPASS, ACCUPLACER, and SAT scores (Rutschow and Mayer 2; Toth 139) and to help increase student self-efficacy in their writing classes (Gere et al. 161). In many cases, research suggests that providing students with the ability to choose their writing course upon entering college will counter the inherent bias and racism of some of the direct assessments (e.g. Toth).

While self-placement practices seek to counter issues of over-representation of particular ethno-racial and language groups in basic writing classes, these practices rarely attend to the stigma that students bring to the notion of being labeled a basic writer and the way this label is synonymous with "conditionally accepted" or academic "other." One lens to understand the response of students when placed into a developmental writing course is the domain of Possible Selves, a concept drawing from research on self-conception and self-knowledge. Possible Selves, or the ways that individuals conceive of their future selves, reflect the "selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming" (Markus and Nurius 954). Possible Selves are intimately connected to our current selves and derived from our past selves, but also deeply reflective of the person's sociocultural context and impacted by social constructions of identity like class (Stevenson and Clegg), gender (Lips), and racial identity (Oyserman et al.; Oyserman and Fryberg;). Contemporary work around Possible Selves has been used to understand

how student perceptions of their future selves may be linked to motivation and persistence (Leondari et al.; Oyserman and Fryberg) and engagement in academic activities (Oyserman et al.). In these contexts, Possible Selves can be directly impacted by certain educational actors, like instructors, and certain kinds of feedback (Oyserman and Fryberg).

Interestingly, APS, as a theory, has not been explicitly connected to perceptions of being labeled a basic writer, and despite research that suggests that students' past experiences can influence their self-placement decisions (Schendel and O'Neill) and that "students' ability to self-assess can be seen as directly related to writing self-efficacy" (Aull 3), placement literature has not considered the role of APSs and how these selves are informed by deficit perceptions of basic writers. Thus, basic writing scholars should consider how deficit perceptions of basic writers mediate student choice in self-placement and are tied up in issues of race and identity, particularly as self-placement seeks to neutralize issues of race in placement. APS is a critical framework to further understand the non-neutrality of student choice in self-placement, particularly as these self-placement processes are becoming go-to solutions in avoiding inequitable placements.

METHODS

Description of Writing Placement 2020

Writing Placement 2020 was a writing placement mechanism designed by members of the university writing program to replace the University of California's in-person timed writing assessment that was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was used to place students in one of the following: two possible sheltered language courses (largely occupied by international students), an "entry-level" writing course to meet the University of California's system-wide incoming writing requirement, or a "lower-division" writing course to meet the first-year writing requirement. While many students at UC Davis arrive with qualifying test scores for the University-wide entry-level writing requirement (ELWR), nearly 60% of students arrive unfulfilled. Writing Placement 2020 acted as a means for fulfilling this requirement, particularly if students challenged out of the entry-level writing class placement. Incoming students are educated around this requirement and its impact through orientation and advisor meetings.

Administered from March 2020 into December 2020, Writing Placement 2020 consisted of two parts: 1) a required multiliteracy and language

survey of 35 questions where students reported on school experiences, knowledge, and confidence levels and 2) an optional "Challenge Activity" where students selected a representative sample of their academic writing and wrote a rationale for a different placement in the form of the challenge essay. Incoming students were sent links to Writing Placement 2020 in their admissions checklist with no description of the process. Their introduction to the placement process was presented in a 2-minute video after they clicked the link where the program director described the entry-level and lower-division writing requirements, detailed means for fulfillment, and provided students with a brief overview of the survey and the possible challenge activity. The video encouraged students to answer questions honestly and informed students that the Writing Placement 2020 was a survey meant to help students "identify the best course for you" before they were automatically directed to begin answering questions in the survey.

The required survey was designed based on the best practices of DSP-based questionnaires, asking students about their school-based writing experiences with frequency questions like "I received written feedback on my writing from teachers and peers."

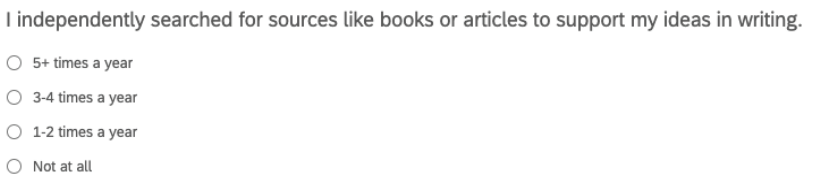

Figure 1. Frequency Example Question from Writing Placement 2020

The survey also included Likert-Scale, agreement-based statements like "I can use different strategies for starting a writing assignment (brainstorming, planning, outlining, etc.)" and "I can clearly indicate when I'm using the ideas or language of others in my writing."

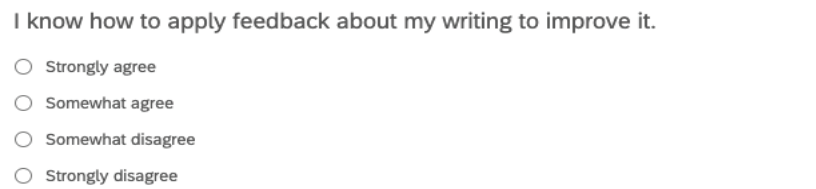

Figure 2. Likert Example Question from Writing Placement 2020

Responses were calculated into a final numeric score that was mapped to course placement options that students saw at the end of the survey. Knowing that automatic survey placements would not suit all students, the writing placement team designed the Challenge Activity (see Appendix A) to engage students in choice and ask them to advocate for their desired placement. As part of this, students were directed to the Writing Placement website, where they found the course descriptions, developed by course instructors (see Table 1), as well as further description of the requirements they needed to fulfill. Students may have also done their own research about the courses but were not directed anywhere else.

Table 1. Course Descriptions Provided to Students

Entry-Level Writing Description	Students developing familiarity with college-level writing will learn. . . • Advanced reading strategies for understanding multiple, complex readings. • Analyzing course texts to learn how writers use ideas and information to build new knowledge in a field. • How to read, analyze, and write about multiple academic texts at the same time focusing on expressing the connections between their own thoughts about the topic and the perspectives of other writers. • About and respond to the wide variety of writing assignments they can expect to see in college courses. • Revision strategies, including how to get helpful feedback on my writing, use feedback, and independently evaluate and improve my own writing.
Lower Division Description	Students who are ready to conduct academic research and write, revise, and edit an extended research article will learn. . . • To use existing reading strategies to find and analyze multiple, complex academic texts. • To complete assignments that are all part of an extended research project. • The expectations of academic research writing and how to connect previous research to data collected. • Develop feedback focused on integrating sources and organizing ideas. • Understand feedback and revise.

Faculty readers used common criteria to confirm or deny students' requests (see Appendix B). Because of the issues present in the Challenge Activity demonstrated in this article and the overly simplistic view of student experience present in the survey questions, Writing Placement 2020 was replaced with a new mechanism the following year (see Burke Reifman et al.).

Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria

Approximately 287 essays were produced from March to December. For this study, student essays were pulled from the four main waves of Writing Placement 2020 held in June, July, August, and September; these waves produced 183 challenge essays. The students who participated in the four main waves were most likely to be students who matriculated (did not defer or melt) in the Fall of 2020 and those who did not participate in a summer bridge program, which would have given them more education regarding the writing curriculum. Since varying numbers of student essays were submitted for the four main waves, this study randomly pulled 50% of the 183, resulting in 91 coded essays. While all 183 challenge essays were read in informal capacities, this analysis focuses on the 91 that were coded.

Demographics of Participants

Following coding, I reviewed institutionally collected demographic information to understand who participated in the challenge activity. Table 2 compares the demographics of students represented in the coded portion (n=91), the full corpus of essays (n=287), and all survey takers (n=4343). This table demonstrates that no one demographic group was overly represented in the challenge activity by more than 3%, with the exception of international (non-resident) students, who were represented slightly less (6%) than their resident peers in the Challenge Activity.

Analytic Methods

Essays in this study were qualitatively coded to understand patterns of evidence used to justify placement. First, once essays were selected and anonymized, I read essays to develop a set of descriptive codes (Miles and Huberman), created to address specific forms of evidence, mentions of resources, and to characterize "the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña 87). These 48 codes were then organized under four parent codes. With a finalized codebook (see Appendix C), each of the 91 essays were coded by two separate readers (the author and the director of the program) who

Table 2. Demographics of Challenge Participants*

	All Survey Takers (N=4343)	**All Essays (N=287)**	**Coded Essays (N=91)**
First Gen	42%	45%	37%
Not First Gen	58%	55%	63%
Female	62%	63%	55%
Non-Binary	>1%	>1%	>1%
Male	38%	37%	45%
African American	4%	4%	7%
American Indian	>1%	1%	0%
Chinese	29%	29%	26%
East Indian	7%	5%	9%
Filipino	5%	5%	9%
Japanese	1%	1%	0%
Korean	2%	>1%	>1%
Latinx	5%	7%	4%
Mexican	22%	19%	18%
None Listed	2%	>1%	>1%
Other Asian	4%	6%	5%
Vietnamese	5%	7%	8%
White	14%	14%	13%
Resident	70%	76%	79%
Non-Resident	30%	24%	21%

*Demographic Categories from UC Davis Registrar Report; Resident means domestic student and Non-Resident means international student.

later met for code rectification using a spreadsheet to document code agreement. Finally, I consulted the frequency of each code to better understand prevailing themes.

FINDINGS

Many of the 91 coded essays were 1-2 double-spaced pages where students would enact different school-based genres (e.g. five-paragraph essays, three-point theses, etc.). Below are representative excerpts from 12 of the 91 coded essays along with descriptions of the student writers in terms of first-generation status, sex, race, and residential status pulled from the University's database. Importantly, the speakers, whose identities were drawn on only after analysis, are not overly representative of any historically disenfranchised identity (e.g. first-generation status, gender/sex, race/ethnicity, and residential status), suggesting a broad representation of students who rejected the basic writer label. Of these 12 essays, only 1 was denied by faculty readers for movement out of an entry-level writing class, meaning the 11 others were successful in using the kinds of evidence described as a means of moving out of basic writing.

Overall, 67% (n=61) of challenge essays were coded with "Identifies Class as Remedial, Basic, Abnormal, etc.," which captured the ways students spoke about the basic writing courses or the kinds of students who might occupy these courses. Many of the excerpts in this code suggest that basic writing is not challenging, that it could be a hindrance to their progress, that it is redundant content, and so on. Implicit in these arguments is the way students envision basic writing classes and themselves in relation to that course and who they believe occupies basic writing or basic writing courses. Further, these excerpts reveal how students see their Academic Possible Selves (APS) as deeply at odds with their placement, suggesting the complexity of choice in placement, particularly when the burden of labor and proof is placed on the students alone.

Basic Writing as Damaging

A common theme in coding were damage-centered narratives around placement in basic writing. Specifically, students associated placement in a basic writing course as something that would negatively impact their progress as a student, associating the placement with a lack of growth and a detriment to their future as students. As one student commented: "Taking a course to satisfy the entry-level writing requirement will let me feel

trapped or stuck because I know I'm capable of more specific and challenging courses" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Female, East Indian, Resident Student*). Many of the students who argued against their placement in basic writing asserted that, despite their lack of experience with the classes, the content would be repetitive and therefore prevent them from growing: "I do not believe that being taught similar and repetitive content will be much help to grow as a writer. Taking an entry-level writing class can then potentially hinder the opportunity I need to develop as a better writer. . ." (*Incoming, First-Generation, Female, Chinese, Resident Student*). Others also commented that being placed in a basic writing class would be missing an opportunity, suggesting that the placement was closing off some route to their desired APS. For this student, this became a moment of opportunity in reclaiming their vision of their future academic self: "I do not believe that I should be re-introduced to core academic literature and literacies. I may have missed satisfying the entry-level writing requirement, but I will not miss the opportunity to be integrated in classes that challenge my abilities as a writer" (*Incoming, Non-First-Generation, Male, African American, Resident Student*). The students reject the deficit narrative associated with the basic writing label, using this moment of choice to counter the label of "entry-level" placed on them by the institution.

Basic Writing as Regression

Other excerpts show students describing basic writing courses as repetitions of high school. As one student argued: "If I were placed into a course to fulfill basic writing, in which its main goal is to develop my writing and critical thinking skills, I suspect I will gain very little from it because I have already acquired these skills from my high school English courses" (*Incoming, Non-First-Generation, Male, Ethnicity Unknown, Resident Student*). In fact, their graduation from high school is proof that this placement is incorrect: "I mastered everything there is to learn in the entry-level writing pathway by the time I was a sophomore in high school and have a strong grasp on the tasks and challenges that the English Composition pathway provides since I graduated high school" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Male, Mexican, Resident Student*).

These students are reminding their reader that their past selves have been successful in what they see as the same content and, to them, basic writing courses represent high school level material. This does not match with their future academic selves, who are college ready, unlike the students

who truly belong in basic writing classes: "I do not mean to undermine the entry-level students, but I believe that it would not be the right place for me. The way I see it is the entry-level writing classes are the college preparatory classes in high school and the English Composition Pathway is the advanced class" (*Incoming, Non-First-Generation, Male, Vietnamese, Resident Student*). Here, students create a firm line between the perception of prepared, admitted college students and students who are placed into basic writing courses and are therefore perceived to be underprepared, conditionally admitted students. Again, they firmly reject the label of the institution.

Basic Writers as Less Literate

Many students asserted that they didn't belong in a basic writing course because they were in fact "literate" and ready to learn at a "higher level." For example, this student describes their placement as a fundamental mismatch to their literacy skills: "The entry-level class that I am placed in is not the best fit for me as I believe my skill sets allow me to continue learning at a higher level…I feel that the result is not representative of my English literacy" (*Incoming, Non-First-Generation, Female, Chinese, Resident Student*). These excerpts are more loaded in their implications and reveal the ways in which the mark of a basic writer was associated with a student who might be less capable or even intelligent and less linguistically proficient. By being placed in a basic writing class, students believe they would need to prove their literacy skills: "There are several writings from my Senior English class that demonstrate my literacy" (*Incoming, Non-First-Generation, Male, White, Resident Student*). For many of these students, this was unreasonable as their literate selves have already been verified by outside benchmarks: "My research and literacy abilities were approved and reviewed by the College Board" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Male, Mexican, Resident Student*). While there was no mention of the word literacy or literate in the survey, nor in the student learning outcomes students could access online, these excerpts demonstrate another line drawn by challenge essay writers: literate students are prepared for "college-level" work and sanctioned by outside parties.

Basic Writing as Contingent Acceptance

Finally, while each of the excerpts above point to issues of conditional acceptance, the following are excerpts which detail the way students see their acceptance to an elite university as direct evidence of their ability to be in a first-year composition course: "It would be absolutely useless to try

and place in a course that is not meant for my level of understanding, but that is exactly why I need to be placed in lower division course: it is the ideal next step for me as an incoming Freshman at UC Davis" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Female, African American, Resident Student*). Here, the rupture between how students envision their future academic selves and their placement in basic writing courses is most evident: their acceptance to a selective university means they cannot be a basic writer, and placement in a basic writing class means their full acceptance to the institution has been questioned. As one student commented regarding their placement: "Only then, would it be fair for students to be able to be placed in a proper class by an extraordinary prestigious institution" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Male, Mexican, Resident Student*).

For many students, acceptance into an elite institution is proof they do not need basic writing, and placement in this class then suggests a contingency of their acceptance. Why would they come to a highly sought-after institution if they wanted an easy class for incapable students who attend lesser universities? As this student commented, "I did not come to UC Davis to take the easy way out. I applied because this university can push me to be the best I can be. I'm sure that I can do better than the course I'm currently placed into" (*Incoming, First-Generation, Female, Asian, Resident Student*). The very notion that they would seek out this university, be accepted, and then be told they needed basic writing was a disruption in their plans as a student. Again, students push against the idea that they have been conditionally accepted by the institution.

DISCUSSION

While the Challenge Essays from Writing Placement 2020 were diverse in their approaches and constructions, common themes demonstrate interesting issues with having students argue against a particular placement. Specifically, it's important to note that much of the language in this analysis (basic, literate, etc.) *did not* appear on the survey or any of the limited introductory information and instead came from students' perceptions of the placement. Indeed, even the university's basic writing class is referred to as "entry-level writing" across the institution, avoiding these language constructions. Students in this study were arguing out of placement in a "entry-level"/basic writing course and into a "lower-division"/ first-year writing courses, arguing for fulfillment, for one less class, and for a more whole sense of self. Positioned as future college students and past high school

students, students drew on negative perceptions of basic writing, their past selves, and their APSs to support their argument. Their choice was colored by common tropes around basic writing as deficit-based and othering, which deeply conflicted with how they saw themselves as students. With this in mind, I argue that the evidence revealed that placement in a basic writing course caused a disruption in students' future academic selves as their APS was deeply misaligned with their recommended placement, suggesting a complicating factor for relying on student choice in placement.

As is evident in the excerpts, students arguing against placement in basic writing classes perceive their placement in the course as regression. As students accepted into an elite institution, they perceived their future selves as prepared for advanced college-level coursework and that anything else was an impediment to their momentum as students. For them, basic writing meant repetition of high school content, time spent on learning skills they already possessed, and damage to their progress. How can they be their ideal academic possible selves (APS), embedded in college and expanding if they are "miss(ing) the opportunity to be integrated in classes that challenge my abilities as a writer?" Placement in this class means a lack of "growth" and a "waste of time"; acts that are antithetical to the behaviors of high achieving students. If a student's future self is high achieving, growing, developing, then placement in a basic writing class suggests a disruption in that self to students. In this case, their understanding of basic writing did lend to a simple choice between classes. Despite never experiencing a basic writing course at UC Davis, they were sure they would only be harmed by it.

It was no mistake that challenge essay writers spent time reminding their readers that they were in fact fully admitted into an "extraordinary prestigious institution." Because they "did not come to UC Davis to take the easy way out," their placement in a basic writing course was fundamentally wrong; the challenge essay activity and the placement tradition it embodies required students to advocate yet again for their sanctioned space in the university, reminding their reader that they have already been accepted, a common issue in placement (Poe et al.). Their recommended survey placement did not match against how they saw themselves as an accepted student at an elite institution. Their admissions, it seems, were already proof that they did not need placement in a basic writing class. Through the lens of APS, these claims, which were common in the challenge essays, can be seen as a rupture in who they believed their future student to be at an elite institution. They speak to the troubling narrative around placement in basic writing as simply the difference between "college-ready" and "academically

underprepared" (Toth 4). In this case, the students could not possibly need an entry-level class because this meant their admission to the university was flawed. This deficit-based perception cannot be separated from issues of race that basic writing scholars have noted. Indeed, while identities of the speakers here varied, it's important to note that an automated placement in a basic writing course may have layered stigma onto students of color, who may have already been experiencing fear of conditional acceptance.

The fracture runs so deeply against how students perceive themselves they even feel the need to remind us that they are in fact literate and that this literacy has already been sanctioned by outside parties. The students who employed this language are suggesting, in some ways, that placement in a basic writing class signifies a lack of literacy, which for them is an impossibility based on their past selves' experiences. Their future self is more than literate; it is college literate, and that has been verified by other assessments. Often, students in the challenge essays would cite success with AP and SATs as the only reason one could need to see they were beyond basic writing courses, despite growing evidence that participation in advanced high school coursework is not evidence of preparedness for college-level writing courses (Hall). While this is unsurprising based on the way test scores are often used to move students out of basic writing courses, the idea that placement in a basic writing course "is not representative of my English literacy" suggests another fracture in their perceived future self. Their APS, progressing and growing in college, is without a doubt not in need of literacy remediation, as literacy is a fixed concept that they no longer need to develop; they use their past self-experiences to locate basic writing as a space of illiteracy and distance themselves from it. This deeply reflects the "basic" vs. "normal" dichotomy that Melzer and others have named and further complicates the choice to place into a basic writing class.

IMPLICATIONS

Viewing these excerpts in the light of APSs is especially important when basic writing scholars consider that possible selves "reflect the extent to which the self is socially determined and constrained" (Markus and Nurius 954). Much like the research that reflects student's negative dispositions toward their basic writing class, the perspectives captured in the challenge essays are reflective of the broad narrative around remediation that the field has worked against for decades. For placement, these findings have deep implications for forcing the burden of labor and proof of "college-

preparedness" on students themselves. In these moments of frustration and disappointment around their placement in a basic writing course, the students employ the rhetoric of "bonehead" English, where students in the class are 'dumb' or 'not trying' and the work is a 'waste of time' (Bachman 18). Student arguments not only reflect the tropes basic writing instructors and scholars hear about remediation, tropes that are historically embedded in issues of basic writing as the home of students of color, but use these tropes for self-advocacy, demonstrating the problem with leaving students alone and singularly responsible for the labor of placement.

These reactions are the result of the disruption of a student's future academic self—the one that is successful, forward moving, college-ready, and achieving. The arguments that students used to demonstrate their preparedness for a first-year composition course were laden with emotion, frustration, and the sense that they had been wronged. Again, students of color may have experienced this wrong two-fold due to the connotations of placement. For many students in this study, this placement was in direct opposition to how they saw their college experience and themselves as students; this placement disrupted who they believed their future academic self would be, particularly after their acceptance to an elite institution. The disruption is the result of asking students to again prove their admittance to the university, and in some cases, might reflect the problematic nature of basic writing being conflated with not only intelligence but also non-white student bodies. Since being labeled a basic writer came with so many negative connotations, this was no choice for students. It was, instead, an imperative act of self-preservation to argue their way out of basic writing.

By viewing these placements through the lens of Academic Possible Selves basic writing scholars can see the importance of this placement moment as identity forming, which may explain why research in placement suggests that students are more confident and have higher senses of self-efficacy when they get to choose their class and align their course with their future academic self (Aull). In many ways, this is further evidence that student choice in placement is crucial to self-efficacy, as it is then identity affirming, rather than dismissing. Further, this suggests that choice in placement and how that choice is presented is also extremely complicated as it is both deeply personal and highly contextual, depending on past experiences, models of APSs available to an individual, and social context. In this case, choice is not a binary. It is not simply, "I need support/time/instruction, or I don't." It is a social and political choice that impacts identity and formations of self, which may be further compounded by marginalized identities that

students occupy. These complications in choice are reflected in other work around self-placement that acknowledges the difficulties in encouraging self-reflection in students (Schendel and O'Neill), particularly as they connect past experiences with future writing situations (Gere et al.); however, the extent to which the field considers choice and reflection as an act mediated through negative perceptions of remediation and the identities associated with it is limited.

Plainly, for students, choice comes with competing values. Indeed, only 6% of students who had the chance to challenge their placement chose to do so. This begs the need for more research around what choice means to students, who feels welcome to choose, and how APSs, a framework which suggests that students from lower socioeconomic, non-dominant linguistic, and minoritized backgrounds may have less positive views of their future selves, may play into placement practices. It's clear that the students from this sampling had a strong sense of their APSs, and they felt in a position to advocate for their particular vision of their future self.

Of course, outright rejection of the basic writing label was not the strategy of every student who participated in the challenge activity. There were several examples of students who suggested that while they thought they could excel in a first-year composition course, they were not surprised to be labeled as in need of more preparation, which may reflect other research on APSs and how they are formed and conditioned over time (Kerpelman and Pittman; Oysterman and Fryberg). Then, there were the thousands of students who the writing placement team never heard from, who accepted their placement whether happily or not. These students may or may not have experienced this type of conflict; only more research on the socially mediated nature of choice in placement will reveal larger trends. These concerns, among others around the placement mechanism from 2020, prompted us to substantially revise this placement process, emphasizing removing the burden of labor from students and distributing the difficulty of choice across stakeholders (see Burke Reifman et al.).

Basic writing scholars, in their mission to support students and acclimate them to writing in higher education contexts and ensure equitable placement in basic writing courses, must contend with how APSs play into students' participation in self-placement models. The variety of self-placement presented here, an impersonal automatic placement that relied on the labor of students in changing it, is one element of self-placement that should be reconsidered in the light of this evidence. Indeed, as legislation works to push self-placement as a panacea to inequitable placement,

understanding choice, as mediated by social stigma around remediation, which is compounded by issues of race, will become imperative in truly delivering equitable placement in writing courses. Namely, the field must push against the notion that universities render placement neutral by relying solely on student choice.

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APPENDIX A

Writing Placement 2020 Challenge Activity Introductory Page & Essay Prompt

Welcome to the Writing Placement 2020 Challenge Activity!

This is your opportunity to collaborate with UC Davis faculty in determining the most appropriate first writing course for you.

Your goal in this challenge activity will be to write an essay that makes an argument for what you believe is a better writing placement for you than the one you received through the Writing Placement 2020 survey. An outline of the challenge process is below.

Challenge activity description:

- The challenge activity consists of **two assignments** you must complete:
  1. Select and upload a recent example of your own academic writing (within the last academic year) that represents your current abilities as a writer.
  2. Write and upload the challenge essay that argues for the writing placement that you believe best aligns with your writing abilities and knowledge.
- You have **7 days** to complete both of these assignments.
- Detailed instructions about each assignment will become available when your challenge wave period begins.
- The assignments can be accessed by clicking on the "Assignments" tab on the left side of this screen.
- You will receive your results via email from writingplacement@ucdavis.edu.

If you experience technical issues with Canvas during your 7-day challenge period, please email us your materials by the challenge deadline at writingplacement@ucdavis.edu.

Before you begin:

- Read about the pathways and courses available to new first-year students at the writing placement website . This information can be used as evidence for your argument in the challenge essay.
- Locate, reread, and upload an example of your own academic writing from within the last academic year.
- Read the instructions for both assignments in this challenge carefully once they are available to you.

Both your writing sample and the challenge essay will be read and assessed by UC Davis writing faculty. After we review your writing we will issue your final placement results. Placement results issued through the challenge activity are final and cannot be challenged again.

If you have concerns or questions during the 7-day challenge period, please contact us at writingplacement@ucdavis.edu.

WP 2020 May Wave: Upload your Challenge Essay

Due Jun 5, 2020 by 5pm **Points** 0 **Submitting** a file upload **File Types** doc, docx, pdf, rtf, and txt
Available until Jun 5, 2020 at 5pm

This assignment was locked Jun 5, 2020 at 5pm.

Instructions: You will be writing a short essay that makes an argument about what writing placement is best for you. This essay should include clear and well supported reasons for your chosen writing placement.

We recommend that you collect and consider the following information as potential supporting evidence for your argument:

- what you know about yourself as a writer of academic English
- what you know about the course(s) in the pathway/placement you were assigned
- What you know about the course(s) in the placement you believe you should have.

Task: Write an essay of around 300 words that makes an argument, supported by evidence, about the best writing placement for you. Once you have written, revised, and proofread your essay upload the final document here within Canvas before the deadline.

Criteria: UC Davis writing faculty will review your essay and make our decision based on how well your essay demonstrates:

- A clear and focused argument
- Use of appropriate evidence to support that argument
- Purposeful organization of ideas
- Clearly indicate when using sources
- Appropriate language and tone for an academic audience
- Sentence-level clarity.

APPENDIX B

Challenge Scoring Guide

Challenge Activity Scoring Process
Step 1: Read the challenge response.
Step 2: Mark Criteria 1 YES or NO.
Step 3: Mark Criteria 2 YES or NO

Both are YES: Challenge accepted	Both are NO: Challenge denied	Split: Consult writing sample **Step 4**: Read Writing Sample. Mark Criteria 3 YES or NO If YES: Challenge accepted. If No: Challenge denied.

Challenge Activity Scoring Rubric

CRITERIA	**Evaluation**
1. Clear Placement Argument?	◦ Yes ◦ No
2. Appropriate Evidence?	◦ Yes ◦ No
• Both Criteria 1 and 2 are Yes? = Challenge accepted --> enter score and final pathway in Box folder spreadsheet for the Wave • Both Criteria 1 and 2 are No? = Challenge denied --> enter socre and final pathway in Box folder spreadsheet for the Wave • Split? = (continue to Writing Sample and Criteria 3)	
3. Writing sample demonstrates C or higher?	◦ If Yes, Challenge accepted --> enter score and final pathway in Box folder spreadsheet for the Wave ◦ If No, Challenge denied --> enter score and final pathway in Box folder spreadsheet for the Wave

APPENDIX C

Final Codebook

Parent Code	Child Code I	Child Code II	Definition
FEATURES OF WRITING SAMPLE			
	Content: Experiential Evidence		
		Peer Review Experience as Evidence	Student uses experience with peer review as evidence of preparedness
		"Good Student": They do Well Writing Essays	Student evokes their understanding of a high achieving, strong, and capable student as evidence.
		Grammatical/ Linguistic Proficiencies as Evidence	Student discusses proficiency with granmmar, understanding of grammar, or lack of grammatical errors as evidence.
		Awareness/ Use of US Educational System	Student uses their knowledge of colleges, programs, tests, or facets of US Education as evidence
		Uses Literature Courses/ Knowledge of Literary Conventions as Evidence	Student uses knowledge of literary conventions, experience reading or analyzing literature (fiction/non-fiction), or time in a literature class as evidence.
		Uses Non-Writing Coursework as Evidence	Student discusses experience wriitng in classes outside of English/Literature/ Language Arts. (Ex: Lab reports, papers for history class, etc.) as evidence.

		Writing Process Experience as Evidence of Writing Preparedness	Student discusses engagement in the writing process (invention, drafting, revising, etc.) as evidence.
	Content: Knowledge Acquired through Research as Evidence		
		Details about Different UCD Courses as Evidence	Student uses information about different pathways/ courses
		Names UCD Course: BW 7	Student specifically names course.
		Names UCD Course: BW1A	Student specifically names course.
		Names UCD Course: NAS5	Student specifically names course.
		Names UCD Course: ENL3	Student specifically names course.
		Names UCD Course: 3A	Student specifically names course.
	Style/Approaches to Writing and in the Writing		
		Language Interferes with Meaning/ Comprehension of Essay	The writing is difficult to understand; not just grammatical errors, but errors that interfere with meaning.
		Features of Standardized Writing	Student uses structures, styles, or organization patterns found in high-stakes testing situations (five paragraph essays, 3-point thesis, narrative introduction, etc.)

		Addresses or Acknowledges Faculty as Audience	Student outwardly addresses their reader.
		Use of Citations/Quotes from Sources	Student employs a direct quote or cites an outside source.
EXPRESSIONS OF THE STUDENT			
	Frustration with Previous Educational/Life Experience		Student expresses frustration/has an emotional response to a past event in their education or personal lives.
	Believes Test Scores Fulfill BWR Status		Student reports that they believe their test scores, once submitted to admissions, will fulfill their ELWR status.
	Argues for BWR Fulfillment Despite Test Scores		Student will argue that although their test scores do not technically fulfill their ELWR status, their scores are "close enough"/"good enough" and should fulfill their requirement.
	Identifies ALWR as "Remedial," "Basic," or "Abnormal"		Student may infer or claim that ELW courses are too slow, redundant, for the unskilled/unintelligent, etc.
	Self-Efficacy as Evidence of Writing Preparedness		Student expresses a strong confidence in their ability to do the work in their desired class.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PLACEMENT PROCESS			
	Frustration (Emotions) over WP2020 Process/ Results		Student expresses frustration, anger, etc. over their engagement in the WP2020 process.
	Confusion over WP2020 Results or Process		Student details their confusion about some aspect of the WP2020 experience.
	Critique of the Placement Mechanism		Student will critique some aspects of WP2020, offer alternative methods of assessment.
	Argued for Same Path Placement		Student reaffirms their path placement.
	Mentions Discussion with Advisor Had or Desired		Student mentions advisor.
	Misunderstands Purpose of the Essay		Student uses the challenge essay for an alternative purpose.
SELF-REPORTED FEATURES OF THE STUDENT			
	Academic Features		
		Academic Success as Evidence of Writing Preparedness	Student Describes their high grades, honors classes, overall academic achievements, and so on as evidence of writing preparedness.
		Discusses Test Anxiety/ Trouble	Student details the stress, anxiety, etc. they experience with tests as evidence.
		Discusses CC or 4-Year Experience	Student points to experience in a college-level course as evidence of writing preparedness.

		Lack of Access to Resources	Student describes a lack of access to some element that would have aided in their success (Ex: Quiet place to study, access to AP tests, etc.).
		Self-Identified International Student	Student identifies as International Student
	Language Identity		
		Misplaced in ML Class	Student identifies misplacement in Multilingual class; they don't identify as multilingual.
		Monolinguistic	Student identifies as monolingual. Often accompanied with other demographic information.
		Multilingual, But English is Primary Language	Student identifies as multilingual but is comfortable using English/identifies English as their primary language.

“I come from a different generation”: Quare Dreaming and Career-Making in Basic Writing

Candace Chambers and Spencer Salas

ABSTRACT: The article stories the dream-making that allowed a young Black Arkansawyer, Deborah Welch, to devise an initial career pathway in the secondary English classroom, then one in postsecondary education, and then neither in favor of an elsewhere she was determined to claim as her own. Theorizing her shape-shifting choice-making with “quareness” (Johnson), we underscore Welch’s quixotic agency as she transgressed traditional institutional and disciplinary boundaries and formulae to reimagine what “becoming somebody” might signify for herself and a new generation of basic writing professionals.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; black women teachers; quareness; shapeshifting portfolios

> But now it’s more, so like, is this a space that’s making me happy? Is this a space that I think is helping me to fulfill the dream or whatever it is right now I have in my head? It could change. But not necessarily putting so much weight on these older, more professional people’s ideas. Because they’re like, what they see is, ummm, for a young Black female to kind of progress in their eyesight is going to be different for me in my eyesight because I’m younger than them. And I come from a different generation, whereas like my parents’ generation—which is a lot of professors that I encountered—getting opportunities to go to graduate school all the way in another state was unheard of at twenty-five or twenty-six.
>
> —Deborah Welch (a pseudonym)

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Deborah Welch was born in 1993 to two parents who lived in a Little Rock, Arkansas all-Black city block. For the first ten years of her life, Welch rarely ventured beyond the neighborhood except for Sundays when the Welch family piled into the car and drove to her maternal grandmother's Baptist church an hour into the country. Whether sitting on a church pew or leaning into her parents' kitchen table, "It was just Black folks," Welch explained. Black love cocooned her whole being and the little girl learned to love and dream big and to want better.

As Vanessa Siddle-Walker explained in her tribute to the legacies of Black women educators of the rural pre-*Brown v. Board of Education* South, "When they [Black teachers] told African American children they could 'be somebody,' they in effect were examples of the truths they espoused, thus making themselves significant role models" (267). The idea that Deborah Welch would become "somebody" was the catechism she took to heart during the marathon Sunday services of her youth at the church where generations of Welches had worshiped. And by her twenty-seventh year, Deborah Welch had accumulated a BA in English Education, an MA in College Composition, and was only a few semesters away from a PhD in Social Foundations of Education. In between, she had navigated five years as a public affairs writer for the US Department of Homeland Security, multiple virtual and face-to-face adjunct writing gigs, and seeded and grown herself an educational consultancy. By Siddle Walker's measure (and ours too), Welch had succeeded. However, unlike the steady servant-leadership of the women who preceded and surrounded her, Deborah Welch's professional choice-making was unpredictable. That was how she liked it—different.

Welch's shapeshifting professional portfolio first caught our attention as we worked to "story" (San Pedro and Kinloch) Black and Brown teachers' lives in New South spaces. Among other things, we were interested in the caring-agency that inspired Black and Brown teachers to tend to their mothers' proverbial gardens, the socially constructed frames they encountered in the workplace and the sometimes-irreconcilable differences that compelled some to abandon the K-16 marketplace altogether (see e.g., Benson et al.; Mason and Salas; Salas et al.). Deborah Welch fell into the category of participants we were looking to interview—sort of. That is, Welch never actually committed fully to the K-12 or basic writing classroom despite having the bloodline and credentials that would have allowed her to do so.

As an undergraduate, Welch had prepared to enter and stay in a secondary English setting but never did mostly because she was barely out of high school herself and couldn't imagine being a proverbial giving tree

teacher for a bunch of crazy kids to slowly dismantle (cf. Johnson et al.; Silverstein and Silverstein). Later, her graduate studies potentially positioned Welch for an academic life in postsecondary writing, maybe even at an R1 and on the tenure track. That was the unicorn everyone seemed to be after. She completed a fully funded MA program in college composition and was just about ready to start a PhD. But when Welch figured out just how much money she would (not) make and what her working conditions would (not) be, she deep-sixed that potential career too. The hunger games of corporate higher education weren't for her either.

So, in the fall of 2020, Welch sat down with us to explain more fully why and how, despite her various degrees, credentials, and family lineage of rural Southern Black womanist schoolteachers, she rejected the (post) secondary writing classroom as a professional terrain. What allowed her to do so? She explained that her generation wanted more. She wanted more. This article is about Welch's wanting more and the Black Southern girlhood that enabled that desire.

As a way of an extended preface, in our own relatively short careers, we have seen basic writing morph from a stand-alone sequence of prerequisites for freshman composition to a progression of co-requisite coursework taken alongside credit-bearing composition requirements. In other cases, developmental writing has shrunk to a menu of compressed self-paced competency-based course offerings to redress specific writing issues with the least disruption possible to degree attainment (Whinnery and Pompelia). What hasn't changed much is the exploitation of "just-in-time" contingent labor (Schell; Schreyer).

In 1987, the Conference on College Composition and Communications (CCCC) articulated its "Wyoming Resolution," lobbying for, among other things, improved writing teachers' pay, benefits, and working conditions—a litany reiterated in 2014 and again in 2016 (McDonald and Schell). In between, Cheryl Glenn famously compared institutional practices of hiring short-term, low-wage, and expendable college composition professionals to fast-food franchises' exploitation of an anonymous workforce. In other words, for Glenn teaching postsecondary writing without benefits or any sort of short- or long-term security was a "McJob" as in "McDonald's." Notably, Glenn's over-the-counter service metaphor implied an actual brick and mortar workplace be it a specific McDonalds address or an academic building. More recently, for the pan-academic *Chronicle of Higher Education* readership, Eva Swindler likened higher education's increasing reliance on

short-term contingent labor to driving an Uber in circles around a college campus or campuses.

We know that in the neoliberal architecture of higher education, freshman composition and its variants have historically been framed as a remedial enterprise (Goen-Salter; Ostergaard and Allan). Per corporate logic, it hardly matters who an academic manager employs to get sub-par students to a specific metric of imagined readiness. Thus, for decades, higher education's exploitation of adjunct instruction seemed a uniquely basic writing conundrum. More recently, with 2023 state legislatures in Texas, Florida, and North Carolina proposing the elimination of tenure altogether (Brown), the vulnerability of the postsecondary basic writing workforce is beginning to look less like an isolated disciplinary characteristic and more like a red flag for the future of the academy writ large.

That said, there's still enough lure to the professorship that we continue to enroll, somewhat disingenuously, dozens of graduate students every year into our carefully curated graduate degree programs with little mention of the desertification of the higher education job marketplace. Deborah Welch, as we shall explain, was one such recruit—lured by the shiny brass ring of the professoriate. But the thing was, as we came to know, Welch's thinking about her education, her career, and her happiness was "quare"—a Black Southern derivative of queer.

It's hard to say what queering or quaring are exactly because the constructs resist a neat rule system of This is v. This isn't. Originally an analytic tool for disrupting heteronormativity and debilitating binaries relating to human sexuality and gender, queering has since flourished as a spacious intersectional approach for exposing hegemonic normativity in all of its forms including the metaphorically closeted space of basic writing—"designed to remediate deviant students and allow them to pass in the traditional academic setting" (Inman 2). Critics of color have noted, however, the default Whiteness within and across queering and the folly of trying to disaggregate sexuality and gender from socially constructed categories of race, class, and more (Anzaldúa; Crenshaw; Harris and Leonardo; hooks).

Pushing back against colorblind and class-neutral queering, E. Patrick Johnson proposed "quare" as a uniquely Black Southern re-articulation of "queer." His grandmother used the word from her North Carolina front porch to describe the eccentricities of specific neighborhood children (e.g., "That sho'll is a quare chile") and, more broadly, anyone or anything out of the ordinary. Per Johnson,

> On the one hand, my grandmother uses "quare" to denote something or someone who is odd, irregular, or slightly off-kilter—definitions in keeping with traditional understandings and uses of "queer." On the other hand, she also deploys "quare" to connote something excessive—something that might philosophically translate into an excess of discursive and epistemological meanings grounded in African American cultural rituals and lived experience. (2)

"Reading" a neighbor from a front porch rocking chair or "talking back" to an academic dean are performative strategies through which individuals and communities might turn, bend, disrupt, and/or subvert dominant meaning systems through which Black and Brown bodies have been historically seen and overseen.

Remixing Johnson's theorization in her rereading of Black womanist narratives across the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries, Janeka Bowman Lewis identified that same sort of quareness as a recurring feature of womanist Afro-futuristic stories and storytelling:

> There are Isie Watts and Janie Crawford of Zora Neale Hurston's imagination, who want to travel the world and escape bonds of girlhood and domesticity. There is Toni Morrison's Nel Wright, who sees a future beyond her mother's domination, and Pecola Breedlove, whose eyes finally become blue enough (if only in her own mind) to escape what she has seen. There is Sapphire Claireece's Precious Jones. . . they are lost and unwanted, trapped in systems of social welfare and foster care. But they are also representatives of Afro-futuristic visions of Black girlhood, of the "quare" routes and pathways of existence. (97)

Thus, in Lewis's reading, quareness approaches Black women's dreams of accessing emotional, physical, spiritual, and psychological territories unencumbered by racialized and gendered limitations—encompassing "the whole being (or being whole) while the individual self (or who society imagines or demands that Black girls be) remains just a part. Quare narratives are narratives beyond the ordinary" (Lewis 96). Deborah Welch's was, too.

STORYING DEBORAH WELCH

As researchers, we recognize that our individual stories also helped to shape this representation of Welch's story. Our interview sequence with Welch was one of a series of opportunities we've created to hear and receive the lived experiences of Black and Brown educators across a range of New South K-16 communities. Chambers, a Black Southern woman doctoral candidate in Urban Literacy Education, was assigned to collaborate with Salas, a Chamorro male faculty mentor, in a Fall 2020 research apprenticeship. Chambers approached Welch, her longtime colleague, about a potential interview sequence. Welch readily accepted.

We value stories because, as Irving Seidman put it, storytelling "is [a] process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience" (7). Or, as Timothy San Pedro and Valerie Kinloch theorized, storying is both a research method and practice that intentionally centers "the realities, desires, and stories of the people with whom we work as we also situate their stories in relation to our stories, lives, and research projects in humanizing ways" (374S).

Leveraging Seidman's in-depth interview protocol, we accessed Welch's story across three 90-minute interviews distributed over two weeks. The first layer of the in-depth interview sequence established Welch's "life story" from her Little Rock, Arkansas childhood to the present. The second asked Welch to elaborate on certain critical incidents related to the intersection of her Black femininity and the educational and professional choice-making to which she had alluded in the first interview. The final 90-minute interview asked Welch to make meaning of her non-traditional career through the lens of her layered and complex identity as Black Southern woman.

We approached the sum of Welch's interview transcripts as "fictions"—"In the sense that they are 'something made,' 'something fashioned' . . . not that they are false, unfactual, or merely 'as if' thought experiments" (Geertz 15). We set about "transforming" the data in an interplay of descriptive, analytic, and interpretive moves (Wolcott). After multiple (re)readings of the complete transcripts, the authors met together for a series of analytic conversations that included our reconstruction of Welch's professional chronology. Guided by our theoretical framework and using the comment function in Microsoft Word, we then bracketed segments of the interview transcript such as "I come from a different generation; You kind of make your own cushion; I guess being like a smart girl or whatever." These data

quotations were the prompts for the initial and then integrative memos we composed around Welch's professional dream-making and the basis for the representation we present here (Emerson et al.). Finally, we note that Welch read the entire manuscript before submission; and we made large and small edits based on her input.

QUARE DREAMING

In the sections that follow, we organize Welch's trajectory into a sequence of quare dreams—fugitive spaces that allowed her to imagine an initial career pathway in the secondary English classroom, then one in postsecondary education, and then neither in favor of an elsewhere she was determined to claim as her own. In so doing, we underscore Welch's quixotic agency as she reimagined what "becoming somebody" might also signify—and in ways that transgressed and improvised traditional institutional and disciplinary binaries and formulae.

Quare Dream Sequence #1: Imagining a Pathway

Welch's mother, a Historically Black College/University (HBCU) graduate with a degree in education, taught Welch to read before kindergarten. Deborah Welch was a well-behaved and diligent student. By the fourth grade, she was tapped for "a special school, I guess you could call it." Her parents enrolled their young, gifted, and Black daughter in the city's academic and performing arts magnet where Welch remained for the last seven years of her K-12 education.

At the top of her high school class, Welch received a variety of undergraduate scholarship offers—"books, everything was included." She decided on Harris-Stowe State University in St. Louis, Missouri, wavering between journalism and education as a major. Although she had been away from home before on annual Girl Scout camps, and even if St. Louis was exciting, Welch was homesick. She wasn't convinced that Harris-Stowe was the place for her to be. She explained,

> I used to pray all the time, 'God, can you help me figure out this decision on what I'm going to do for my life?' So that's kind of the decision I was wrestling with when I went to Harris-Stowe.

She left Harris-Stowe at the end of the fall semester. Back in Little Rock, she followed up with Philander Smith University—asking if she could have a re-do on the scholarship she had declined in favor of Harris-Stowe. The

response was negative, but Welch still had her FAFSA funding, and because of the frugality her parents instilled in her, Welch never took out a loan.

She declared a major in English education and commuted from home to campus daily—"So I got on the bus, things of that nature. When I started at Philander, I loved it—the feeling that I had when I got there. So, I said, 'I'm good at this writing thing. I don't really like literature. But I'll just deal with it.'"

As the semesters passed, Welch became gradually more involved on campus. She signed up for an HIV awareness initiative and then as a writer for the university's student newspaper, where she stayed on through graduation—"I enjoyed it. I wrote commentaries and interviewed people on campus for other stories." In her junior year, she also entered a paid student public affairs internship program with the US Department of Homeland Security, where she worked seven hours a week during the school year and full-time during the summer and the long Christmas break—writing feature stories for the state of Arkansas' website and Homeland Security blogs mostly.

For her year-long student teaching assignment, Welch purposefully chose two distinct sites: a Black middle school in the city where she would spend the fall semester, and a high school in the rural environs of a neighboring county—"Where the White people lived"—where she would teach in the spring.

Her first semester was chaotic and energizing at the same time. Her mentor teachers—all older Black women—took a tough-love approach, and it worked for them. In her own classroom, Welch developed strong relationships with her seventh-grade students. Consequently, she explained, "I could teach them whatever I want to teach them." The students trusted Welch. She was one of them.

In contrast, her spring placement with a ninth-grade class in a semi-rural, very White middle-class high school was awkward. Her cooperating teacher, a White woman, had not expected Welch to be Black—"'You come from Philander? The Black school?—not even from like one of the White schools?' So, it was a very, it was very weird." Welch could recall "teaching a lesson and then a unit but otherwise not much."

As graduation approached, Welch received a verbal offer to return to the (Black) middle school full-time. In the meantime, her undergraduate advisor at the time encouraged her to think about graduate school. She was, the advisor argued, still single and without any sort of child-rearing responsibilities. Welch's colleagues at Homeland Security chimed in to encourage her to continue her studies, citing her academic and professional

success—and her unusual situation (as everybody told her) of not having any children who depended on her. "It's kinda like, 'Oh, you haven't gotten pregnant? You're an outlier. You should go and get your graduate degree." And I was just like, 'Okay.'"

Welch applied to various MA programs in rhetoric and composition and received a full ride from the University of Georgia. Since she would not be paying anything, Welch decided to accept the offer and put secondary classroom teaching on hold—at least for the moment. She wanted to see what else she could do. She felt it was the moment to take a chance.

Quare Dream Sequence #2: (Re)Turning Home

At the age of 21, Welch found herself in the comparatively rare situation of having a professional choice. She might very well have simply taken the middle-school job and stayed there for the next forty years. Teaching was in her blood. So many of the women around and before her had made that choice—to serve. But Welch still wondered what was out there—what other future she could make for herself. And as everybody was telling her, because she was not yet pregnant, now was the time to do it. The University of Georgia seemed like a far-away place. Welch knew that she would be homesick. But it wasn't forever, and an MA would open long-shuttered doors to Black country girls like her.

Athens, GA was not any more Southern than her Little Rock, AR childhood home. But Welch remembered vividly the shock of her first weeks in Georgia:

> I had my hair braided for school. I'm walking in with these long braids and they're looking at me like, 'Where did you come from? Why are you here? You're in an English M.A. program, and you are a Black woman? You're not even a Black man.' I'm sitting in the middle of all these White folks looking at me. I'm looking at them and then, yeah, school starts.

Welch realized that aside from a semester of student teaching, she had never really been in a predominately White space aside from the high school classroom where she spent a couple of months sitting quietly in a corner. Athens felt "weird." The city was still highly segregated, and it was rare to see a Black woman (or man) in the bars and restaurants of East Broad Street, where her classmates tended to flock on Friday and Saturday evenings.

In her coursework, Welch struggled with her own quiet nature. Her interactions with her White classmates were belittling—"They'll dismiss what I'm saying—as if I didn't say anything. Maybe I'm tripping? You know, this could have happened with Black people too, but it was very awkward."

Her first-year assistantship at the undergraduate writing center was especially challenging. When the White male undergraduates entered her cubicle for appointments, their double-takes were undisguised. Welch explained that because her name didn't particularly "ring Black," the (White male) undergraduates were often dumbstruck when they met her face-to-face, "They would just look at me like, 'Can we go ahead and get this over with?' I would get those interactions all the time."

In her third semester, Welch began teaching an actual freshman composition course. She was nervous. It was 2016 and the eve of the Trump presidency. For context, we note that just a decade before Welch's arrival to the Athens campus, the State of Georgia had experienced a lengthy public controversy about the design of its flag and meaning(s). The 1956 version (the same year of Brown v Board of Education) juxtaposed the State Seal with the Confederate Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia—the one most associated with the Confederacy and its white supremacist roots. A short-lived (2001-2003) revision followed—blue with the Seal hovering above a collection of past Georgia flags and those of the nation. A 2003 referendum resulted in a "compromise flag"—the Seal encircled by 13 stars and superimposed over the lesser-known First Flag of the Confederacy. Moreover, just an hour west of Athens, you can still visit a Confederate parade of Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis literally carved into the north face of the quartz monzonite dome of Stone Mountain, GA (see also, e.g., Salas). Thus, the racialized dog-whistles that punctuated the MAGA campaign were instantly recognizable for the state's long-term Black and White residents.

Welch felt even less safe than the year before—"So I would have a student who would come to class with her Make America Great Again hat. I'm sure other people in the classroom felt that way." Welch re-adjusted the readings to explore hate speech. The students liked the course and responded to Welch and her youth. After all, she was just a few years older than the first-year students in her section. Or perhaps it was a combination of her undergraduate secondary English licensure and her teaching lineage that made her section, even with its emphasis on criticality, somehow less frightening for her White students. Whatever the case, a large portion of the class followed her into the Spring section by their own volition. They liked her, she guessed.

Notwithstanding her relative success in the undergraduate classroom, the Whiteness of the University of Georgia was, at times, overwhelming. Welch confided that she would go to Black restaurants in Atlanta to get away from it all and "have some Brown people around me" and began frequenting a Black church on Sundays. In the meantime, Welch plodded along through the degree and eventually befriended a classmate from the Tennessee mountains, an equally young White woman, who started the program with her. Two country mice (albeit Welch had grown up in the Little Rock city limits), the women developed an inter-racial odd-couple simpatico that their mostly Atlanta sophisticates, found unexpected and, therefore, amusing. Welch recalled the pair being met with side-eye glances and wry grins.

For her graduate assistantship, Welch was matched with the department's sole Black woman graduate faculty member. She joined her ethnographic fieldwork around Black community literacies. This was the best thing about Georgia, she explained—driving out into rural Black communities and working side-by-side with another Black woman who had "become somebody." By her second year, the same mentor was encouraging her to do a PhD. Welch applied to a handful of programs and received multiple offers—all full rides.

Through a combination of her graduate assistantship, a remote internship with Homeland Security, and the personal economy that had been such a part of her upbringing, Welch completed the MA not only debt-free but with some extra "acorns" stored up. Since the degree was fully funded, Welch packed a U-Haul and headed to the University of Minnesota to start a new life and a doctoral program.

Two days after arriving in Minneapolis to begin a joint PhD in English Education and Composition, Welch sensed something was very wrong. She turned around and drove herself back to Little Rock, Arkansas. It was hard for Welch's extended community family to fathom why Welch had driven away from an R1. Little old Deborah Welch had worked so hard to get a seat at the big table only to decide she wasn't hungry. For them, Welch's decision had seemingly disregarded intergenerational anthems for lifting up the race.

Quare Dream Sequence #3: Imagining her Freedom

At various junctures in her journey, Welch seemed to possess an emotional dowsing rod for divining what would (not) satisfy her professionally. A whole lot of people back home saw her success as their success. But Welch's happiness, she understood, was hers. The unspoken message

she received back in her Little Rock neighborhood was, "We thought you were going to be the one that could make it." But Welch had her reasons for walking away (or driving away) from a fully funded University of Minnesota doctoral degree program.

First, Georgia had been difficult emotionally. Not only had she experienced a highly racialized two years, but she also saw, in her mentor, the sort of future that awaited her in the Whiteness of higher education—"She had got her PhD later in life. She was a K-12 teacher. She made it basically; she made it to the top. But it was just how much fighting she had to do when she got there in that space." She googled just how much her professors were making in their coveted positions. It wasn't much:

> To teach at a college level, you have to have a master's degree in English, which is probably very rare for people who look like me. Because again, being a Black person and then being a Black woman, we need to be in something that's gonna make some money to provide for our families and things of that nature. And English—it's kind of a gamble. A lot of them are middle school and high school teachers.

Welch was not ready to spend four to six years doing a degree that would require circumnavigating a White space once again. Neither did she want to commit to middle grades English Language Arts or secondary English for the rest of her life. She was still in her twenties. She wanted to figure out what she could do with the degrees she already had. Welch quietly returned to her position at the US Department of Homeland Security to think about her next steps.

We asked Welch why she hadn't taken, at least temporarily, a teaching position in a Black (or even White) high school back home. Her Arkansas teaching license was still up to date. Welch would have been a coup for any school district in any state. Welch explained that over the years and multiple degrees, she had gradually climbed up the Homeland Security pay scale and was already making $50K annually. Even with a master's degree, entering a high school classroom as a first-year teacher would have meant a substantial pay cut that would take decades to recuperate. It was a non-starter.

As early as Philander, Welch developed an interest in entrepreneurship—avidly reading financial self-help books and binge-watching episodes of The Suze Orman Show. She had an idea—one that had come to her during her days at the Undergraduate Writing Center there:

> I used to work at the front desk, and I would hear people calling all

> the time, 'Can y'all edit my paper? Can you do this to this?'—'We don't edit papers in the writing center.' I'm like, 'It could be me—I could be doing this.'

In Georgia, she started editing essays and resumes on the side—"It was my first business. And then when I came home after moving from Minnesota, I started learning more about entrepreneurship, Black entrepreneurship, and financial freedom."

She began piecing together a present and future for herself—trademarking an academic writing business and networking her services across the Black church circuit and her HBCU contacts. Word spread. Welch received invitations to lead college essay writing workshops for cohorts of high school students around Little Rock. She coached high school students one-on-one—helping them find and apply for scholarships that might fund their futures. She edited papers and resumes for graduate students across the state. She did take on various online adjunct basic writing and freshman composition positions. But these were side gigs. She kept dreaming, still wanting a PhD and the title of "Doctor" to legitimize and grow the business she envisioned for herself.

When The University of North Carolina at Greensboro offered her a full ride for a PhD in Social Foundations of Education, she moved again. She was surprised to find that the three lead program faculty members and at least half of her cohort were Black Southerners just like her—almost like an HBCU. The program director focused on making the degree work for every student. He told the cohort that careers were like snowflakes. Each one had its shape. He met with Welch within the first weeks of her arrival for a sit-down to vision-board her future. Welch told him about the gaslighting her University of Georgia mentor had gone through—and that was supposed to be one of the good jobs. Welch explained that she already had an MA and was adjuncting part-time. She told him she didn't want a career in the academy. The PhD she was after was all about furthering the Black business she had already. He nodded. This time it felt different and maybe because it felt different, it also felt right.

Coda

Thinking about Black feminist essays, the women who wrote them, and why college writers should read them, Juanita Rodgers Comfort explains, "I examine the writing of African American women, specifically, because their texts document the authoritative spaces they have created for themselves

within and against particular configurations of social, cultural, political, and economic power" (541). Today, there is less of a need to "account for what makes their [Black womanist] discursive situations noteworthy" (Comfort 541). What's still a stretch is finding qualitative representations of the professional choices Black and Brown writing faculty (don't) make or how, for example, a young Black woman could drive away from a full R1 fellowship and the unicorn career of a tenured professorship. And to reiterate, all these things initially drew our attention to Welch—her professional impulses, her determined refusals, her homegrown entrepreneurialism. We sat down and digitally recorded her story wanting to understand what her case could mean for Black and Brown writing professionals working within, around, and against the White innocence of a discipline (Burrows; Davila; Molloy and Bennett).

First, we need to recognize the extent to which decades of corporate K-12 managerialism have plowed over the metaphorical gardens that generations of Black teachers devoted entire careers and even lives to tending. A particularly infamous national illustration that we remember vividly is the December 2008 *Time* magazine cover of Michelle Rhee, one of many short-lived Chancellors of D.C. Public Schools, with a broom in her hand—a metaphor for the deep cleansing of the system that included the shuttering of entire schools and mass firing of tired and ineffective (Black woman) veteran teachers. So, to a certain extent, we understood why Welch skipped over public school teaching as a career. She did so because she could.

At the University of Georgia, in fresh braids, Welch was the Black girl professor with a White woman's name who left the undergraduates tongue-tied. Her MA studies went well enough for her to garner yet another fellowship—this time for a doctorate in English education/composition at an even more lauded university. But within the first days if not hours of her new degree program, Welch was overwhelmed by the Whiteness of it all. She drove straight back to Little Rock where she was met with the deflated gazes of her colleagues and family relations who had so much wanted her to "make it" in a White world because that, Welch explained, was the ultimate measure of success for an educated Black woman. At least, Welch clarified, that's how an older generation of Black folks saw it. For them, it was about taking a seat at the table.

This brings us to our second point. Across the K-12 research and policy literature, there is a nostalgic gaze for Black women's "experiences, knowledge, wisdom and spiritual . . . conceptualizations of their roles as teachers" (Dixson and Dingus 806). For this reason, when a Black woman walks away

from the (post)secondary classroom, there's a heartache that reverberates across generations. Welch felt that regret too. But her career gaze extended far beyond the city block of her childhood or the fields behind her grandmother's wooden home. Rather, the somebody she imagined she might become one day and was contoured by "dreams of freedom and imagining different pathways" (Lewis 96). Thus, another important take-away from Welch's story is that centering Black lives is more than pulling up a chair to a preset table. Rather, as Cynthia Dillard explained, "It is about thoughtfully and carefully curating spaces where Black being is the table" (25).

However, regardless of who is at the table or who the table is, money matters. It mattered for Deborah Welch. The degrees she accumulated and declined or redirected were intentional material investments in her evolving personal business strategy. We note that as we began this manuscript, in 2020, Arkansas public school teachers' pay ranked 47th nationwide with a starting salary of $35,799. The servant leadership roles to which generations of Black women teachers committed was historically under-compensated (at least in terms of worldly rewards). But for Welch, the 2020 Arkansas public school teachers' salary schedule was just plain old servitude. If Welch had choices, it was because of the heavy lifting of the women before her. Just because she had a license didn't mean, at least to Welch, that she had to settle. That was the legacy the women ahead of her had afforded her. She didn't have to settle. For Welch (and her mentors), not settling meant moving forward with another degree and then another—with an eye on a university professorship. However, Welch quickly recognized the exploitation that even a tenure track career in college composition would carry—if she could even get one. She didn't want a full-time adjunct gig either because of the commuting costs and the time constraints. She'd be working for pennies—she figured it out on a calculator. So, Welch flipped it to her advantage—squeezing whatever benefits she could out of a part-time lectureship while patiently building her own business. We admire Welch's entrepreneurialism and celebrate it. Even so, we do not offer Welch's homegrown capitalism as a business template for our colleagues. We are keenly aware of the symbolic and material toll that the ongoing corporatization of higher education has extracted from its workforce. But it's also true that faculty tend to shy away from the vulgarity of dollars and cents when it comes to program recruitment. Candid discussions about the state and future of the profession are just as necessary when we are talking to applicants as we are when we are singing to the choir.

Finally, we don't know on which quare routes or pathways of existence Deborah Welch's excess of wanting more will take her, which opportuni-

ties she'll walk (or drive) away from, which ones she'll take up for a while to see how they go. But within and across Welch's "methods of refusal and disengagement to challenge oppressive regimes . . . to create and imagine freedom" (Coles et al. 3) there seemed to be space enough for a young gifted and Black woman-chile to make her garden grow all by herself and just for herself. Maybe that's the sort of futuristic homeplace that a new generation of basic writing professionals could do with, too.

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Errors & Excitations: William Steig's *The Bad Speller*

William DeGenaro

ABSTRACT: Spelling errors are among the surface features of a written text that can lead readers to judge adversely the intelligence of the writer. Jokes about unconventional spelling frequently circulate, sometimes "punching up" (e.g., Donald Trump's "covfefe" meme) and sometimes "punching down" (e.g., teachers mocking student writing on social media). We should consider spelling errors, or unconventional spelling, to be matters of not just convention but also style. Sometimes, for instance, spelling errors are instances of language play, as in William Steig's children's book The Bad Speller (1970), in which Steig shares 44 whimsical drawings of animals, fairy tales, and idiosyncratic scenes, each captioned with a one-sentence description riddled with unconventional spellings. Steig's book is a meditation on the quirks of the English language and suggests that teachers, among others, might productively approach error and convention with a spirit of playfulness and a sense of humor.

KEYWORDS: error; humor; language play; satire; spelling; style; William Steig

> "Add a little bit to the end there. Spell it again" —Dan Quayle
>
> "It's potato, not potatoe" —Bart Simpson
>
> "The heart of our trouble is with our foolish alphabet. It doesn't know how to spell, and can't be taught" —Mark Twain
>
> "The ability to spell grows slowly out of a number of different kinds of encounters with words—with the sounds of words (phonological encounters), the looks of words on paper (visual encounters), the feel of words as the hand moves to form them in writing (kinesthetic encounters), and the meaning of words as they take their places in the contexts of sentences (semantic encounters)." —Mina Shaughnessy

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Written and illustrated by William Steig, *The Bad Speller* (1970) is a collection of simple, amusing drawings with captions full of unconventionally spelled words.[1] I spent hours as a six- and seven-year-old laughing at Steig's anthropomorphic animals, his offbeat visual take on Biblical and fairy tale characters, and what I later came to see as his aesthetically intentional use of spelling errors. I loved humor, and my big sister Anna taught me to read a year before kindergarten. Next to *The Bad Speller,* my second favorite book was a collection of Victorian limericks by Edward Lear who, like Steig, combined text, language play, and crude drawings. I loved Bugs Bunny cartoons which had a sensibility and a fascination with anthropomorphism that paired well with Steig. My parents' record collection included as much Allan Sherman and Bill Cosby as Rodgers & Hammerstein. I remember lying on the carpet and spinning *Don Adams Meets the Roving Reporter,* a series of offbeat, audio sketches in which the *Get Smart* star voices both a field reporter and the eccentric characters he interviews. A typical gag[2] has the roving reporter waiting at the top of Mt. Everest so he can interview the first person to climb Mt. Everest. I guess fairly obscure, goofy, erudite humor was attractive to an introverted little boy who liked books, records, and gags. But why were Steig's *spelling errors* funny?

Basic writing professionals have long worked to understand, contextualize, and theorize all kinds of errors. From Mina Shaughnessy's groundbreaking study of the logic and consistency of errors in student writing to Min-Zhan Lu's provocative juxtaposition of the unconventionality of student writing and the unconventionality of postmodern literary texts, most of this scholarship focuses on errors in college classrooms, while less work in the field has looked at the circulation of errors in non-academic contexts. Further, little research has been done on the humorous dimension of errors, despite, for instance, the preponderance of social media memes with funny ambiguities and misunderstandings stemming from a misplaced comma or misspelled word. I would like to posit *The Bad Speller* as a text that can show basic writing scholars, teachers, and students the productive potential of irreverence and humor. We already laugh at errors, for good or for bad, so why not take an additional step toward playfulness and toward acknowledgement and cultivation of an *aesthetics of error,* in which we frame errors as a matter of style more so than a matter of correctness?[3] In this essay, I offer a close reading of the stylish errors in Steig and work to reveal both the consistency and intentionality of the spelling errors and the ways the text's errors help Steig to reveal deeper emotional truths. Ultimately, my hope is that this close reading is suggestive of ways that teachers of basic writing can approach style

and sentence-level correctness with a sense of humor and an even greater openness to unconventionality.

Steig and the Bad Speller

William Steig (1907-2003) worked as a cartoonist and artist for four decades before he turned error into spectacle in *The Bad Speller.* Born in 1907 to Polish-Jewish immigrants, Steig grew up in the Bronx, in a house full of children and the arts. His parents were socialist-activists and loved to expose their kids to opera, Shakespeare, left politics, and the emerging field of psychoanalysis (Lorenz 13). When Steig arrived at *The New Yorker* in 1930, he brought these influences with him and used them in his work—a Gramscian "organic intellectual," if you will. Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci theorized that culture workers from the working class had an organic connection to class struggle and hence a great potential for illuminating how hegemony circulates. Indeed, Steig's early cartoons in particular were inclined to portray New York tenements and immigrant communities. Professionally, he was class conscious; alongside artists like Charles Addams[4], Steig argued that *The New Yorker*'s cartoonists were as vital as their writers *(Funny Business).* Steig helped to cement the magazine's reputation for witty, urbane cartoons that are silly, smart, and sometimes dark. For decades, readers were as likely to subscribe for the cartoons as for the prose. For all his populist urges, Steig was aware of his own talent and could be assertive in how he dealt with editors. He ran in artistic, elite circles, socializing with coworkers like E.B. White and other notable New Yorkers like Langston Hughes. His sister-in-law during his first marriage was famed anthropologist Margaret Mead (Lorenz 68-69). Having inherited his parents' affinity for psychology, Steig was influenced by Freud disciple Wilhelm Reich, later discredited for his controversial "orgone accumulators," meant to help persons with mental health problems shed bad energy and retain "life energy." Steig liked Reich's idea that we have in us "pollution" we should release (Lorenz 74-77).

Steig's working-class populism co-existed with an occasionally highbrow sensibility. Throughout the 1930s–1950s, Steig published prolifically in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere, and showed work at curated exhibitions. The latter proved amenable to Steig's odd representations of the mental, emotional, and affective dimensions of the human condition, and he garnered acclaim. Compositionist Ken Macrorie wrote him a fan letter (Box 1, Folder 43). Updike praised the "psychological and philosophical resonance in Steig," arguing that although his work could be "unnerving" Steig is ultimately a

humanist (6). Auden found Steig's work dark and engaging. His *New Yorker* colleague Lee Lorenz wrote, "Steig uses his gifts not to parade his own feelings but to elucidate the feelings of others" (141). My favorite of his many *New Yorker* covers appeared on an issue that came out days before Thanksgiving and portrayed a turkey consulting a psychic who is crying as she gazes into her crystal ball. Silly, and yet Steig's empathy for both turkey and psychic are on display. He didn't begin writing children's stories until the 60s and this new pursuit provided another opportunity to explore the tragi-comic aspects of the human condition (e.g., being lost in "th woulds") and to engage the line between high and low culture. Steig once said, "I enjoy the physical act of writing. When I was a kid, before I could spell, I'd take a pencil and some paper and sit for hours 'writing' a story" (qtd. in Lorenz 121). It was perhaps inevitable that his career trajectory would lead to children's literature.

In his 60s, Steig started publishing stories and wordplay books, ostensibly for kids. His language play books include *CDC* and *CDB,* which contain whimsical illustrations captioned with rebuses comprised entirely of letters representing words ("CDC" = "See the sea"). Some of these pseudo-riddles are difficult to solve and represent Steig's interest in playful subversions of language conventions. *Speller* took a slightly different approach. Combining forty-four simple, black-and-white drawings of fairy tales, anthropomorphic animals, and mundane, melancholy human interactions with one-sentence captions (ironically rendered in red pen) full of unconventional spelling, *The Bad Speller* is a humorous look at the absurdities of English orthography. Figure 1's depiction of wide-eyed children "laust" not only in a forest but perhaps also in their own self-doubt and dread (an existential headspace known as "th woulds") shows Steig's irreverence toward English as well as his knack for putting errors in service to emotional insights.

Neither Steig's Wikipedia page nor his *New York Times* obituary mention *The Bad Speller.* Art historians and curators have written about the installations and anthologies showcasing Steig's paintings, illustrations, and scores of *New Yorker* covers, as well as Steig's decades-long membership in New York's literary and arts communities (*Funny Business;* Lorenz; Topliss). Scholars of children's literature and folklore (Archer; Cott; Spitz; Zipes) have studied Steig's allusion-rich stories like *Shrek!,* by far his best known work, and his Caldecott-winning *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, the latter occasionally banned for illustrations which depict police officers as literal pigs. But even biographical criticism and retrospectives of his career barely include *The Bad Speller* as a footnote. Steig himself called the book a "mistake" (qtd

Figure 1. Steig's Take on the Classic Fairy Tale. All Images from *The Bad Speller* Used with Permission of the Steig Family.

in Lorenz 167), lesser in significance in Steig's self-assessment than his more overtly psychological character studies.

As Bloom[5] shows, deviations from standard written English, from dialectical differences to rhetorical practices associated with the working class, have long signified less cultural capital and lower placement within class and race hierarchies. As such, those linguistic differences have been something to poke fun at. Given Steig's close ties to erudite circles, not the least of which was the staff of *The New Yorker,* bastion of high culture, where he did much of his most renowned work, one might hypothesize that *Speller* punches down or ridicules those who commit the mortal sin of a spelling error. Steig was close friends with his *New Yorker* colleague E.B. White, who co-wrote the most famous usage and style guide in the English language, and whose wife Katharine Sergeant Angell White, often credited for shaping the magazine's literary ethos, was Steig's editor for many years (Lorenz; Topliss). But I think *Speller* is more complicated and ambivalent, and shares only a passing connection with teachers poking fun at their student's errors on social media. Both involve a similar power dynamic: someone with greater access to higher-order, social-capital-yielding literacies ridiculing those with less access to those literate practices, but Steig's not singling out a real person. Instead he's doing something more subversive—creating a persona in the titular bad speller. Notice that the book isn't called *Bad Spelling*.

The persona alluded to in the title can be understood as a strawman for someone who is illiterate and, as the book's title overtly states, "bad," but also as an avant-garde documenter of life's foibles, and/or as a language poet, and/or as the precocious child with whom I could probably identify as a kid. The student whose writing is singled out and shared without permission online has a singular identity in that rhetorical situation. But who is Steig's bad speller? Hard to say. Children's literature scholar Karla Kushkin has said that Steig "relishes language, dropping in odd words and phrases the way an immigrant just learning English might" (qtd. in Lorenz 197). Kushkin's assessment reveals the ways that Steig found poetry and aesthetic beauty everywhere, including among the language of the vulnerable or the easily dismissed—children, immigrants, bad spellers, etc. Maybe he was *having* fun without *poking* fun.

The Bad Speller might bring to mind teachers ridiculing their students on social media, but the text might also remind us of Donald Trump's viral typo-cum-neologism *covfefe,* a recent example of a spelling error generating laughs. Trump appears to have intended to write "coverage," but the unconventional *covfefe* took on a life of its own, becoming in memes and late-night comedic monologues, an ambiguous word sometimes signifying the mythic liberal media's negative coverage of Trump, sometimes signifying coffee, and sometimes signifying Trump's stupidity or incompetence. The most obvious antecedent for this memed moment is then-VP Dan Quayle's 1992 misspelling of *potato,* at a spelling bee natch. Like Trump, Quayle became the object of jabs that inferred the spelling gaffe meant that Quayle was at best a lightweight and at worst a fool. These examples are perhaps unlikely to give us pause due not just to the regressive politics of Trump and Quayle, but also due to our viewing the humor as examples *of punching up* at powerful public figures. Further, we expect democratic engagement in the public sphere to at times include rigorous critique, satire, and even *ridicule* of both ideas and individuals.

But despite these affective differences, the lines between punching up and punching down and between satire and ridicule can be blurry. Consider jokes about Trump playing tennis in unflattering shorts or eating fast food. These jokes punch up at an unsympathetic public figure, yet your fat[6] friends may perceive these jokes not as taking aim at Trump but as taking aim at our bodies. I doubt many were hurt by *covfefe*, but the ridicule of unconventional spelling and other surface features can similarly imply that those who transgress convention and correctness lack cultural capital or intelligence. Horobin writes, "There's a tendency to view correct spelling

as an index of intelligence, moral fibre, and general trustworthiness" (3). Horobin points out that although the culture collectively claims spelling is a practical utility, spelling bees tend to use esoteric or highly specialized words (6). Our concerns with spelling are rooted in utilitarian concerns like getting a good job but there's also a more abstract "prestige value" in being correct (Horobin 37). So then who and what are we laughing at when we laugh at spelling errors? Twain observed that the "foolish alphabet" more so than the user of said alphabet deserves both our ridicule and a systematic "simplification" (544). Those of us who teach basic writing and other classes with much linguistic diversity have a particular investment in considering what we talk about when we talk, and laugh, about error, and an aesthetically rich and thoughtful work like *Speller* deepens our sense (and that of our students) of the complexity of errors, their significations, and most of all their excitations. The word *excitation* suggests both excitement and whimsy as well as electrical stimulation and arousal[7] and I think captures something about the reason many of us love teaching writing and basic writing: the *buzz* and the *jolt* we get from language, including language play. Many of us want to share that excitation with students.

Whence Spelling Errors & What Should Teachers Do with Them?

Historians of language have explained and sometimes debated why spelling in English can be thorny. We use a Latin alphabet to write a contemporary version of an Anglo-Saxon tongue (Horobin 39; Upward and Davidson 14-17). Many readers of this journal probably learned in a Brit Lit survey that the Norman Conquest resulted in French becoming the language of the elite in Britain (Horobin 77; Upward and Davidson 71-72), introducing a host of new words and sounds. Complaints about the gulf between pronunciation and spelling date back at least to the sixteenth century, when lexicographers and dictionary writers worked to standardize a spelling system while debating whether to base those spellings on phonetic versus etymological accuracy (Horobin 110). The etymologist camp—and later Samuel Johnson—were reverential of classical influences on the language and advocated, for instance, adding silent letters to words like *debt* "to align them" with Latin cognates (Horobin 111), while major orthographers like John Hart considered silent letters to be confusing "superfluities" (Upward and Davidson 294). Just a few centuries later, on both sides of the ocean, spelling reform movements argued for streamlining. In the US, Carnegie and Twain were among the prominent

supporters of the "Simplified Spelling Board" (Upward and Davidson 307), while Tennyson and Darwin led a British counterpart (Horobin 167-68). Unsurprisingly, Twain approached his advocacy of spelling reform with wit; he put intentional spelling errors in service to his argument about the absurdity of English and did so many years before Steig.[8]

Compared to other types of errors, Shaughnessy says spelling errors embody "even greater strictness and arbitrariness" (160) and finds that more than one-third of the errors that basic writers commit are spelling mistakes (162). She sensibly suggests that spelling is probably not worth devoting much class time to, but she does develop a taxonomy of types of spelling errors observed in her data set, with the intent of understanding the logic that student-writers are following. Her categories are: spelling errors stemming from the "unpredictabilities" of English, non-phonetically spelled sound words, homophones, spelling errors stemming from "unfamiliarity with the structure of words," and mistakes "caused by failure to remember or see words" (164-75). This is in line with Shaughnessy's larger project of understanding students' perspectives including their rationales for errors. But spelling is only one surface feature to which we apply the construct of correctness and only one of the elements of the written word sometimes used to judge refinement, taste, and intelligence. Basic writing studies has long been concerned with building on Shaughnessy by contextualizing how errors circulate. Joseph Williams asked why we so often speak of error with "emotion" and "fury" (152), why some errors receive even greater vitriol than others, and why some people are more offended than others when it comes to errors of usage. He suggests we consider error a "social behavior," a transaction that causes a reaction in the audience, a "gaffe" more trivial than, say, a racist joke (153). So-called grammarians, he argues, often focus more on a mythic rule than on clarity and the holistic effectiveness of an utterance, pointing out that advice-givers and rule-makers like Steig's friend and colleague E.B. White often violate their own rules; ultimately Williams advocates reading student writing with the faith we place in published writers and texts (156-59), an idea that became a pillar of basic writing scholarship.

More recent analyses have explored the implications of the culture's handbook mentality (Rozakis; Strunk and White; Truss). Prendergast argues that *Elements of Style* and the handbooks that followed in its wake make use of violent imagery, bellicose metaphors, and uncritical nostalgia to justify waging "war" on bad writing. Worse, Prendergast says, Strunk and White issued absolutes regarding "clarity, brevity, and correctness," creating a moral imperative to disregard shifting contexts (e.g., inclusive language

movements) and "remake a world distinctly in one's own image: one style, one moral essence" (15). And Min-Zhan Lu points out that compositionists themselves adopt critical perspectives toward language and skill-drill pedagogy, but still perpetuate a divide between "form and meaning" (166). We "confirm these students' impression that only those who make 'errors' need to worry about issues of 'usage' and 'editing'" (167). Likewise, we treat writing by "outsiders" (like basic writers) differently than the ways we treat writing by "experts" (Lu 167), in ways that create and perpetuate colonial attitudes.

Writing about the ideological dimensions of style, Lu provocatively contrasts the latitude often given to difficult fiction writers versus basic writers: "Why is it that in spite of our developing ability to acknowledge the political need and right of 'real' writers to experiment with 'style,' we continue to cling to the belief that such a need and right does not belong to 'student writers'?" (170). Steig's persona in *The Bad Speller* might be a little bit of both groups—a little bit *brilliant artist* and a little bit *basic writer*. The "bad speller" referred to in the book's title might even trouble the binary between the low-status bad speller (or bad writer) in a pre-credit comp class and the language poet or avant-garde provacateur studied in a postmodern literature class. Steig's persona is also the writer described in *Errors & Expectations* whose so-called errors are less haphazard than they first appear. Shaughnessy argued that student writers use particular, largely consistent logics in making decisions about surface features of their writing. Steig affirms Shaughnessy's argument in that his persona also makes "errors" with intentionality and consistency, not due to carelessness or laziness. As we'll see below, the "bad speller" is a consistent speller. Like Twain, what interests Steig most seems to be the broader context of "bad" spelling. He's satirizing not poor spellers nor the non-*New Yorker* reading public, but rather the language itself, the illogic of English and its rules, conventions, and orthographic systems.

Lu argues we should "contest the distinction between "real" and "student" writers, and move past simplifying idiosyncracy as "error" (171). With both groups, why not aim for a more contextual, critical disposition where we strive to place "errors" and other matters of "style" in a social and political context? Lu's important work on the rhetorical canon of style challenges Shaughnessy's assumption that the global message is necessarily of the utmost importance and that the "code" should be invisible to readers. For Shaughnessy, errors worm their way into "the consciousness of the reader. They introduce in accidental ways alternative forms in spots where usage has stabilized a particular form. . . they shift the reader's attention from where he [sic] is going to how he [sic] is getting there" (Shaughnessy

12). Using conventional sentence-level features, for Shaughnessy, is "obligatory" because standard spelling et al. "have become habitual to those who communicate within that code" (12). Lu and other critical theorists have worked to reclaim local concerns as interesting, aesthetic, political sites for consideration of the written word. The translingual and code-meshing movements, for instance, have asserted multilingual texts and the so-called unconventional styles and rhetorics used by Gen 1.5 students and other twenty-first century trans-nationalists as sites of resistance and creativity (Canagarajah; Lu and Horner; MacDonald and DeGenaro; Milson-Whyte; Young et al.). *The Bad Speller* is one such example of a text foregrounding style, aesthetics, and sentence-level choices, alongside ideological richness.

Connors and Lunsford's landmark study on error found that spelling was the most frequent error ("Frequency of Formal Error" 400). Lunsford and Lunsford replicated the study two decades later, and spelling had dropped to the fifth most common error (795). Because Connors and Lunsford were surprised at the preponderance of spelling errors in student writing, they omitted this category of error from the study and subsequently inquired further into spelling errors in a separate article using the same data set. In the follow-up analysis, they found that little pedagogy exists around spelling errors beyond the distribution to students of what they call "demon lists" (a term I think Steig would relish) of commonly misspelled words; further, they find that the majority of spelling errors in their data set consist of homophones and non-phonetically spelled words spelled how they sound ("Exorcising"). In their follow-up, Connors and Lunsford point out that although spelling is largely absent from then-emerging literature on the teaching of writing, in practice the "sp" marginalia was "the commonest of the crimson rashes to which first-year essays never seemed to develop antibodies," from the 1880s through 1980s ("Exorcising" 404). During that period, textbooks remained stagnant, Connors and Lunsford find, characterized by either ignoring spelling altogether, or suggesting that students "look it up, learn the rules, observe a demon list, and write out troublesome words over and over" (409). Aside from these studies, little research has been conducted on spelling errors in college writing. According to Anson, the "movement in the profession away from preoccupation with correctness was simultaneously reinforced by the broad intellectual trends of postmodernism" (5). Anson advocates for a broader pedagogy than error-marking and posits the value of fostering in students an ability to consider the "function" (impact on readers) rather than the "fact" of an error on the page (16-17).

Patterns & Consistencies of "Error" in *The Bad Speller*

We can observe, chart, and unpack the patterns and consistencies of spelling errors in *Speller* by looking at the most commonly misspelled words:

Table 1. Most Commonly Misspelled Words in *The Bad Speller*

Most commonly misspelled words	**Number of times this "Error" appears**	**Consistency of this "error"**	**Representative appearance of "error"**
the -> th	20	Text also contains one correct spelling of "the"	HANDSIL N GRETTLE LOST IN TH WOULDS.
is -> iz	7	Total consistency (i.e., "is" spelled "iz" all in all seven instances)	LITL MIS MUFAT IZ FRITIND BIGH A SPYDAR.
his -> hiz	7	Total consistency	JENERAL ABOWT TWO KUT A KAIK WITH HIZ SORD.
of -> ov	6	Total consistency	TO LUVERS KISSN ON TH LIPSE BIGH TH LITE OV A FOOL MUNE.
dog -> dawg	5	Total consistency	DAWG MUTHR N CHILED.

to -> two	5	Text also contains one instance of "to" spelled as "twho" and three instances of "to" spelled as "tew"	TO HIPNETIS TRINE TWO HIPNETIGHS EECH UTHR AT TH SAIM TYM.
with -> wyth	4	Text also contains two correct spellings of "with"	DUNKEE WYTH A PETT GEWS.
two -> to	4	Total consistency (although "two" appears as a misspelling of "to" five times)	TO GEACE DOOLN.
has -> haz	4	Total consistency	KAT WISHN HE KOOD FLI. BURD BEAN HAPY HE HAZ WYNGZ.
			**The text contains 44 illustrations and has no pagination, so I have not provided parenthetical citations.

The nine most-commonly misspelled words in *The Bad Speller* suggest that the text sees errors as mundane. All nine are monosyllabic. With the exception of "dawg," all are among the most commonly used words in the language: auxiliary or copula verbs, prepositions, and other short words of four letters or fewer. All nine are relatively easy to spell, suggesting that Steig's vision of spelling error is not limited to English's difficulties. Error is

commonplace in the text; long, complex, idiosyncratic, and/or multisyllabic words are not the only words prone to error. If the titular bad speller is a persona, we can see their mistakes as more than a function of confusion. The errors appear as ordinary facts, as self-evident, possibly as choices. What most stands out is consistency, echoing Shaughnessy. Errors in Steig's book are reasonably unambiguous and free of chaos. They rarely impede clarity. They are facts on the page and follow a pattern. Indeed, these top nine errors have an 90% consistency rate. I.E., they are spelled the same (incorrect) way a total of sixty-two times and appear as variant spellings only seven times. Steig brings order to a language arguably characterized by disorder, bringing to mind Shaughnessy's description of reading an essay composed by a basic writer: ". . . the inexperienced teacher is almost certain to see nothing but a chaos of error. . . [but] a closer look will reveal very little that is random or 'illogical' in what they have written" (5). The same can be said of *Speller;* the text appears chaotic but analysis reveals consistency and order. Put another way: Steig fully committed to the bit. He even wrote a two-page letter to his publisher about his progress on *The Bad Speller* and misspelled every word (Box 1, Folder 43).

Steig brings order, but perhaps not too much order. There are several notable exceptions to consistency in the list above, including but not limited to the inclusion of several instances of correct spelling of the words. "The" appears once in the next and "with" twice in their conventional forms. Also, one-off misspellings "twho" and "tew" keep readers on our toes (or our tews?). Homophones also lead to a handful of inconsistencies. Two (!) of the most commonly misspelled words are homophones of one another ("to" and "two"), which of course can be readily confused with one another. The word "to" (i.e., the preposition or infinitive marker) appears as "two" five times, but also as "twho" one time and as "tew" three times. And although the word "two" (i.e., the number) always appears as to, "two" does appear in the text as a misspelling of "to." These particular errors *can* be read as deeper engagement with the confusing properties of the language, interesting complications of the consistent patterns of error in the text. Attentive readers might notice, even if in passing, the normalizing repetition of "th" and "iz" while also picking up on the playful chaos of the to/two/twho/tew homophones. Some readers might feel seen. Some readers might appreciate the play. Both audiences will note the lack of punching down in Steig's humor.

Animals are a frequent visual motif, as well as an additional iteration of the text's repetition and consistency. A full twenty-nine out of forty-four illustrations contain animals, usually anthropomorphized. In all but two cases

(both are instances of the word "fish"), the names of animals are misspelled. In nearly every case of an animal appearing more than once, the animal names are misspelled in the same way, another notable pattern in the text:

Table 2. Misspelled Animal Names in *The Bad Speller*

Misspelled animal names that recur in the text	**Number of times this "error" appears in text**	**Consistency of this "error"**
dog -> dawg	5	Total consistency (i.e. "dog" is never spelled differently including in its conventional form)
bird -> burd	3	Total consistency
lion -> line	3	Total consistency
mouse -> mows	2	Total consistency
cat -> kat	2	Total consistency
donkey -> dunkee	2	Also appears once as "dunky"
Animal names that appear misspelled one time each: beagle -> beagl crocodile's -> krokodilez duck -> duk ducks -> dux elephant -> elephant elephants -> ellafence fox -> focks geece -> grace gooce -> gews horse -> hoarse owl -> oul peacock -> pekok pig -> pyg rabbit -> rabit rabbit -> rabet seals -> seelze spider -> spydar whale -> wail	None of these animal names ever appear with their correct spellings, although notice that plurals contain wholly different spellings from their singular form. Notice that "Rabbit" is the only animal name on this list that has two different variants.	**Animal names that are spelled correctly in the text:** fish (twice)

It is unremarkable that there is such a long list of animal names in the text, given how frequently animals appear across Steig's entire body of work. However, the preponderance of *misspelled animal names* further underlines Steig's consistency. And since animals are part of the *natural world,* the misspelling of their names suggests that we can look at the errors themselves as, well, *natural.* Similar to the misspelling of *easy* and monosyllabic words like "of" and "is," the misspelling of "pig" and "duck" in a sense normalizes error as part of a usual, nearly conventional, possibly even primal aspect of the bad speller persona's writing style. Animals in Steig's world are ubiquitous and, paradoxically, both funny- and normal-looking. The same can be said of spelling errors. And the spellings of animal names are also extremely consistent, even moreso than the nine most commonly mispelled words, with a 94% consistency rate (only rabet/rabit and dunkee/dunky stray from the consistent pattern.

If consistency of error is one way *Speller* echoes Shaughnessy, another echo is the recognizable reasons for the errors. For instance, Steig uses misspellings that appear to be overgeneralizing a pattern based on a rhymed word:

Table 3. Misspellings That Seem to be Informed by Rhymed Words

Misspelling	**Perhaps because the word rhymes with. . .**
my -> migh	high
musicians -> musitions	positions
various -> varius	Darius
geese -> geace	peace
masquerade -> mascaraid	laid
by -> bigh	high
same -> saim	aim
when -> wen	ten
wall -> wawl	tall
all -> awl	tall
bone -> boan	loan
her -> hur	fur
for -> fore	score
sphere -> sphear	ear

near -> nere	here
to do -> tew dew	few
owl -> oul	foul
caught -> cought	fought
hear -> hare	scare
lips -> lipse	eclipse
moon -> mune	dune
could -> kood	wood
bird -> burd	absurd
whale -> wail	tail

As Shaughnessy taught us, student writers often commit errors not due to laziness or randomness, but rather for specific, logical reasons. Errors often occur due to overgeneralization of some rule (e.g., the overuse of "whom" even, incorrectly, as a subject pronoun). Likewise, spelling errors are sometimes due to the inconsistent phonetic system of the English language. Steig is playing with this concept, showing us intentional but unconventional ways to spell everyday words like "bird" and "bone."

Two additional patterns illustrate the internal logic of *The Bad Speller.* First, words that begin with the *hard c* sound nearly always appear with an initial k instead of an initial c or initial qu:

Table 4. Misspellings Involving an Initial Hard-c Sound

Words that contain an initial hard c sound and that are incorrectly written with an initial "k"	**Number of times this error appears in the text**
cat -> kat	3
campus -> kampus	1
cooking -> kukn	1
campfire -> kampfyr	1
cupboard -> kubberd	1
catch -> katsch	1
casting -> kastng	1
queene -> kwene	1

could -> kook	1
quill -> kwil	1
cut -> kut	1
cake -> kaik	1
crocodile's -> krokodilez	1
	words in the text that contain an initial hard c sound and begin with the conventionally correct initial consonant sound: climber -> clymer climbing -> clymen caught -> cought kissing -> kissn kisses -> kissiz

The /hard c/ sound can be confusing since the sound can be signified with a *c, k, ck,* or *qu*. In the initial position, Steig consistently uses a k fifteen times in thirteen different words. He only uses the correct initial /hard c/ sound five times, in the words kissing, kisses, climber, climbing, and caught, although as the table shows, these three words are still misspelled despite the correct initial letter.

Steig similarly avoids the conventional spelling of the "-ing" suffix:

Table 5. Misspellings Involving -ing Endings

Words with a misspelled "-ing" suffix	**Number of times this error appears in the text**
sleepwalking -> sleepwaukn	1
playing -> plane	1
dueling -> dooln	1
cooking -> kookn	1
trying -> trine	2
climbing -> clymen	1
spying -> spine	1

resting -> wrestn	1
looking -> lookn	1
studying -> studeyng	1
rocking -> rokn	1
observing -> observan	1
passing -> passn	1
riding -> rydng	1
fishing -> fishn	1
biting -> bytng	1
performing -> perfourmng	1
casting -> kastng	1
typewriting -> tiperitn	1
shooting -> shewtng	1
bowing -> bown	1
being -> bean	2
producing -> prodoosn	1
breathing -> breethn	1
kissing -> kissn	1
Wishing -> wishn	1
Writing -> ritn	1
Using -> yewzng	1
Taking -> taken	1
Floating -> floteng	1
Tiptoeing -> tiptone	1
Sleeping -> sleepen	1
	Words in the text that spell the "-ing" suffix in the conventional way: leaping -> leping descending -> descending wondering -> wundring

Only three words contain the "ing" suffix spelled conventionally, whereas the "-ing" suffix is misspelled thirty-four times in thirty-two unique words, usually with an omitted i or g; this pattern has a consistency rate of 91%. But beyond the consistency of this error, the misspelled suffix allows Steig to engage dialectical difference. Some dialects do not fully enunciate the *ing* sound—and as the chart demonstrates, Steig mirrors this aspect of orality. For example, his caption for his Old Mother Hubbard cartoon reads, "OLE MUTHR HUBERD LOOKN FORE A BOAN IN HUR KUBBERD." This is one of the particularly ambivalent moments of error. The Old Mother Hubbard protagonist is defined by her low-class status, as signified by empty cupboards. So one way to read the omission of the fully enunciated "-ing" sound is as a punching down at the woman. She's low class, not someone likely to read *The New Yorker,* and likely speaks a dialect that uses this pattern. She's likely saying something closer to "lookn" than "looking." Other misspelled "ing" words also signify working-class and/or rural life uncommon to *New Yorker* offices—"fishn" and using a "rockn" chair, for example. But we can also read these errors as commentary on the language's frequent deviations from phonetic pronunciation. Steig allows for multiple readings; he could be mocking individuals (both people and animals, natch) but is more than likely laughing at the absurdity of the larger system in which those individuals practice literacy.

The Aesthetics and Poetics of Error

I would like to transition from charting the repetition of error in Steig to the broader aesthetic effect of these misspellings. If the previous section demonstrates how *Speller* embodies Shaughnessy's core argument about the internal logic and consistency of error, the present section attempts to theorize the text's implementation of an *aesthetics of error,* that is, Steig's employment of so-called mistakes for poetic, playful effect. The errors are frequently, well, fun, and clearly Steig loves to wink at his readers by employing "errors" that involve wordplay, underlining my reading of the text as a call for approaching unconventionality with a spirit of humor. Often, the misspellings themselves serve as poetic devices, as I'll unpack below. But also, it is this aesthetic approach—the inventive, intentional, and reflective use of mistakes-as-poetic-devices—that allows Steig to delve more deeply into human emotions, further demonstrating the text's utility in basic writing classes. In this playfulness and poetry and in this deeper exploration of hu-

man affect, we again see echoes of Lu's connection between basic writers and avant-garde postmodernists.

Steig uses error to create or reinforce the visual appearance of rhymes. Frequently, Steig uses unconventional spelling in service to the artful repetition of the same final letters of words. This gives the visual appearance of rhyme. For example, he describes a mountain-climbing dog who "wil yodil" upon reaching the peak. Spelled and pronounced conventionally, "will" and "yodel" are at best half-rhymes but the repetition of the final "il" gives the words visual symmetry. There is artistic and aesthetic intention in this flourish. Elsewhere Steig shows readers a "line spine" (lion spying) on a hunter; the visual and the caption work in tandem to anthropomorphize the lion and turn the tables on the hunter, but beyond the irony, we observe Steig attending to language choices and creating a faux-rhyme or visual rhyme using two words that, again, are at best half-rhymes. At times these "visual rhymes" draw attention to words that even when spelled conventionally rhyme with each other. He captions his take on the evil queen from Snow White with: "Mira, Mira, on the wawl. Hu iz faress of them awl?" The rhymed couplet still works with the conventional spellings of "wall" and "all" but Steig further draws our attention to the visual-textual dimension of the repetition—as

Figure 2. Another Image Based on a Familiar Fairy Tale

opposed to just the sound of the words. He uses a similar technique in his imagining of Old Mother "Huberd" looking for a bone in her "kubberd." The rhyme already works sonically but now works as a visual too. Logically and perhaps poetically too, why shouldn't the rhymed words "Hubbard" and "cupboard" look alike on the page? Steig is essentially telling his readers that words can look as silly and surreal and interesting as his drawings.

Steig uses error to create a visual representation of alliteration. It's not enough for Steig to employ alliteration as a sonic device. He frequently repeats the same initial consonant, particularly the aforementioned, initial "k." Thus we meet one "kat" who wishes he "kood" fly, and one "kat" who prefers "kukn" on a "kampfyr." With the correct spellings, Steig still could have employed both alliteration and a repeated initial consonant ("c" instead of "k"), but as is the case with many of his rhymes, he further underlines the sonic repetition with the unconventional spelling. The letters have aesthetic appeal. With both his visual rhymes and visual alliteration, Steig makes conscientious and creative choices—the kinds of choices we encourage our basic writers to make. We can't be sure of Steig's intentions, but we can ask our students about their intentions and their choices, encourage intentionality and reflectiveness, and perhaps even respect and foster unconventionality and play.

Steig engages in puns, neologisms, and other forms of play. Steig uses a strikingly large number of poetic tropes. His wordplay further reinforces Lu's notion that basic writers are akin to postmodernists in their deconstruction of convention and clarity. Spelling errors are perhaps the most "basic" of basic writing markers. The breakdown of convention occurs at the level of the individual word, after all. Of course, Steig is a highly literate practitioner of dominant-dialect English—a writer and member of the media elite, literally a close friend and colleague of the person who wrote the book on sentence-level correctness, and yet the analogy between the Bad Speller and the Basic Writer holds true. Steig has created a persona in the titular bad speller to convey his critiques of the very idea of convention. The fact that Steig uses aesthetic tools as part of his satire illustrates what I think Lu meant in her provocation about basic writers as postmodernists. Some of the puns hinge on misspelling. For instance, Steig crafts an image of a romantic scene unfolding underneath a "fool mune," and the moon is anthropomorphised with a goofy face, the moon literally a "fool." And we see a menagerie of animals "perfourmng a difiklt feet." In the image, there are four animals—thus the "perfourmance." Their trick is balancing one another on their paws and hooves—thus they are performing a "feet." Another example, one that ap-

pealed to me as a little boy, is a dog disguised as a donkey to fool his friends, "butt" the other dogs know his real identity due to his scent, literally due to his "butt." Elsewhere, another dog is fascinated by the "mistery" of a levitating man. A "mister" who can levitate. . . a "mistery."

Some wordplay is more conceptual, like the suggestion that "Handsil" and "Grettle" are lost in the "woulds." This is my favorite moment of abstract, existential humor. Steig turns the helping verb "would" into a noun and creates a neologism. The "woulds" calls to mind the more recent usage of "the feels" as a noun: *This sad movie has me in my feels*. Similarly, the woulds becomes an emotive, poignant noun for moments of second-guessing. I've been lost in the woulds, too. But the line is also funny. Being lost in the "woulds" sounds almost like a line from an Ogden Nash poem (about a "panther" who we ought not "anther" maybe?) or a Maureen Dowd op-ed critiquing Hillary Clinton for past missteps. Though less existential than the "woulds," other conceptual moments abound. In another panel, the king of the jungle is spending the day fishing, and Steig's narrator observes that "th line haz lett owt his fishng lion." And the most literal pun is surely the sentimental scene of a "dawg muthr n chiled," which could as easily be read "dog mothering [her] child" as "dog mother and child." The more deeply Steig wanders into a world of emotional depth, the less his work seems like punching down; the moon (or "mune") might be a fool, but the text is in solidarity with lost children, mama dogs, and all the rest.

Steig also plays with language by using the incorrect homophone, mirroring one of the most common ways basic writers misspell words. There are numerous examples of this form of "bad spelling" in the text, but one particularly homophonic caption—accompanying a drawing of a little girl fascinated by a monstrously large flower—reads, "Migh o migh, iz she serpryzd two sea a flour ov sutch grate sighs." Every word except for "she" and "a" is misspelled and no fewer than five are incorrectly deployed homophones: two, sea, flour, grate, sighs. These misspellings don't necessarily create puns or ambiguities, but they highlight the preponderance of confusing, English-language. Steig also substitutes:

- "Butt" for "but"
- "To" for "two"
- "There" for "their" (the seminal example of confusing homophones)
- "Hare" for "hear"
- "Fore" for "for"

- "Knot" for "not"

Steig breaks down the barrier between a dumb versus intellectual joke. Substituting "butt" for "but" is perhaps the dumbest.[9] And maybe the most intellectual is "wyth" for "with," clearly a call-back to a common spelling of the word during the early-Modern era. It's yet another instance of Steig embedding a knowing linguistic reference via an "error."

Implications and Conclusions

If Steig's language play and focus on error reflect a desire to break down barriers between high and low culture by making dumb jokes that are also intellectual, then a similar claim can be made about the broader worldview of *The Bad Speller.* Like Bugs Bunny cartoons, which shared a similar smart-dumb dynamic, *The Bad Speller* draws heavily on biblical, literary, and cultural allusions. Just as the Warner Bros. shorts often retold operas (the iconic "Rabbit of Seville"), fairy tales, and other familiar stories, with its own cast of loony characters, so does Steig (in a preview of the storytelling mode he used in *Shrek* years later). One *The Bad Speller* panel retells the Biblical story of Jonah, and riffs on fairy tales like Little Miss Muffet abound. Steig situated his irreverent work in a broader tradition, bringing erudite wordplay to a mass audience, like the humorous, populist expression of Ogden Nash, Edward Lear, Don Addams, and Bugs Bunny architects Chuck Jones and Tex Avery.

Through his sense of play (including his intentional errors), Steig takes his work to dark places, places that acknowledge the good, bad, ugly, and complexity of human emotion. Steig's representation of "Handsil n Grettle laust in th woulds" underlines the children's fear. His "Litl Mis Mufat" is terrified, and his version of the dog belonging to "Ole Muthr Huberd" appears genuinely hungry. Though whimsical, he seems attracted to stories of struggling and suffering. Poet and critic W. H. Auden wrote the following about Steig (albeit years before *The Bad Speller)*:

> [H]e is unequivocally pessimistic: the only virtue he grants the human species is a capacity to perceive and laugh at its folly. Though this is, I believe, too negative to be an adequate response to life—a sense of humor is rarely without an element of fear—it is an indispensable preliminary. We shall never earn the right to lift our heads till we have learned to hang them. (48)

It is telling that a modernist poet best known for a poem about World War II, finds Steig's worldview a bit too dark. Indeed, it may take a second read to realize Auden is praising Steig—for awareness of the bleak side of humanity, for possessing a more authentic and holistic understanding of the potential of humor, and for a fully formed perspective on the "follies" of life. In *The Bad Speller,* Steig posits a frightening, difficult, surreal world. We are all adrift, lost in "th woulds," or fleeing from mundane terrors like the arachnophobic Little Miss Muffat. Summing up his process, Steig once wrote, "The so-called struggle of the artist is nothing but the struggle against the restraints, internal/external, of our irrational way of life" (qtd. In Lorenz 123). For Steig, the world writ large is as chaotic as our orthographic system. I rediscovered *The Bad Speller* cleaning out my childhood bedroom in 2017, as my parents prepared to sell the house where they'd lived for half a century. As a forty-something, it was the text's sometimes-brutal affective dimensions that spoke to me. Truth be told, I still found the but/butt gags compelling too.

Two additional cartoons illustrate Steig's sense that the world is mundane but frightening and disordered. In one, the devil is sitting at a typewriter, brainstorming a list of "wikid thingz tew dew." The devil wears a real scowl on his face and looks particularly malevolent, at least as cartoon demons go. But Steig undercuts the malevolence by giving the devil a goofy

Figure 3. Steig at the Intersection of Malevolence and Whimsy

pet owl and a wife doing household chores. The world is a scary place, but life goes on, and there is whimsy to balance life's dreadful realities. In the other, two hypnotists attempt to control one another. They both look evil but ineffectual. The caption reinforces that they are merely "trine two hipnetighs" each other. Like the scene with the devil, the malevolence is undercut. Hope is alive, despite the scary environs in which we find ourselves.

Similarly, *The Bad Speller* assumes the world is difficult. The fishing lion can't catch any fish. Animals who seem to have leisure time are burdened in their attempt at a "difiklt feat." Even "real" children (as opposed to children who are fairy tale characters) face burdens like getting caught in the rain. We glimpse foibles. Auden's assessment is deadly accurate: Steig seems to recognize that there is a great deal of "folly." As Auden points out, Steig is a "pessimist," but a pessimist with a sense of humor and a recognition that we can leverage and learn from a critical awareness of life's. . . difiklties.

No matter how hard they try, Steig's characters can't escape who they are—not the dog wearing a donkey mask, not the peacock riding an old-time bicycle, not the donkey reading the newspaper while its pet goose looks on. They are still, respectively, a dog, peacock, and donkey. We can't hide our true nature. Visually, Steig anthropomorphizes numerous animals in *The Bad Speller.* We see dueling geese; a jazz band with a pig, dog, and chicken; cats sitting around a campfire; a lion spending the day fishing; a duck riding around on a beagle's back; and much more. Some animals seem to live the lives of animals and others seem to have primarily human lives. In this way, *The Bad Speller* anticipated the television series *Bojack Horseman,* which similarly imagined a world with inconsistent rules regarding whether animals could think and communicate. And like the morose, existential, tragi-comic world of *Bojack*, which focuses on a horse struggling with depression, addiction, and a waning career in show biz, *The Bad Speller* implies that humans are no more or less likely than animals to find ourselves in states of profound, banal angst. Like the captions accompanying the scenes, human and animal alike are in states of error.

At its core, though, *The Bad Speller* is humor. Perhaps it's also a satire and critique of the oddities of English, an instance of punching up, akin to Twain's jeremiad on simplifying our spelling system. Perhaps it's also a poetic rendering of perceived rubes, punching down, its aim squarely on the poor spellers who probably wouldn't read *The New Yorker*. Regardless, it's humor. In a similar vein, the field of rhetoric and composition has on occasion treated error with whimsy: Williams purposefully including errors in his landmark essay, "The Phenonmeology of Error," to see if readers would notice, Connors

and Lunsford subtitling their work on student error, "Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research." Why? As I suggested earlier, I suspect many of us entered this field not only out of a love of language but more specifically a love of language *play*. Errors are funny in the way that most subversions of convention are funny. A "bad spelling" is an opportunity to play with language *and* to transgress a convention that the culture sometimes frames as a high-stakes matter of morals (see especially Prendergast). *The Bad Speller* is a companion to *The Elements of Style,* and not just because the two books were written by friends. Steig's book is a response and a rebuke, if unintentional, to *Elements,* shifting the focus away from moral imperatives and mandates toward aesthetics, and knowing winks, from matters of correctness to matters of style.

If Steig has a psychic connection to handbooks, he also has other serendipitous connections to the field. Before transferring to art school, he studied at City University of New York, decades before Shaughnessy would teach and conduct her groundbreaking research there. Indeed, *The Bad Speller* is also a companion piece to *Errors & Expectations,* a taxonomy of what we do when we stray from (or mock) convention. And just one year after *The Bad Speller* was published, CCCC convened its language policy committee to consider more inclusive teaching practices that acknowledge all forms of "language varieties" (Perryman-Clark et al. 1), a committee responsible for writing "Students' Right to their Own Language" in the years following that initial meeting. That document has little to say about spelling specifically, beyond the observation it's one of the "least serious aspects of writing" (29). But the statement speaks across all kinds of language diversity: "Should we, on the one hand, urge creativity and individuality in the arts and sciences, take pride in the diversity of our historical development, and on the other hand, try to obliterate all the differences in the ways Americans speak and write?" (22). According to the document, notions of "correctness…encourage an elitist attitude. The main values they transmit are stasis, restriction, manners, status, and imitation" (31). *The Bad Speller* agrees, implicitly urging us to look at our students like artists and tricksters who are capable of employing a variety of codes, capable of humor, capable of provocation. Perhaps *The Bad Speller* provides a way to teach our students not to punch down, a way to teach students not to punch at all, a way to build a world where laughing and making mistakes is preferable to punching, period.

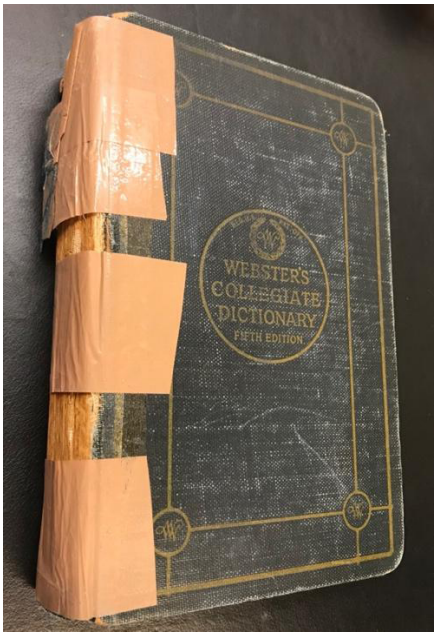

Figure 4. William Steig's Dictionary (Box 26, Folder 1)

Notes

1. A big "thank you" to Maggie Steig, for the kind generosity and the great stories about her dad. Thanks to *JBW* editors Lisa Blankenship and Dominique Zino and the two anonymous peer reviewers for the support and helpful feedback. I also appreciate the assistance of Lynne Farrington and the whole team at the Kislak Center for Special Collections at U-Penn (home of Steig's archives) and the University of Michigan Dearborn College of Arts, Sciences, and Letters, which funded my travel there. Biggest thanks of all to Anne and Helen Melone for one of the coolest birthday gifts ever, *The Bad Speller*.
2. Another track on the Don Adams record, "Bank Robber," is sampled on "Nobody Move" from Eazy E's first solo album, a record I liked much later, so I'd like to think Eazy's producer Dr. Dre was as big a fan of *Roving Reporter* as I was. You know that scene in *Straight Outta Compton* in which Dre listens to old soul and funk records in his bedroom and the audience is meant to think about how he'll eventually become a millionaire sampling those records? The Mandela effect gets me every time; I always think he's going to be playing the funny records I loved as a kid

3. With, of course, critical exploration of how, when, and where these particular stylistic choices are and are not effective.
4. Of *The Addams Family* fame.
5. Lynn Z. Bloom makes this point in her influential article, "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise." Elsewhere in her work, Bloom recalls her family using a Steig cartoon as a Christmas card one holiday season. The cartoon shows a stern father holding a report card and telling his dejected little girl that a B+ won't do ("Give Grades").
6. As a fat person, I use "fat" as a descriptive, not derogatory, term.
7. Not to mention a fairly iconic Beach Boys lyric.
8. Twain's spelling satire and other documents from the spelling reform movements could also, alongside Steig, serve as teachable texts in courses foregrounding language, error, and satire.
9. And by "dumbest," I mean one of the funniest.

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