

# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

**SPRING 1988**

VOLUME 7, NUMBER 1

On Not Listening in Order to Hear:  
Collaborative Learning and the  
Rewards of Classroom Research  
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Survival of the Fittest: Ten Years  
in a Basic Writing Program  
**Hephzibah Roskelly, editor**

Bureaucracy and Basic Writing Programs;  
or, Fallout from the Jan Kemp Trial  
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"Why Test?"  
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Orthography Revisited: A Response  
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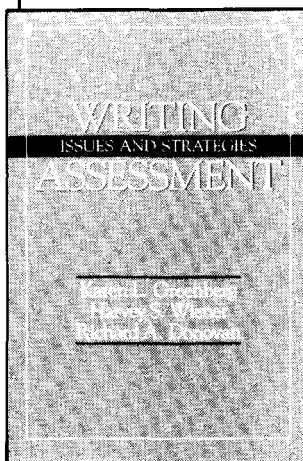
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# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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## CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require four copies of a manuscript. To assure impartial review, give author information and a biographical note for publication on the cover page only. One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. We require the new MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 1984). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our one-page style sheet.

*All manuscripts must focus clearly on Basic Writing and must add substantively to the existing literature.* We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about matters such as the social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; rhetoric; discourse theory; cognitive theory; grammar; linguistics, including text analysis, error descriptions, and cohesion studies; English as a second language; and assessment and evaluation. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening; cross-disciplinary insights for basic writing from psychology, sociology, anthropology, journalism, biology, or art; the uses and misuses of technology for basic writing; and the like.

The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy; and teaching logs which trace the development of original insights.

Starting with the 1986 issue, a "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" will be given to the author of the best *JBW* article every four issues (two years). The prize is \$500.00, courtesy of an anonymous donor. The winner, to be selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, will be announced in our pages and elsewhere.

## EDITOR'S COLUMN

This issue of *JBW* exemplifies what I had in mind when I wrote the "Call for Articles" that began appearing in 1985. We offer here the "*variety* of manuscripts" that I hope will serve to stimulate additional creative ways of thinking and talking about scholarship, teaching, and the academic world in which we dwell for part of our professional lives.

Our first essay is a speech by Kenneth Bruffee presented at a conference for "teachers of humanities." The speech sketches Professor Bruffee's personal memories of the collaborative community of which he was part when open admissions started at The City University of New York. His message, while not specifically related to basic writing, is important for all of us who teach writing at all levels.

The next piece, edited by Hephzibah Roskelly, is one example of what Professor Bruffee talks about. This article is innovative in its conception, and instructive in the history it offers. As this essay shows, dedicated teachers vary dramatically in their leadership styles and their ways of handling the politics of the academy. Politics and its effects are the subjects of the next essay, which is by George Jensen. Reporting on the famous "Jan Kemp Case" in Georgia, Professor Jensen outlines the potentially negative programmatic and curricular effects of education policy being decided by legislators.

The next trio of essays focus on writing assessment. For a crosscultural perspective on essay scoring in the United States, we are pleased to reprint "Why Test?" by Marie Jean Lederman. This essay serves as background for the ensuing dialogue between Professors Lederman and Gao Jie in which they compare instruction and assessment of writing in the United States and China, an exchange opportunity made possible through Lederman's efforts. Rounding out the perspective is Kathryn Fitzgerald's delineation of assessment criteria evolving at The University of Utah.

Paul Hunter and his colleagues, another group working collaboratively for this issue of *JBW*, offer their observations and research into characteristic language used by female basic writers, suggesting the need to adjust existing epistemological assumptions. Lastly, we offer Ann Dobie's response to Kristine Anderson's comments in the Fall 1987 *JBW*.



Overall, I find it interesting to note a unifying theme throughout this issue's essays: most draw on history to inform our present practices and to influence new approaches in future practices.

Lynn Quitman Troyka

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**Winner:** Sandra Schor  
"An Alternative to Revising:  
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**Finalists:** Janet Gilbert  
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Spring 1986 *JBW*

Katharine Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly  
"Listening as an Act of Composing,"  
Fall 1986 *JBW*

**Members of the Jury:** Chair, Donald McQuade, University  
of California, Berkeley; Alice Gillam-Scott, The University  
of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Mark Reynolds, Jefferson Davis  
State Junior College.

Kenneth A. Bruffee

## ON NOT LISTENING IN ORDER TO HEAR: COLLABORATIVE LEARNING AND THE REWARDS OF CLASSROOM RESEARCH

*Editor's Note: This is a keynote address Kenneth A. Bruffee gave in the fall of 1987 to the annual regional meeting of the Community College Humanities Association. Because the audience for this talk included basic writing teachers, and because we think that the message of this talk can enhance the teaching of basic writing, we are honored that Professor Bruffee is putting his speech on record in the Journal of Basic Writing.*

I'm going to do something today that I hardly ever do in an address. I am going to risk boring you into a state of marginal apoplexy by telling you a bit of my own intellectual history, the history of my early work with collaborative learning. I take that risk in order to make a point that I hope you will consider in relation to your own life and work. My point will be that as community college teachers of the humanities, you have a unique opportunity, it seems to me, both to foster genuine, positive change in the students you teach and, through a disciplined process of "classroom research" that I will describe later, to document significant aspects of American cultural life.

I hasten to say that in using the word "cultural" in this context I am not talking about spiritual uplift: peddling Blake to the benighted and Mozart to the masses. I am using the word with a small "c," in the sense that the anthropologist Clifford Geertz uses the term in his remarkable

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*Kenneth A. Bruffee is professor of English and director of the honors program at Brooklyn College, CUNY. His publications include Elegiac Romance: Cultural Change and Loss of the Hero in Modern Fiction (Cornell UP, 1983), A Short Course in Writing, 3rd ed. (Little, Brown, 1985), and a series of articles in Liberal Education and College English on collaborative learning, liberal education, and the authority of knowledge. He has led colloquia on those subjects at Bard College, Brown University, Bucknell University, New York University, University of Minnesota, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University, and at the Woodrow Wilson Foundation Workshop on Interpreting the Humanities at Princeton University.*

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book *Local Knowledge*, and I am using it in place of such possible alternatives as “social” or “political.” I prefer to talk about the “cultural” aspects of American life that teaching humanities in community colleges touches, and I prefer to say that community college humanities instructors have an opportunity to document that “cultural” life, because I intend the word “cultural” to convey something both broader and deeper than either word, “social” or “political,” conveys, at least to me. “Cultural” is a broader term because it is all-inclusive. It subsumes what most of us call political and social. And it is a deeper term, because it gets at a level of relations among human beings that is more complex and obscure than anything that all but a very few analysts of a political or social bent ever reach. What I call “cultural” includes such things as family rituals, ethnic customs and values, “common sense,” vocational or professional knowledge and expertise, and, above all (or rather, beneath all), the language we speak.

To develop this notion, what I have to say here today is divided into two parts. First, I will try to suggest the nature of collaborative learning in terms of the personal intellectual history I warned you about. And second, I will give a brief account of some “classroom research” that is related to “cultural” issues I have just sketched. My point will be that community college instructors are ideally situated to undertake “classroom research” on issues of this sort. The diversity and cultural origins of the students that fill your classrooms offer you an opportunity to document issues such as these to a depth that I think rarely occurs in professional literature.

## **I. Intellectual History**

When I first encountered collaborative learning, in the early 1970s, the truth is I really didn’t know what was going on. That was partly because it wasn’t happening to someone else. It was happening to me. It has only been by unpacking that experience over the past fifteen years, by reading broadly and trying to write about the experience and talk to others about it as I am talking to you now, that I began to understand it.

What happened, briefly, as I remember it, was this. In 1971, the first year of open admissions at The City University of New York, I took on the job of Director of Freshman English at Brooklyn College. What I did in that job was organize, more or less from scratch, a program of courses in writing at all levels. I also taught remedial writing classes and freshman comp. in the program and tried to teach other teachers how to teach those courses.

Of course, I really didn’t know in any systematic way how to do any of those things. So I made a desperate attempt, along with a handful of colleagues who were directing writing programs at other City University of New York colleges, people such as Donald McQuade, Mina Shaughnessy, Harvey Wiener, and others, to try to understand the difficult new task we had committed ourselves to.

In the course of that collaborative and—from my point of view—highly productive process, all of us made some striking discoveries about ourselves as well as about our students. In fact, what we found out about our students was not unlike what we found out about ourselves, and we made both of these discoveries through the same collaborative process. We began working together because we had all discovered that as open admissions writing teachers and as directors of open admissions writing programs we had more in common with each other than with many of our colleagues on our own campuses. We had also acknowledged to ourselves that what we were supposed to be doing we simply didn't know how to do.

As part of trying to find out how to do what we were supposed to be doing, we agreed to meet and talk. We began converging Saturday mornings on a mutually convenient Manhattan coffee shop, sometimes in the University's Graduate Center, sometimes not. I remember vividly that we met several times at a wonderful soup shop that had just opened on Fifth Avenue called La Potagerie. We had a pretty good time. To focus our discussions in the midst of all this medium-high living, we decided to give ourselves some reading assignments. We chose several texts that one or another of us had run across in some context or other and that seemed to offer some help in looking at the needs of our students, if possible in a larger than merely academic context.

One of the first texts we read together was Sennett and Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, a book that talks about the families of blue-collar workers living in and around Boston. These families had a lot in common with the family I had grown up in and, as we eventually learned from each other, with the family life many of us in the group had experienced. They also had a bit in common with the families of the students we were teaching. One of the first and most important things that Sennett and Cobb suggested to us was that teaching writing to open admissions students might raise issues that were more profound than simply how to "correct errors." Teaching writing might in fact involve an issue that seemed altogether beyond our professional training and expertise to understand: the issue of acculturation.

It began to dawn on us, in short, as we read and talked about what we read, that our students, however poorly prepared academically, did not come to us as blank slates. They arrived in our classes already deeply acculturated, already full-fledged, competent members (as we were too) of one or another cultural community. In fact, they were already members of several interrelated cultural communities. If that was the case, we concluded, then in the first instance the way our students talked and wrote, and even the way they behaved in class, did not involve "errors" at all. They talked, wrote, and behaved in a manner that was perfectly correct within the cultural community they were currently members of. The way they talked, wrote, and behaved was "incorrect," we found ourselves saying, only in terms of a cultural community that they were not—or were not yet—members of. The cultural community the students were not yet members of and were asking to join by virtue of committing themselves to attend college was of course the, to them,

alien community of the "literate" and the "liberally educated."

Beginning to describe our students in this new way, we also began to talk about our job as their teachers in a new way, a way that differed strikingly from the way we were in the habit of talking about teaching. If how our students talked, wrote, and behaved was not in the first instance a matter of "error," then, we began to say, perhaps our job as teachers was not in the first instance to correct them. We recognized of course that what the cultural community of the "literate" and the "liberally educated" regarded as correct and incorrect talk, writing, and behavior remained an issue. But what we were now saying was that in the first instance our job as teachers was to find ways to begin and to sustain a much more difficult, painful, and problematical process than "correcting errors." Our job as teachers, we were saying, was to find out how, in some way and in some measure, to reacculturate the students who had placed themselves in our charge.

My point here, you see, is not so much about our students as about us, their teachers. My colleagues and I were beginning to talk about education in general and teaching in particular in a way that was quite different from the way we had ever talked about it before. And the change in the way we talked about what we were doing signalled a cultural change in ourselves. In fact, I would say now, the change in the way we talked about education and teaching was more than a signal of change. Change in the way we talked was the cultural change itself that we were undergoing. The language we were now using literally constituted the small transitional community of which we were now devoted members. Learning as we were experiencing it was not just inextricably related to that new social relationship among us. It was identical with it and inseparable from it. To paraphrase Richard Rorty's account of learning, it was not a shift inside us that now suited us to enter new relationships with reality and with other people. Learning *was* that shift in our language-constituted relations with others.

Furthering this process of reacculturation we were experiencing, another text we assigned ourselves to read and talk about was Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's book, as you recall, is about teaching reading and writing to the illiterate poor in Brazil, and it has an unmistakably Marxist slant. Now, I don't think any of us in our group would have called ourselves Marxists. Looking at us around a table in that Fifth Avenue restaurant, certainly, no outsider would be driven to that conclusion. I think, in fact, that for the most part we had a bias that was fairly typical of early-Nineteen Seventies academics: a bias that was mostly white, mostly male, and solidly American middle-class.

Despite that bias, however, we were fully aware that many of the students we taught were in a sense forced to pursue postsecondary education, largely through economic pressure, by society that paid workers better who were literate in the standard dialect of English than those who were not literate in it. A job at the telephone company turned up as a point of reference, and the high proportion of those who as recently as last summer, failed the New York Telephone company entrance exams suggests that that was not a wholly unfair criterion. Yet one thing

we learned from Freire was that our middle-class American goal of establishing literacy in the standard dialect was shared by at least one person whose basic political assumptions differed quite a bit from our own. This goal of literacy in the standard dialect is one that you and I continue to share today, of course, especially as larger and larger numbers of non-English speaking students enter our classes.

Stirred by these marginally political concerns, our discussion of Freire began by addressing the troubling key word in his title, the term "oppressed." I think we all found the word somewhat melodramatic as applied to open admissions students. Some of you may feel similarly reluctant to apply it to the students in your community college classes. But we had to admit also, without casting aspersions as to the source of that condition, that to say that our students existed in a state of "oppression" was not entirely inappropriate. Sennett and Cobb had taught us that our students had been acculturated to talk to and deal effectively only with people in their own crowd, their own neighborhood, perhaps only in their own family or ethnic group.

We now saw that acculturation to those perfectly valid and coherent but entirely local communities alone had confined our students severely and had sharply limited their freedom. It had prepared them for social, political, and economic relations of only the narrowest and most limited sort and had closed them out of relations with the broader, highly diverse, integrated American cultural community at large. As a result, their local acculturation prevented many of them from discovering their own buried potential and from living more economically viable and vocationally satisfying lives. We suspected (given our middle-class, professional, liberal-humanistic bias) that our students' acculturation also prevented them from living lives that were intellectually, emotionally, and aesthetically fulfilling. We realized of course that this was not exclusively an "open admissions" problem. Local parochialism of experience and thought is a problem that, on William Perry's testimony, is not unknown even at Harvard College.

So, although we knew that what Freire meant by the key word in his title, "oppressed," was not exactly what we meant by it, to the extent that our more liberal sense of the word did correspond with Freire's intent, the word led us in a useful direction. In order to make any positive impression at all on the students we were encountering in our classes, it was clear that we too needed a pedagogy of the "oppressed," even in our more pallid sense of the word. The pedagogy that Freire offered turned out, furthermore, to be something we had come across before in our reading, and would come across again used to accomplish a similar end. The feminist movement of the Sixties and Seventies, for example, had used this pedagogy to help women change their attitudes toward themselves and to reconstruct their role in society. Kurt Lewin had used it to help people accept dietary changes caused by food scarcities during World War II and to liberate children and adolescents who had been raised as Hitler Youth. A pedagogy that could relieve or overcome "oppression" in many relevant senses, we began to see, would inevitably be a pedagogy of reacculturation.

Freire, in fact, went well beyond leading us toward considering the possibility that a pedagogy of reacculturation could meet our needs. He and others also told us something about what a pedagogy of reacculturation might be, and how it might work. We learned first that reacculturation is at best extremely difficult to accomplish. Furthermore, macho fantasies of reacculturation such as "The Taming of the Shrew" notwithstanding, it is probably next to impossible to reacculturate another person individually. My wife has been trying to turn me into a gentleman for years, with no visible result.

What does seem just possible to accomplish is for people to reacculturate themselves. That is, there does exist a way in which we seem able to sever, diminish, or renegotiate our ties to one or more of the cultural communities we belong to and at the same time gain membership in another such community. We can do all that if, and it seems only if, we work collaboratively. What we have to do, it appears, is create a temporary transition or "support" group that we can join on the way, so to speak, as we undergo the trials of changing allegiance from one cultural community to another. The main agenda of this transition group is to provide an arena for conversation and to sustain us while we learn the language, mores, and values of the cultural community we are trying to join.

In short, this pedagogy of reacculturation had been right under our noses all along. What we had been doing ourselves was exactly that. We ourselves were engaged in the complex, tortuous, aggravating collaborative process of reacculturation. Faced with a situation that seemed alien to us and which our training as carrel rats, conventional academic humanists, did not seem to prepare us to do, in self-defense we had recognized the degree of affinity that existed among us, formed on that basis a transitional group, and assigned ourselves tasks to do collaboratively. We read. We met regularly. We treated ourselves well and had a good time. We got to know each other. We talked.

We learned a lot, of course, from what we read, because whenever we read what we are doing is joining new cultural communities. We join the communities represented by the authors of the texts we read, by acquiring fluency in the language of the text and making it our own. A library from this point of view is not a repository; it's a crowd. Conversely, we make the authors we read members of our own cultural community. Our little discussion group had in effect adopted Sennett and Cobb and Freire into membership in it. But although we learned a lot from what we read, we learned much more from each other's responses to what we read. Each of us began to change, and we discovered that the most powerful force changing us was each other's influence. In the process we became an entirely new cultural community, a community that talked about education as quintessentially reacculturative and talked about education as quintessentially collaborative.

Sooner or later, of course, we all moved out of this community in quite different professional directions. Mina Shaughnessy, as you know, explored ways of helping students deal with the errors they inevitably commit as they begin to make the transition to the new cultural com-

munity of the “literate.” Donald McQuade went to work on a new anthology of American literature, a landmark volume that acknowledges deep diversities in American culture. Harvey Wiener set out to organize writing program administrators nationally, so as to offer others the benefits of collaboration that we had received.

I myself went in still another direction. As perhaps you know either through things of mine in print or by having endured one of the collaborative learning demonstrations I have been known to inflict upon unsuspecting college faculties here and there, I began an effort to explore the process and rationale of collaborative learning. In that effort I eventually made two discoveries that I found exceedingly helpful. First, I found that there already existed a relevant technology, the technology of small group work, that college instructors could acquire relatively easily and put to use to organize effective collaborative learning among their students. And second, I found that there exists a language, the language of social construction, in which it is possible to talk more fruitfully about collaborative learning than in the language of cognition. One product of that discovery is my bibliographical essay that some of you may find of interest called “Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge” (Authority). I learned also that as college instructors who apply the technology of small group work to organize effective collaborative learning among our students, we could learn a great deal about ourselves, about the subjects we teach, about our students, and about the enormously diverse and rapidly changing American cultural community of which we are all part.

## II. “Classroom Research”

So much for personal history. I would like now to talk a bit about the last two issues I mentioned: what we can learn about our students and what we can learn about American culture. These issues are especially relevant to the possibility of the “classroom research” that I mentioned earlier. By way of demonstrating this point, let me read you some material generously provided to me by a colleague of mine, Professor John Trimbur, now at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. While teaching some years ago at Baltimore Community College, Trimbur asked his students to keep a personal log of their collaborative work together. One of the tasks he gave them to work on collaboratively was a Studs Terkel interview about a former Ku Klux Klan leader who had come to agree with the position of Martin Luther King. After discussing the piece in small, task-oriented groups similar in most respects to the discussion group that my colleagues and I had formed, the students were to go home and write an essay explaining that change, all the while keeping track of their thinking in their log. Trimbur tells the rest of the story this way:

One woman wrote in her log [he says] that at first she couldn’t think of anything to say. She found the assignment difficult because she did not want to “judge” the guy. She went on quite a while in this entry to say how in her family she had been brought up not to “judge” other people.



Notice here that the student herself attributes her behavior to the way she had been acculturated in the first place: the way “she had been brought up.” Trimbur continues:

Then, in a log entry written a few days later, she wrote again about the class hour when we discussed the Terkel piece and the writing assignment. What she remembered now was what another woman in the class had said about “conversion.” She found herself “talking it over” with that woman in her mind, and as she talked it over she began to connect the idea of conversion with the story of Saint Paul in the Bible. Making this connection was quite an event for her, as the entry describes it. “Event” is not too strong a word for the experience, because it so clearly involved an active, imagined classmate. And once that event occurred she felt ready to write and interested in what she had to say.

Notice first in this passage that change began for the student with a real discussion with a peer, the person who provided the word, “conversion,” that became so important in this student’s thinking. The student then internalized this discussion with her peer and continued it in her own imagination. What this suggests is that effective collaboration does not stop when group work stops. Group work provides the language we need, in this case the key word “conversion,” in order to “talk to ourselves” productively in a new way.

Second, notice that the discussion, external and internal, did not only change this student’s opinion; it also changed her feelings. It made her “ready to write and interested in what she had to say.” As a result of her early acculturation into one community (being “brought up not to ‘judge’ people”) she had a tendency to reject the whole idea being presented in the Terkel interview. This attitude changed to a willingness to entertain the idea. In recording that change, the student seems to have recorded the crucial first step that must occur whenever we set out to join a larger, more inclusive community of cultural peers: Willingness to entertain a new idea. We can’t leave home it seems, without it.

What I would like to stress here, however, is not what happened to this student but what her instructor did with her account of it. At the time, Trimbur happened to be interested in studying the “inner” process of collaborative learning. We set out to interpret the key passage in this student’s log so as to suggest several different ways to explain the student’s account: an explanation in rhetorical terms, one in subjectivist terms, and one in social terms. He then opted for the latter, concluding that it was by changing “her stance relative to another person” that the student was able to change “her stance relative to the task.” Trimbur’s trenchant commentary appears in full, if you’d like to read it, in the introduction to my textbook *A Short Course in Writing*.

What I would most like to emphasize here is that an instructor who had gathered material of this sort but whose interests differed from Trimbur’s might interpret it in any one of several entirely different but equally interesting and valuable ways. To someone with literary critical interests

the material might suggest ways to apply verbal or symbolic analysis to “living” texts. Or it might suggest ways in which social relations affect the imagination, leading to an extension of reader-response criticism that could draw on the psychological writings of L. S. Vygotsky and dovetail into currently fashionable studies of the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin. Someone with philosophical interests might be moved to explore relationships between language as a social entity and what are called the processes of cognition, leading perhaps to a consideration of the critique of traditional epistemology offered by Richard Rorty. Someone with an interest in psychology might read the material as suggesting ways in which readers respond to emotional challenge or threat. Someone with a religious bent might find resources for discussing the grass roots potential for future developments in “liberation theology.” The sociologically concerned might see a way of exploring the dynamics of social change among people in one or another racial, ethnic, or economic category. And composition specialists might find suggestive material for studying how writers overcome “blocks.” And so on.

The material I have offered in this one brief example lends itself, in short, to a large variety of interest, and it provides “data,” if you will, for research in many areas where, to date, the surface has barely been scratched. Furthermore, it is important to notice, material of this sort is otherwise unobtainable except through the fertile social conditions that collaborative learning creates. Only in the security provided by peer support in small groups which have been given the focus of well-tailored collaborative tasks are people likely to formulate and make accessible to others the uncertain, nebulous, and protean thinking that occurs in the process of change. Only in the security of small group conversation can students speak freely of themselves, by themselves, and for themselves. Instructors in this setting teach indirectly by means of a conversation-focusing task. They neither “facilitate” nor “sit in,” but literally step out. They do not listen directly. But they do hear and hear a great deal more than most instructors ever hear. By providing a secure context for focused conversation, that is, instructors who organize collaborative learning hear their students’ collective experience in the reports of group recorders. More productively still, instructors hear their students’ individual experience through the writing that their collaborative work emboldens them to provide in logs and papers.

This, finally, is the factor that provides “classroom research” of this sort with the degree of “control” it needs in order to establish its validity. “Control” is established by virtue of the fact that collaborative learning is, of course, contrived. Collaborative learning occurs institutionally within the clearly defined and all but universally understood conditions of the classroom. If the technology of collaborative learning is systematically applied, therefore, it can replicate from situation to situation, from class to class, conditions within which quite different groups of participants arrive at consensus and dissent. These replicable conditions can control and thus validate the results derived from classroom research of the sort I have described.

It is therefore work of this sort that I recommend to you as teachers of the humanities in community colleges. It is research for which the conditions of community college humanities classrooms are eminently suited. They provide both the requisite diverse population and the requisite challenging texts. Furthermore, the potential in research of this type for active, vitalizing collaboration among faculty, similar to the collaboration that my colleagues and I engaged in some years ago, is great. And, finally, research of this type is of the highest professional importance. It reveals us Americans—our students and ourselves—as people who know that human survival depends on developing our skill in negotiating among the diverse communities we belong to. It reveals what it takes for us to learn how to engage effectively in the democratic process, a process that, as any parent of young children knows, is by no means native to anyone. And it thereby reveals us as we—ourselves and our students—undertake the crucial task of becoming integrated productively into the larger cultural community that we call “American life.”

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Hephzibah Roskelley, editor

## SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST: TEN YEARS IN A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM

Like all evolutionary structures, the Writing Clinic or Writing Center, as it is now less medically named, traces its changes physically. It remains in the basement of the Humanities Building at the University of Louisville, where nine-year-old flood stains on one wall warn the staff that water covers paper. But much has altered. Individual carrels, constructed ten years ago as frontier outposts of composition teaching—one tutor to three “tutees”—now serve as offices for instructors. The orange dividing wall transported across campus section by section has disappeared as students now work in real four-walled classrooms in other parts of the building. Still, the orange wall was a tangible, if unaesthetic, sign of progress: basic writers as students, not tutees. Over the years the staff brought in tables and chairs to accommodate the small group work we came to value. We added filing cabinets to hold the accumulating essays, exams, and evaluations that helped us assess students’ placement and progress. Recollecting our experience as directors of the basic writing program, we find the physical alterations in the Clinic reflect changing notions in the profession about the function and form of basic writing programs within the university. This essay, written by the first seven directors of basic writing at Louisville, colleagues, and friends now dispersed across the United States, traces the evolution of one program that survived.

The program at the University of Louisville began—like Mina Shaughnessy’s at The City College of The City University of New York—as a response to the burgeoning group of students, traditionally excluded from college, who were taking advantage of new open admissions policies. As Shaughnessy describes them, these students were caught in

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*Hephzibah Roskelley, assistant professor of English at University of Massachusetts-Boston, teaches courses in composition and rhetorical theory. She and Kate Ronald are working on a book on dichotomies in the teaching of composition.*

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an educational Catch 22: persuaded that they could never learn to read and write and admonished to learn to do both. The paradox for basic writing students survives ten years after Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* and translates into academic politics, as universities simultaneously encourage access for the poor, the disadvantaged, the minorities, and work to maintain the standards of "higher education." In "The Language of Exclusion: Basic Writing Instruction at the University," (*College English* 47 (1985): 341-359) Mike Rose explores five notions about writing instruction at the university that limit understanding and deepen this paradox:

Writing ability is judged in terms of the presence of error and can thus be quantified. Writing is a skill or a tool rather than a discipline. A number of our students lack this skill and must be remediated. In fact, some percentage of our students are, for all intents and purposes, illiterate. Our remedial efforts, while currently necessary, can be phased out once the literacy crisis is solved in other segments of the educational system. (341)

Rose shows how these ideas about writing keep writing instruction "on the periphery of the curriculum," (341) both essential and chronically threatened in the institution. Had he known us personally, Rose could not have described more pointedly the forces at work on the basic writing program at the University of Louisville. Since its beginning in 1976, the program has been defining and redefining its mission, embroiled in the struggle to help all comers succeed in academic life while assuring a level of achievement satisfactory to members of the academic community.

The conflict presented by the basic writing program in our institution and, as Rose suggests, in many universities creates a paradox for teachers and directors of programs as well as for the students they serve. Directors of basic writing programs are typically given great responsibility for programs but little power to implement their ideas since the directors are seldom tenurable academic staff. Each director at The University of Louisville, in fact, has been at once both graduate student and administrator, consequently assuming a strangely subordinate-but-equal role in administrative politics. As directors, we argued and negotiated first for continuance, later for resources and autonomy, with tenured faculty from other departments, with teachers of our courses, and with directors of our dissertations.

Our task was complicated by terminology. The term "remedial," often used by university administrators to describe the function of basic writing programs, defines not so much the students such programs serve as the fundamental tension that exists between basic writing and the university. As Rose points out, "remedial" signals a belief in the transience of the basic writing class; that sooner or later with enough training, everyone gets "remediated," and the problem and the program disappear. This belief continues to prevent basic writing programs from being clearly articulated and integrated into the college curriculum. Like many basic writing programs, we inherited too many terms to describe the classes

we taught and our purpose in teaching them. Our courses were “developmental” or “fundamental” or “preparatory,” and we “remediated,” “retained,” “certified.” We had to convince others to see our courses as something more than temporary holding tanks for composition-program rejects and our students as something more than participants in a community of failure.

The directors whose reflections appear here have searched for ways to change perceptions about basic writing and to resolve the paradoxes we faced in the institution. Our roles as students helped us. Our work in literary theory and in rhetoric and composition shaped our practice as teachers and administrators, and we brought new ways of thinking to our testing programs, our course materials, our workshops with instructors. When the Clinic began, the words “process” and “heuristic” had not even acquired buzz-word respectability. “Reader-response” and “pre-writing” were merely hyphenated words. But we learned fast, and because we were in the classroom ourselves, we applied theory immediately, teaching one another as we taught the students. Each new director learned to build on the ideas of the previous director, and the group of teachers and learners came to expect experimentation as well as continuity, as we tried to make political reality, learning theory, and classroom practice come together.

Shaughnessy taught the profession how to view the basic writing class as a real community separated from the academic community; our work at the University of Louisville over the past ten years has been to locate paths along which those two communities can converge. The reflections that follow tell personal stories about the paths taken by one basic writing program. They also reveal fragments of an evolutionary past that we share with the profession at large. Pieced together, they produce an interesting, if not clearly categorized, skeleton that reminds us of what we’ve learned and why we keep exploring.

## 1976-1977

When the tall ships sailed into Boston Harbor in the summer of 1976, political cynic though I was, I had a tear in my eye. The fireworks and general hoopla set off for the nation’s bicentennial seemed wonderfully appropriate. To me they were an outward and national sign of my inward and personal celebration. I had successfully completed a Ph.D. program in Renaissance literature, and I had secured gainful employment for the coming year.

Joe Comprone, just hired by the University of Louisville to build a program in composition, had given me the job of constructing its foundation. I was to be in charge of basic writing and Director of the still-to-be-created Writing Clinic. My years as a teaching assistant had coincided with the entry of the nontraditional student into the university, and my experience with these students convinced me that the process approach had to inform the teaching of basic writing. To my mind grammar study, usage drills, and sentence exercises impersonally marked by an authoritative teacher were out; and writing, writing, and more writing

personally attended to by a sympathetic tutor were in. Sympathy, however, didn't prevent us from counting errors and handing out fill-in-the-blanks assignment sheets. In the absence of experience and guidelines, we taught the way we thought we remembered learning. Still, I knew these students needed to write. None of us had ever tried to put the process theory into practice, but now I was to have the opportunity and the means to do just that.

To be no longer a teaching assistant was a professional elevation, but one requiring, paradoxically, a physical descent. I would leave the third floor graduate student office (its appellation, the Bull Pen, indicated its nature as an academic warm-up area, not the quality of conversation therein) for the basement, and rooms being vacated by the University Archives. I could not have been more pleased. I did notice that announcing that I had been advanced to the basement caused a peculiar smile on some faces, and from time to time I caught part of a phrase that suggested something about my not knowing which way was up. I had by this time seen an Escher etching or two and knew that in matters of perspective, well, it was perspective that mattered. And I was certain that as far as my profession was concerned, the basement was a step in the right direction.

It probably helped, too, that I had no negative associations regarding basements. For me, basements always called to mind a story my grandmother told me when I was a child about my father's boyhood. I have no idea if the events actually happened or if my grandmother were making up the tale to amuse me. I value it now for its prophetic properties. Anyway, it seems that when he was eight or nine, my father came home one day with his knickers filthy. He was told to deposit his clothes in the hallway and make himself presentable to sit on the front porch; he did this every afternoon from 3 until 5 o'clock to await his father's Arrival Home from the Office. My grandmother, picking up my daddy's knickers from the hall floor, heard a noise in the basement, went to the basement door and said sternly, "What are you doing down there without any pants on?" After a silence, a rather stunned voice replied, "Ma'am, I'm fully clothed and I'm down here reading your meter."

The meter reader's answer pretty accurately describes my year as Director of the Writing Clinic. I spent my time trying to convince those on the other floors that those of us in the basement were fully clothed and performing a necessary and appropriate service. To a charming person of advanced years touring parts of the University as a member of an external advisory (fund-raising) commission, I explained that no, we were not dealing with the sort of student the visitor's son had brought home from Hotchkiss years before who had said *pin* when he meant *pen*. I doubt my explanation penetrated. Later, ushered by me onto the elevator, the visitor turned to the sole Black among the group of students already on it and said, "Three, please." To a meeting of the Greater Louisville Council of Teachers of English, I demonstrated with charts and numbers that our students came from every high school in the city, not only *some* schools.

On that first day the Clinic opened, students and tutors carted chairs and tables from the hall and arranged them in groups of four, three students to one tutor, with changing clientele every hour. The students wrote paragraphs, the tutors read them, corrected mistakes, and encouraged rewriting. Of course we knew very little of the implications of writing process theory in 1976. Our diagnostic tests from that era show our nod to invention with all of three lines for the students' "pre-writing," and a space for the topic sentence following naturally. Our assignments were the old narrow find-a-thesis, support-with-details kind: "Blind dates," "Furniture," or "Some Things Never Change." Why we thought then that basic writing students could write only paragraphs escapes me now. Our evaluation forms also remain a mystery to me today: one category allows for a student having "exceptional" capitalization. We focused then on "diction," "singulars/plurals," "verb forms," and our attention to content was likely to be limited to "organization and logic." But the concentrated attention that the tutoring format allowed led us to question these categories of response more and more, as we came to see that our students had something important to say, with or without "control" over verb forms.

Now the tall ships have come to New York to pay their respects to the Lady of the Harbor, and a decade has passed since I looked around a room devoid of everything but a table, some folding chairs, and a group of people—eager, willing, intelligent, courageous, and, above all, creative people—a staff of any director's dreams. How I had the fortune to find them I do not know. I do know that it was they, not I, that made the Writing Clinic work that first year. My great accomplishment was hiring them and getting out of their way. Come to think of it, I did do just what some said I would—went down there and laid an egg. It was a beginning. And like many stories that start *ab ovo*, this one evolves into something quite fine.

—Sue Lorch

University of South Carolina-Aiken

## 1977-1979

We don't often have the opportunity to live through an event that is at the same time literally true and metaphorically compelling. Such an event, however, marked the tone of my two years as Writing Clinic Director. It came on a day that seemed deceptively typical: that morning, at precisely 7:45 A.M., I strode down the stairway of the Humanities Building to the hallway leading to my basement office, opened the corridor door, and stepped forthrightly into a foot of cold standing water. With water lapping at my ankles, I looked at the key ring in my hand, given to me by friends as a totem for my job. On its fob in bold clear lettering were the words, "Captain's Office: U.S.S. Titanic."

Of course, once the Clinic staff arrived, we began to see the humor of the situation. It took the better part of two days to remove the standing water, for the entire basement of the building was under the floodline (from an undetected break in the main waterline). And for several days



thereafter, even with the help of huge dehumidifiers, all of us walked around looking like Little Orphan Annie with hair curled by humidity fit for a rain forest. But we survived in good spirits, for—whatever else it meant—traveling by steerage on the Titanic in our basement habitat had forged us as a staff into a cohesive group. We liked, respected, and helped each other weather not only this event, but also some metaphorical floods which promised to be as monumental as our literal ones.

As a writing clinic in its second and third years, we were clearly being scrutinized to determine if we could meet the demands placed on us. For in those two years, we faced a tremendous growth in numbers of students using the Clinic (as many as 600 students a day at our peak) and in kinds of services we were asked to create for various university populations. Large numbers of students and small numbers at the bottom line challenged us to define our limits and provide the answer to the question the Department seemed to ask us insistently: “Just what kind of service *can* you provide the university community?” Through teamwork and the dedication of a truly extraordinary staff, we were able to develop several successful programs which tried to answer the question. Without the benefit of prototypes to guide us, we developed, with the Education Department, the writing component of an entrance examination for student teachers. In 1977, there were as yet no statewide models or mandates, so we produced one of the first such testing programs in the state. In conjunction with the University reading specialist and a licensed psychometrist, we participated in testing programs for students with learning disabilities, and we designed individual reading/writing tutorial programs for them. We also worked with General Electric, a major employer in the Louisville area, to create a college-credit composition course for middle-level managers. All these programs drew on our creativity as teachers, our theoretical knowledge of composing, our expertise as practitioners of our craft, and our flexibility as a unit in the larger university. They were also great fun to develop.

In addition, of course, we maintained our work with English 100, now a course for the “developmental” student and we continued to offer supplementary tutoring to students throughout the composition sequence. The increased numbers of students who had placed in English 100 via ACT scores of below 16 and a large group of “traditional” 101 students sent to us by their frustrated freshman composition teachers made the English Department increasingly skeptical of tutoring as a pedagogical strategy; not only were there too few tutors, they were too expensive. Pressured by the English Department to cut the “remediating” budget, we had to change the pure tutoring format. Students now attended a “lecture” one day a week and met with tutors for two other sessions. Our approaches were still traditional—lectures on topic sentences, the modes of process analysis, comparison/contrast, and even exercises on vocabulary and spelling. We tried anything. But we began to focus more on “prewriting” techniques and on helping students care about what they had to say. We paid more attention to how students tackled our assignments. Rhetorical concerns with audience, purpose, and voice dominated more and more of our talk. Assignments changed to page-

length pieces that invited students to “develop by example,” and the assignments often included readings as models or cases to guide response.

These facets, the mainstays of our Clinic life, were sometimes the source of agonized soul-searching. (I remember Rose who, after three semesters in English 100, dropped out of school to go home and sit on her front porch; Pete, who continued to rewrite the accident that had left him paralyzed; Ricky, who signed up for English 100 six semesters straight, but came to class only once during that time.) More often we were surrounded with evidence of our positive effect on students and the University (I remember when Maury brought his first English 101 “A” paper to the Clinic to show us). Students were in college, doing well in their courses, who probably wouldn’t have been there if we hadn’t been in the Writing Clinic.

—Liz Bell

University of South Carolina-Aiken

### 1979-1981

A wave of theory hit the Writing Clinic in the fall of 1979. Not the practical sort myself, I jumped into theories of rhetoric and reading, convinced that theory might indeed inform writing practice. Imbued with a sense of social responsibility about students who reached the university without the one tool traditionally deemed the key to academic success, I found it ludicrous, on one hand, to imagine students who used “be” as a finite verb succeeding in a traditional university, but criminal on the other to bar the university’s door to those who had not been challenged or even encouraged to write. If the staff thought some of my theories high-falutin, we did usually agree that intelligence was not measured in length of T-units or by mastery of Standard American English.

Some of the new orthodoxy made sense to all of us: error-counting belittled students, embittered teachers, and produced no results. Students wrote about experiences they’d been led to believe were insignificant; we tried to teach how writers made significance. We experimented with the theories: creating contexts in which students might win by writing, seeking purpose that might motivate, responding to encourage communication.

Audience and context dominated our teaching during those years. I was the first director to duplicate articles from *College English* or CCC for the staff, and Ruth Mitchell and Mary Taylor’s “An Audience Response Model for Writing” (*College English* 41 (1979): 247-279) became our theoretical base. The focus of assignments changed from narrowing and developing a topic sentence, or following a particular pattern of exposition, to responses to rhetorical contexts. We wrote many of these scenarios: “You work on an assembly line in a factory. . . .” “You are moving out of your apartment and your landlord refuses to return your damage deposit.” At the same time, our evaluation of student work changed from marking mistakes to holistic evaluation, based on the students’ effectiveness in achieving a purpose and persuading an audience.

We stopped spending time on what the students' writing didn't have and concentrated on its strengths. We no longer required paragraph-only responses; students decided for themselves what the topic required. And reflecting the new facilitative composition theory, our "lectures" became "workshops," led by tutors who were no longer paid by the hour, but hired as half-time and quarter-time instructors.

I inherited a staff of part-timers and graduate students. No one considered them professional—or even trained—though they were admired for their "patience to work with *those* students." They were considered the bottom rung of English Department hangers-on, women mostly, relegated to the basement. But in that basement, they cooked up a revolution. I might have fueled it a bit, with my theories, and suggested—in academic writing, research, and experimentation—ways to make the influence felt, but the spirit of revolution grew there in the Humanities Building basement as it had in basement programs around the country whenever teachers confronted the results of a failing educational system.

Looking back, I don't measure our success by the curriculum we structured and coordinated, the publications (our own and our students') we sponsored, by the team teaching, the revised tests, the theoretical bull sessions, by group grading, holistic scoring, context-based writing assignments, or even by the attitudes we changed in each other, in our students, and in the English Department. I measure it by three events during those two years that we turned to our advantage (really quite accidentally): the mimeograph machine acquisition, the payless September, and the 1980 NCAA basketball title.

1. The English Department gave us a mimeo machine and a scanner which made mimeo masters from typed or printed copy. (We needed a copier, but this combo was cheaper.) We mastered the technology—every one of us. We got pretty professional at layout and artwork as we published *The Writing Clinic Rag*, a periodical to which students contributed their writing (which we published unedited) and teachers their best writing assignments. The machine was *never* quiet. We went around with ink-blackened fingers and proved once again that print can fuel a revolution.

2. That English Department part-timers are sorely used—underpaid, overworked outcasts from the tenure system—is well understood by *JBW* readers. It is also understood that programs like ours feed on part-timers. So when, that first September of our revolution, everyone got paid but the part-timers, we got angry enough to write an official letter of protest to the University president. Our protest made the English Department uncomfortable (even those who supported us) and pressured the University to cough up checks pretty quickly. Hardly a major victory, it nonetheless set a tone that has characterized the Writing Clinic's demand to be considered professional.

3. We learned to be sports fans in the Clinic—we cared about students and they cared about sports—and in the process we developed new attitudes toward student athletes, whose discipline we tried to harness, and whose defeats we mourned and whose victories we celebrated. Especially that March night in 1980 when *we* won the NCAA basketball title. The

University of Louisville had a Cinderella team that year—one star and a handful of talented underclassmen, most of whom were, or had been, students in the Clinic. That event crystallized a most significant lesson that I hesitate to trivialize by naming, but which has to do with recognizing the whole human in the nontraditional student: the minorities, the underprivileged, the older students, the athletes. It's easy when you theorize about helping people to see only what they don't have. A championship team allowed us to share a bit of what they did.

Perhaps we were too serious about what we did. But revolutionaries have to take a stand.

—Susan Helgeson  
TCS Software—Houston, Texas

## 1981-1982

Cockroaches. The basement of the Humanities Building, newly named the Writing Center during my year as Director, was infested. I lived with them summer and winter, entering in the dark of the morning to the rushing of the reversed engines on a 727 landing at Standiford Field, leaving after sunset smelling the soybeans roast at the Ralston Purina plant, never seeing the sun. Basic writing work has been that way wherever I have been, an industrial scene in a David Lynch film. There were roaches, there were teachers, there were students, and there was learning. Cockroaches don't learn. They were still in the basement when I left. Nonetheless, I presided over efforts at learning how to be an efficient Writing Center, with the main thrusts to improve our testing and to become more cost-effective.

With larger and larger numbers of students, a new division for underprepared students being developed, and continuing budget crises, assessment was a major focus of our work that year. We needed to improve testing methods because students scoring lower than 16 on the verbal section of the ACT would no longer be placed automatically in Basic Writing but would write an essay which would determine their placement. To improve testing, and our methods for assessing competence, we developed a sentence-combining exercise as a diagnostic tool, word counts which could be used to place students or change placements once students had entered the English 100 (Basic Writing) class. We never implemented it, however, since we fairly quickly realized the statistics could not tell teachers as much about a student's problems as a cursory glance at the placement exam essay we held on file. We began to work on improving essay topics and directions instead.

The series of new testing assignments we developed during the year remained context-based but they were evaluated for sentence length and complexity as well as for their attention to the demands of audience and purpose. Through this process we discovered the practical limit for length on a contextual assignment (about half a page), we found some interesting cultural biases (inner city students not driving and therefore not knowing the names of the interstates in town), and we recognized that using related contexts for similar assignments quickly bored the students. These

discoveries actually helped us write some good assignments, and we reduced our placement error rate to less than five percent, a statistic we derived in part from looking at failures in English 101 classes. The new assignments we were writing led to our compiling our own textbook, a choice book, which preserved all that the teachers had created as hand-outs over the years.

Cost-effectiveness went hand in hand with our new emphasis on assessment, both obvious means of quantifying and documenting our work in the Center. To economize, we began team-teaching, a format which kept student/teacher ratios to 7/1, reduced cost per student, and gave the teachers a slight raise. It was a good idea to try, and it achieved its goals, but it was trouble to schedule and created more work for the teachers. After its trial year, team-teaching gave way to other formats. But the tutorial setting was gone for good, and with it the 101 students who needed extra help. Basic Writing took its place beside other composition courses in regular classrooms, a separate, no longer drop-in, program.

The success of the testing program and the team-teaching program is really thirty individual success stories. The teachers worked out the details of everything I introduced, forming and shaping through feedback one to another, and implementing the final product as their own. I played the same role toward their ideas. Without this symbiotic relationship, we never would have done the testing work or the Clinic textbook, and team-teaching would have been an unqualified disaster.

I can't argue that students always felt part of the symbiosis. With the new emphasis on accountability, we encountered some unique problems. We decided to abandon the practice of allowing a student who had failed English 100 twice to go on to the English 101, and we learned the painful task of holding up a student's progress at the University because he or she had not achieved the level our testing program was demonstrating to be meaningful. But we also learned how warmly rewarding it was to pass a student we thought would never master the course.

Much learning took place in the Writing Center. Seventy percent of the students passed on the first attempt at English 100. Nearly one hundred percent passed on the second try. Two four-time repeaters learned to write that year. Even the student who got caught trying to cheat on the placement exam, and so escape the course, applied himself and passed on the first try.

It was a good year, I think, for all of the learners in the Writing Center. It was not a good year for the cockroaches. Some of us ganged up on them in the restrooms. But in any Lynch film against the smoky background, someone succeeds, someone fails, someone dies. It was good that our successes were teachers and students, our failures were so minor, and our casualties were limited to the roaches.

—Forrest Houlette  
Ball State University

1982-1984

I worked in this revolution, amidst the cockroaches, from the beginning. Sue Lorch called me one night in August of 1976 to offer me a job tutoring in the Writing Clinic. It was around 11:00 P.M. on the night before the Clinic first opened its doors, and she was desperate. Luckily, so was I. I reported for work the next morning. And I got hooked early—first on the students, then on the staff, and finally, on rhetorical theory and composition studies. I was just beginning my dissertation on expressive discourse, six years later, when I applied for the Director's position.

But I almost didn't take the job when it was offered in the summer of 1982. All the rules had changed. During that summer, the English Department, worried about costs, virtually turned the basic writing program over to a newly created Preparatory Division. The Prep Division would have "budgetary" control, the English Department "curricular" and "staffing" control. Trouble was, the Prep Division didn't have much of a budget that summer, and the Directorship, always a full-time position with a full-time salary, now became a teaching assistantship at one-third the already meager pay. But I was addicted to the program for good by now, and had some ideas about using expressive writing in our classes, so I accepted the job, only dimly aware that along with the decrease in salary would come a tremendous increase in responsibility and politicking.

I was the first Director to serve the two masters of Department and Division. The change required a sort of schizophrenic rethinking of roles and mission, for me and the teachers, many of whom had been around nearly as long as I had. I reported to everybody, it seemed—the Director of Composition, the Chair of English, the Director and staff of the Prep Division and anyone else who felt even mildly threatened by the altered status of the Clinic. Many did. Naturally, the English Department and the Prep Division didn't always agree on how the Clinic should be run, who should be hired, how students should be tested. And the staff, the students, and I were caught in the middle. It took the first year for us to adjust to new ways of reporting students' progress, the new politics of our various supervisors, and the new status of our students. The students now were not only Arts and Science students "making up for lost time," but students in an entirely new division of the university. The whole game had changed. The students now would have to complete a certain number of hours in the Division with a certain GPA to be considered for admission to Arts and Sciences.

Our responsibilities, therefore, increased. Passing a student from English 099 (the new number for our old course that now told everyone this was not "college work") had always meant that we thought the student was ready for English 101 no more, no less. Now we were part of English. Now, a passing grade in English 099 translated into a recommendation that the student was ready for *all* of the Arts and Sciences curriculum. As a result, the students quickly became more labeled, more

desperate, and more tested. One of the trickiest battles I had to fight was to retain the responsibility for certifying students' competence. Even though the Clinic was ostensibly under its curricular control, Arts and Sciences wanted yet another standard test of our students' readiness for "college"—their college. The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills became my worst enemy. I finally convinced all the masters that our curriculum, our assignments and exams (which increasingly reflected actual writing processes like drafting and revising), and our teachers' judgments were more reliable than standardized tests. But it was close.

Teachers' roles changed in those years as well. The Preparatory Division, anxious to take its place in the academic community as an equal power, was eager to pay basic writing teachers the same rate as any other part-time teacher in the university. Thus, I was able to stop the mandatory team-teaching format, and the staff was generally relieved. The majority of the staff now moved into classrooms alone, some for the first time. The sudden autonomy changed the mood of the Clinic. Before now, almost all of our teaching had been public; we sat with our students at tables no more than two feet apart, or we listened to the teaching going on behind the orange wall that divided tutoring from workshop groups. Now we came back from classrooms to sit at the tables and talk, rather than overhear.

Reading became more a part of the Clinic's pedagogy as we became certifiers of students' readiness for college curriculum. Assignments and midterm and final exams asked students to read something, usually from the popular press, demonstrate that they understood its message, and write a personal response to it. My research into expressive discourse led me to encourage instructors to help students slow down their reading by writing about developing guesses about meaning and connections to their experiences. Final exams became week-long exercises, carefully set up and prepared for, with topics given in advance and strategies worked on in class. And I changed the procedure by which the placement exam was read. Instead of begging for volunteers and grabbing readers out of the halls to be paid one dollar per essay, I set up a team of seven or eight regular readers. The teachers collaborated to design the placement exam, the scoring guide, and to test the test in their classes. The new restrictions and responsibilities, therefore, led to some exciting possibilities for change to bring the Clinic more in line with what was then current in composition studies.

When I look back on my two years as Director, I think I am most proud of our creating and pushing through channels a new course in the Clinic—English 098. Since the beginning, there had always been a group of students who could not get through English 099, Basic Writing, in one semester. They worked diligently, showed significant improvement, began to feel more in control of writing contexts, and then we teachers turned around and said, "Yes, you have done a wonderful job trying, but still you get an F." The political climate in the Prep Division allowed us to propose English 098, a lower-level course designed for these students.

The English Department probably wouldn't have funded it, or been sure "those students" belonged in the academy in the first place, but, by this time, the Prep Division had money and its Director was listening. The course began in the fall of 1983, staffed by six of our best teachers and designed to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The success rate remains high, as does the morale of these students. They move smoothly and confidently to English 099, the "door" to the university.

In these two years, the political tension made us stop and think. We became more vocal advocates for the students and for ourselves as professionals. We talked more realistically about our qualifications, the students' dilemmas, our approaches to the bureaucracy, and applications of the theory we were studying. The Prep Division took us seriously and we got hooked on widening our influence beyond the English Department. Oh, and I got a raise during my second year.

—Kate Ronald  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

#### 1984-1985

Orwell's year ironically was a calm political time in the basement. The Preparatory Division and the English Department had struck a kind of balance, with the Division controlling a stabilized budget and the Department retaining control over curriculum. In this climate of detente, the Clinic Director's role expanded; because neither side knew or had much contact with the other except through me, I became mediator and public relations officer, explaining English Department policies to Division staff and Division decisions to faculty members. But because neither side could claim full control over the Writing Center, this quiet political year became the year of Being Left Alone; the director made hiring decisions and revised programs with little intervention or advice from either boss.

Like most of my predecessors, I was working on my dissertation when I became Director of the Clinic, and the curricular changes I instituted were a direct result of my own dissertation focus on the reclaiming of the imagination, as Ann Berthoff has called it, and the importance of reading in that enterprise. Of course, researchers had long since acknowledged the intimate connection between reading and writing. But the basic writing textbooks slumped on the tops of our filing cabinets and still used by some instructors persisted in two distressing assumptions that kept teachers and students from making the connection: since the basic writers can't read, don't let them; if they read at all, make it short, simple, and "relevant." I wanted to make sure we resisted the temptation to condescend to our students' reading capabilities by denying them access to "challenging" literature. I remember the suspicion that greeted me on the day I introduced to instructors two groups of assignments that I had tried out in my English 098 class. The assignments centered on *King Lear* and a Kate Chopin short story. We examined responses from my group of unskilled writers, finding a surprising amount of interpretive skill, if not mastery over form, among the essays.



Our classes read a lot that year as we developed a growing belief in the notion that approach to texts rather than the texts themselves made the difference, that the act of interpreting literature could be made to mirror the act of composing in writing. Students learned to trust their responses to the texts they read, and their teachers learned that in encouraging trust among students we were giving them a kind of control. Reader response as empowerment. I still believe that, three years beyond my dissertation and Wolfgang Iser.

Berthoff's work on composing and the imagination and our success with using literature in classroom assignments led me to change the topics for the required midterm and final exams. Several volunteers grouped around the typewriter on a few quiet afternoons to write our own mini-series of exam assignments. The assignments were very short narratives illustrating some cliché like "you never miss the water till the well runs dry" or "all's well that ends well" with instructions to explain how the story fit the cliché and an invitation to use personal experience to help with the explanation. These little vignettes were more than just fun to write; they let us test our theories as well as our imaginations. Their style helped students respond conversationally, from their own experience and from the text, in class discussions and short writing assignments preceding the exam. Exam responses blended these types of support and detail naturally. Berthoff calls this process knowing your knowledge, and it seemed crucial for this group of students to recognize that they came with knowledge as well as got it in the classroom.

Theories about the imagination and the connection between reading and writing were all very well for a dissertation writer whose job it was to make sense of such ideas. But as Director of the program, I had to look for ways to share these ideas with a staff whose part-time status mandated other professional lives. If the diversity of the teaching community is a strength in basic writing, it's also paradoxically its weakness. Shared contexts can't be assumed, and opportunities for sharing are limited by those traditional limiters: money and status. Casting about for a solution, I realized that the exams required of all Preparatory Division students could become occasions for the testing and certifying of not only our students' progress, but our own. So I began staffwide holistic grading sessions that brought all twenty-one of us together to evaluate the performance of lots of students (each instructor typically read eighty or so exams), and to reflect on our own teaching methods and attitudes about writing competence. As we discussed samples, we'd discover what we had emphasized in preparing students and we'd locate stylistic and syntactic markers that separated failing from passing responses. I think, I hope, that we saw ourselves as a community of researchers as well as teachers.

During my year, with the Preparatory Division and the English Department in perilous equilibrium, it became clear that we would have to find new ways to retain cohesiveness. We were no longer the isolated group of "basement professionals." The English Department sent more graduate students from "upstairs" to teach, more faculty to talk. The Preparatory Division sent for our course syllabi and our instructors' vitae.

The role of the Center grew broader as more and more “outsiders,” students in regular programs and businesses in the area, began to call for advice and consultation. As a relative newcomer to basic writing classes, I helped accelerate the change of role and of image. But amidst all the changes that began to give us greater visibility and even status, the basement community kept me from forgetting some of the wisdom from the first days, a wisdom that began with belief in possibilities.

—Hephzibah Roskelly  
University of Massachusetts-Boston

## 1985-1987

If Susan’s term as Director was shaped by her interest in composition theory, Kate’s by political exigency, and Hepsie’s by her commitment to imagination, mine was driven by the conviction that defining and teaching good writing is necessarily approached as a collaborative enterprise. Influenced by the work of Ann Berthoff, Kenneth Bruffee, and Paulo Freire, I believe that to teach well we need to investigate our knowledge, question our own authority. This is particularly important in a changing program, and reviewing the history of this program makes it clear that change is, to borrow a cliché, the only constant.

One of Susan’s legacies was my interest in writing evaluation, sparked when she asked me in 1979 to investigate something called “primary trait scoring.” Being of a political bent, I came to see evaluation as a crucial issue in composition instruction. At the beginning, our students were placed by their ACT scores and given a “diagnostic” in the first class meeting. Realizing that an objective test score was a poor indicator of writing proficiency, Susan had in 1980 instituted placement testing in student orientation sessions. Like virtually all our operations, it was shaped by budget; we could only afford to test so many students, so an ACT English score of 15, which would yield about that many, became our upper limit. Every year thereafter we sought to refine our topic-writing, our test-giving, and our essay-scoring procedures, looking for ways to get tired, frightened, and often hungry almost-freshmen to produce writing that would show us what they might do in a composition course. I profited handsomely from my investment in that process, and by the time I became Director, I was writing a dissertation on evaluative reading.

I continued the practice of grading midterm and final essays in a single sitting by a holistic procedure, but provided less and less in the way of scoring guides, using the first hour of each session instead to provoke discussion of several difficult essays and thereby trying to develop a definition of “satisfactory response” that we could all subscribe to, at least in part. In my second year, uncomfortable with the limitations imposed on both writers and readers by using an impromptu essay as an exit examination, I worked with the staff to devise and implement an evaluation system based on portfolios of finished work.

But what ties all this together, what I tried to make explicit in the hope that it would sustain itself, is the communal nature of our program’s development. I will likely be the last Director who can look back to the

early years and see how we created "Basic Writing" out of whole cloth, relying on native wit and daily inspiration to keep our students from sinking while we developed concepts to account for what we saw on their papers and methods to help them learn to do the writing college would require of them. We learned to collaborate because nobody knew what to do and everybody had to do it. So we learned to listen over our shoulders and talk to each other between classes, to scavenge each other's handouts and listen up when someone said, "I was reading such-and-such over the weekend."

Finding out about others who were working with and theorizing about unskilled writers enabled us to put our work in context, to see that what we were doing was a task shared by teachers in other places, and that the problems we were encountering, not nearly so mundane as our better-paid colleagues imagined, in fact raised questions about the very nature of literacy and education. We learned to what a large extent "good writing" is a social construct reflecting the community in which it is defined.

Seven years' work here convinced me that this is an ideal situation in which to learn to teach, a place where Authority carries little weight but where peers listen to each other. So when I became Director, I set about making more explicit what I thought we had learned. I tried to assure that the learning was shared by the whole staff, those who had joined us lately as well as those who had been with us since the beginning. Assuming that it was not my responsibility to make all the decisions, but to point out what decisions needed to be made and to take the lead in negotiations, I tried to draw people together and keep them talking about teaching. We had formal meetings on set topics such as reading in the writing class, responding to student work, and grading, and some of us profited richly from participating in conferences away from Louisville. But the best tool, the most useful and pleasant, continues to be informal consultation, what one Authority has termed "sitting around Kaffee-Klatsching in the Clinic." By involving small groups of people in conversation about the problem at hand, I was able, sometimes, both to find out their thinking and inform them of mine. The give-and-take of these informal sessions continues, in my view, to be the backbone of the program, what makes us work.

In an increasingly conservative political climate, it is both more difficult and more essential to keep us all—administrators, fellow teachers, students, myself—reminded that easy answers will not do. Pressures for accountability increase even as understanding of complexity decreases. The Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills always lurks in the shadows. Only a program whose members can say clearly why they do what they do and contemplate doing it differently can, or deserves to, survive.

—Wanda Martin  
University of New Mexico

## Conclusion

Ten years later we're still not sure how we convinced a department, an administration, students, and teachers to support and extend the function of the Writing Center. We do know we counted on students to make our case to administrators that basic writing was worth the money; and we counted on one another to reinforce theories and practices we were learning. Looking back we find that the pedagogical—and political—strategies which worked were those that took advantage of the community we had around us. The ideas that didn't last—sentence combining, grammar exercises, our textbook—were theories imposed without consideration of our own context in a mistaken belief that models could be made of processes. The history of this writing program, and maybe the history of many writing programs, is a story of recognition: nurturing what works, abandoning what doesn't, changing what we see by changing how we see.

Consequently after ten years, we writing teachers—the seven of us who share their experiences here and the profession as a whole—are still looking for the paths that converge, the places where students participate in the community of academic writers by bringing what they already know to bear on what they need to know. The prospects are, as they always have been, both daunting and exhilarating. “Remedial education” is studied and restudied, while the institution, chronically forgetful of the past, struggles to set the limits of higher education by creating new admission standards that will exclude some who would have benefited from basic writing programs. At the same time, faculty members across the university, troubled by the inability of graduates to write effectively, are beginning to investigate how they can integrate writing into their courses. Now new general education programs are developing which, if they're successful, will bring writing to the heart of every student's curriculum.

So, the Writing Clinic becomes the Writing Center, and the Writing Center, in turn, decenters, offering new services in new places as the notion of writing as a skill too basic for the university gives way to a concept of writing as a discipline vital to the academic life. The next Director at the University of Louisville will run a program increasingly different from the one which originated prior to the flood in a basement room vacated by University Archives. But what does not change, despite wave after wave of theory and practice, is the determination to help every student learn to write for college, as best we know how.

George H. Jensen

## BUREAUCRACY AND BASIC WRITING PROGRAMS; OR, FALLOUT FROM THE JAN KEMP TRIAL

Literacy programs generally emerge from political clashes between the haves and the have nots, between those who press for change and those who defend the status quo, or between those who wish to open education to the masses and those who promote education for the elite. Basic writing programs are no exception. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, minority groups were exerting tremendous pressure on institutions of higher education to recruit more minority students. Against this force were traditional academicians concerned that a large influx of nontraditional students would lower standards and dilute the quality of a college education. Basic writing programs were developed for the most part to reduce the strife between such factions.

Even though basic writing programs have helped many students succeed in college, vestiges of the politics that led to the creation of these programs remain. Basic writing programs are hit with many obstacles. They often continue to be viewed as political liabilities, being considered the focus of political pressure from the federal government and civil rights groups and a threat to the "character" or "image" of particular institutions. In general, literacy programs tend to be viewed as temporary solutions to transient problems (see Rose 355-59). Many politicians and academic administrators seem anxiously to await the day that "remedial" programs can be phased out.

Since politics is an inevitable feature of basic writing programs, those of us who teach in them need to understand the "nature of the beast."

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*George H. Jensen, assistant professor, Division of Developmental Studies, Georgia State University, has published articles in College Composition and Communication, Journal of Basic Writing, Proof, and Bulletin of Psychological Type. With John DiTiberio, he has written Personality and the Teaching of Composition, forthcoming with Ablex Publishing Company.*

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Unfortunately little has been written on the kinds of political issues that confront basic writing programs. What is needed especially is a better understanding of how the *structure* of a literacy program affects its political life. If a basic writing program is administratively a part of some larger academic unit, such as a Department of English or a College of Education, does it gain security or does it become a purgatory for graduate teaching assistants, instructors, and inexperienced assistant professors? If a basic writing program is a free standing unit, does it gain independence and respect or is it more vulnerable?

Such issues certainly need to be explored in more depth. This paper will analyze how higher education in Georgia reacted to the Jan Kemp trial, an event which, I believe, can illustrate paradigmatically the kinds of political issues that arise in basic writing programs that are administratively separate from a traditional academic department or college.

## THE TRIAL

In the early 1970s, the Board of Regents (the governing body of higher education in Georgia) experimented with several approaches to raising the academic competence of nontraditional students. After the Regents found that summer enrichment programs and other short-term interventions were generally ineffective, they created Developmental Studies, a statewide program to provide extensive instruction in composition, reading, and mathematics. Each institution of higher education was charged with the task of a separate division, apart from traditional academic units, that would be responsible for providing "remedial" instruction before students were admitted to core academic classes. From the beginning, the Board of Regents established certain statewide regulations for the programs. Most of these related either to placement or exit standards.

It was in the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia that Jan Kemp began to teach composition during the late 1970s. In 1982, she was dismissed, ostensibly because she was argumentative with her superiors. Kemp then filed a lawsuit, charging that she was terminated because she had complained about the preferential treatment of athletes.

The widely publicized trial revealed numerous violations of state policy, professional ethics, and common sense. About twenty-five percent of the students in the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia, a program funded largely through the athletic foundation, were athletes. It might be predicted that this seemingly incestuous structure could lead to abuse. It did. For example, one of the existing state policies restricted Developmental Studies students to four attempts to pass courses in a particular area—composition, reading, or mathematics. The record shows that athletes at the University of Georgia were sometimes allowed five or six attempts, apparently for no reason other than they could continue to be eligible to play football.

The problems, however, extended beyond this vested financial agreement. Virginia Trotter, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, went as far as to change the grades of six football players who were then enrolled in Developmental Studies classes, so that they would be eligible to play in the Sugar Bowl. She first discussed the matter with Fred Davison, President of the University, and she felt that she had acted with his implicit approval.

The improprieties revealed during the Kemp trial were many and varied. It ended in February, 1986, as sensationally as it had begun. Kemp won reinstatement to the University of Georgia and a settlement of 2.5 million dollars. To avoid appeals, she later settled for a lesser amount, reportedly about one million dollars.

## THE AUDIT

As a result of the trial, it became clear that problems existed within and, more importantly, *outside* the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia, and changes were made. Fred Davison, the President, resigned; Virginia Trotter, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and LeRoy Ervin, the Director of Developmental Studies, were both reassigned. But the repercussions extended far beyond the University of Georgia campus.

Concerned that the kind of violations revealed during the Kemp trial might be widespread, the Board of Regents ordered an audit of every Developmental Studies Program in the state. During the first phase of the audit, an investigative team interviewed the director of each program, faculty, athletic counselors, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and other institutional officials. During the second phase, a team of accountants reviewed student records for a three-year period (1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85). Week after week, the state's newspapers carried stories about violations of state policy. All institutions had at least a handful of violations; some were reported to have violations in the hundreds. But the story presented by the press seems far less serious once one reads the actual reports and, more importantly, each institution's response to the reports. Indeed, only five or six institutions—according to the Board of Regent's own reports—were considered “not in general compliance” with state regulations.

Those institutions “not in general compliance” were not cited for the kind of corruption that had occurred at the University of Georgia. A couple of the institutions had an excessive number of violations because their procedures for monitoring students were inadequate. For example, Columbus College, a small four-year institution judged “not in general compliance,” did not have student records computerized and thus could not use computers to monitor students. It was cited for thirty-nine instances in which students did not take placement examinations, actually a rather minor violation (Columbus College Audit). Since students may be required to take as many as three entrance examinations (English, reading, mathematics), these violations could relate to as few as thirteen students over a three-year period. The college responded to the audit

by saying that they had asked the students to take the examinations, but some simply had not shown up. Because the institution could not monitor the students by computer, some slipped through. The institution felt that some of the other violations (thirty students were allowed more than “four attempts” to exit, and fourteen students were allowed to exit without meeting all the exit standards) were partially due to an institutional reorganization. The Director of the college’s Developmental Studies Program had died during the period under audit. Columbus College certainly needed to modernize its record keeping, but the institution’s violations hardly constituted a major scandal.

In reports on other institutions, it appears that the auditors incorrectly cited violations. For example, Kennesaw College was cited for fifty-two instances of students taking courses out of sequence (Kennesaw College Audit). The auditors assumed that English 098 was a prerequisite for English 099, but Kennesaw College’s catalog clearly states that 099 is a prerequisite for 098.

Other apparent violations related to differences in interpretation of state policy. Bainbridge Junior College (BJC) was criticized for a violation in the intent of a policy that students enroll in Developmental Studies classes “during consecutive quarters of attendance and not enroll in credit courses instead of the required D[evelopmental] S[tudies] P[rogram] course(s)” (Bainbridge Junior College Audit). Bainbridge’s President Mobley replied:

We maintain that BJC is not in violation of Regents’ policy concerning the *intent* mentioned by auditors. The historical record we have enclosed dates back to the draft document of the original academic committee . . . , which we believe was not interpreted correctly by the auditors. As a matter of record, the language of the intent was addressed specifically, reviewed by the original committee, recommended by the Deans, approved by the Advisory Council, and approved by the [Board of] Regents. (1)

Bainbridge’s interpretation certainly seems justified, since it was approved up the chain of command. In fact, it could be argued that the college’s interpretation is more beneficial to students. When students are allowed to take some credit courses as they meet their Developmental Studies requirements, the students generally feel more connected to the college or university and more positive about their progress.

The reluctance of the auditors to allow interpretations (or institutional reformulations) of state policy to benefit students was most evident in the audit of Albany State College. The auditors cited the institution for forty-eight instances of allowing students more than four attempts to complete their Developmental Studies course work. Albany State’s President Black responded:

The institution’s practice has been that of allowing students more than four attempts only when the students have made significant progress in their course work and the instructor of record feels the student’s progress is significant enough to warrant an addi-



tional attempt. In the cases where these exceptions have been granted, the success rate of students is more than 85%. (2)

This kind of violation of policy can hardly be placed in the same class as allowing athletes an extra attempt or two so that they can remain eligible to play football.

Although the real story was not reported in the press, the audits verified that the kind of corruption that Kemp denounced at the University of Georgia was not statewide. All but five or six of the state's thirty-four institutions were (in the auditor's own words) "in general compliance." Given the ambiguous quality of the audits, it is questionable that even five or six institutions were truly "not in general compliance."

## NEW REGULATIONS

Even though the auditor's reports indicated that the events that led to the Kemp trial were unique to a specific period of a particular administration at the University of Georgia, the Board of Regents moved to establish additional policies to regulate Developmental Studies Programs. When a draft of the new policies appeared on July 11, 1986, each institution was allowed to respond. The institutions complained that some of the policies would not work on their campus, that some policies restricted the professional role of the faculty, and that other policies placed students in Catch-22 snafu's. Personnel at the Board of Regents reviewed the responses and made some revisions, but the majority of the new policies stood. The Board of Regents felt that too many of the institutions' complaints about new policies argued against each other and, therefore, could not be resolved. The Board did not choose another interpretation. If the responses from the state's thirty-four institutions argued against each other, then perhaps these new policies were too restrictive to work on all campuses. Perhaps, the Board of Regents was trying to solve, with statewide policies, problems indigenous to one or two institutions.

With the new regulations, Georgia's Developmental Studies Programs were faced with, by my count, thirteen new points of policy. Furthermore, the programs were given less than a quarter to implement them. And few of the policies seemed either necessary or constructive.

I will cite one example in detail. Before the Kemp trial, the Board of Regents had already established a "thirty-hour" rule. Students were required to complete all of their Developmental Studies courses before they accumulated thirty hours of coursework, and advisors were given the responsibility of seeing that the rule was followed. The auditors discovered that some students were registering for Developmental Studies courses along with credit courses to appease their advisors. The students then would drop their Developmental Studies courses and remain in Political Science, Sociology, or History. Some students, thus, were clearly circumventing the system. But how many? By my count, about two per institution during the three-year period under audit. Most of these were concentrated at institutions that had poor record-keeping procedures. It was not so much that the "thirty-hour" rule was not working as it was that some institutions needed to monitor the rule more closely.

Yet, the Board of Regents created two new policies to plug a fairly minor loophole in the “thirty-hour” rule. One new policy requires students to register for their Developmental Studies requirements before they register for core curriculum courses. The other new policy keeps students from dropping those Developmental Studies courses for which they have registered:

Students enrolled in both Developmental Studies and credit courses may not withdraw from Developmental Studies courses unless they also withdraw from credit courses. (Developmental Studies Procedures)

Thus, students who chose to withdraw from Developmental Studies courses (or are withdrawn by their instructor because of violations of attendance policy) are to be withdrawn from all other courses in which they are currently enrolled.

These new policies may seem harmless enough on the surface, but they could have disastrous effects for students. For example, if a student enrolled in a Developmental Studies composition class and a core curriculum history class violates the attendance policy of the former, then he or she will be dropped from both classes. If the student is dropped after mid-term, that student will receive a “Withdrawn Failing” for the history class, which is averaged into the GPA as an “F”. For a marginal student (who may not have the academic resources to recover from an “F”), a single violation of an attendance policy may lead to probation or expulsion from the university.

Thus, the Board of Regents added two new policies that are at best superfluous and at worst counterproductive. Similarly, it is difficult to determine what bit of evidence presented at the Kemp trial or what data collected in the audit of Developmental Studies Programs was used to justify the other new policies.

The Tower Commission Report on the Iran scandal offers an interesting contrast. The Tower Report attempted to determine what went wrong with the National Security Council (NSC). The committee concluded that the Iran scandal developed because the leaders—not the policies—of the NSC were flawed. They recommended no changes in the structure of the NSC because this, they felt, would place counterproductive limits on the Presidency (94). A similar report could have been written about Georgia’s Developmental Studies Programs. The Board of Regents could have concluded that the structure of Developmental Studies Programs was not flawed, for it was working at most institutions, but that the administrators at some institutions were flawed. They could have asked each institution to address the problems unique to that institution in a way that would work for that institution. Then, perhaps, problems could have been solved without new rules, without further restricting the academic freedom of faculty, and without making students feel like the system is “out to get them.”

## IMPLICATIONS

When we speak of the politics of basic writing programs, it is important to realize that the structure of the program will affect the kinds of political issues that come forth in and around that structure. When a basic writing program is established as part of a statewide program, as an independent division within the university structure, it may seem to gain some independence from literary critics or secondary educational specialists, but the basic writing program also will lose some independence to a state bureaucracy that will tend to view the programs as so many peas in a pod. In the aftermath of the Kemp trial, we can see that events in the University of Georgia's Developmental Studies Program seemed to affect how programs throughout the state were perceived. Once a crisis was perceived, real or not, the bureaucracy moved to establish statewide policies, as if each program at each institution was identical.

There are also inherent dangers in being ruled or directed by bureaucrats who have not, as Paulo Freire advocates, entered into a "communion" with those who need to be educated (47). The policies of high-level bureaucrats often have unforeseen ramifications for the curriculum. For example, some of the new policies established by the Board of Regents in Georgia have increased the importance of a statewide objective grammar test which students must pass to exit Developmental Studies. Thus, instructors are indirectly encouraged to spend more class time coaching students to pass a grammar test, which could, as George Hillocks' meta-analysis shows, have a negative effect on the quality of the students' writing (134-141, 225-227). As regulations proliferate, competent professionals can, in Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux's words, be reduced to "high-level clerks implementing the orders of others" (24). Developmental Studies specialists may be forced to follow policies that they have had little voice in formulating.

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Marie Jean Lederman

## WHY TEST?

*Editor's Note: This article appeared originally in an essay collection on writing assessment published in 1986. The full citation is given in the permission statement below. JBW is reprinting this article because we feel it provides useful background and texture for the dialogic essay written especially for JBW by Gao Jie and Marie Jean Lederman (see article immediately following this one). We feel also that on its own it offers an indispensable perspective on writing assessment in the United States.*

Why do we test? Some of us test because we believe we must. More of us test because boards of regents or trustees, state legislators, or high-ranking college administrators have mandated testing programs. In the mid-1980s in America, testing has become the flag raised by the troops of the Land of Academic Standards.

Today's strong belief in assessment ranges from the "quick fix" of tests in popular magazines to formal examinations in schools. The city of Minneapolis is a striking example. In its 1984 attempt to tighten academic standards, it was the first school system in the country to require competency tests for promotion out of kindergarten. To ensure preparation for testing at this level, the business community is busily developing computer materials such as Program Design's Baby's First Software.

America appears, at this juncture, to be a particularly test-happy culture. But what seems to be an especially American, especially contemporary phenomenon is far from unique to this one place and this one time. Today's spur to testing may be boards of regents or trustees, legislators, or local administrators, but the reasons we test and the inevitable problems involved in testing have roots that touch the beginnings of social activities.

To understand why we test today, it is instructive to go back to reasons why people throughout history and throughout the world have relied on tests. A look at other cultures and their tests provides a useful historical

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*From Writing Assessment: Issues and Strategies, edited by Karen L. Greenberg, Harvey S. Wiener, and Richard A. Donovan. Copyright © 1986 by Longman Inc. Reprinted by permission.*

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perspective on our own motivations for testing, our testing procedures, and the inevitable limitations of any tests we create.

Perhaps the earliest tests were *rites de passage*, tests that inducted adolescents into adulthood. These rites not only marked a sexual coming of age but also marked admission into the culture, values, and mores of the group. According to Otto Rank, they were educational experiences that reconciled, for boys, both sexuality and education by deferring the boy's formal education to the time of puberty. The boy's initiation marked the passing of the role of education from a person (mother) to the community; "*in place of a human being as a pattern of education, a collective ideology appears as the education ideal*" (246). Basically, such tests permitted movement of both girls and boys from one stage to another and were inherent in the education of all members of the group. Of course, the nature of the tests varied, depending on the values of the group. These *rites de passage*, marking a transition from one stage to another according to specific tasks performed, might be seen as harbingers of proficiency tests like the "rising junior" examinations given by some colleges today. These "rising junior" examinations seek to establish a set of tasks beyond course grades that are "external" verification of students' abilities to meet the standards of the group they wish to join.

If attaining membership in a group was one early function of testing, another was the attempt to sort people or to choose the best people to perform specific tasks valued by a group. The Chinese invented the examination, "one of the more controversial of their contributions to the world, which many centuries later adopted this method of determining qualifications" (Heren et al. 121). In China, the written examination system began in the Sui dynasty (589-618). The Chinese attempted to create a system of competitive examinations for government positions, precursors to our modern civil service examinations.

By A.D. 1370 these examinations had striking similarities to writing assessment examinations today:

*Every three years competitors successful in the district examinations assembled in the provincial capitals for three sessions of three days and three nights each. Compositions in prose and verse revealed the extent of reading and depth of scholarship. At this level, penmanship did not count, since a bureau of examination copyists (established in 1015 A.D.) reproduced the papers in another hand before they were evaluated by two independent readers, with a third reader to receive and reconcile the sealed grades. (DuBois 4)*

In attempting to rank candidates on the basis of demonstrated merit, the examiners in China faced many of the problems that we face in designing similar assessment tasks today. One problem in essay testing now is the question of the influence of handwriting in judgments that readers make about the quality of an essay. This question seems to have been solved, at least to the satisfaction of the Chinese examiners. By rewriting candidates' papers, they ensured that handwriting would not "count" (DuBois 4). An alternative explanation, however, may be that

the decision to copy the papers was made to conceal the identity of the examinees. Other historians note that in addition to using numbers instead of names on the examination papers, papers were copied to ensure that the examinees' identity would remain unknown and therefore would not influence the readers (Fairbank, Reischauer, and Craig 189). Today's examiners, similarly, seek to maintain the anonymity of examinees through substitutions such as social security numbers or other codes on student papers.

An even more striking parallel with today's concerns about instruments for writing assessment was the early recognition of the problem of tests establishing fixed forms and of the relationship between those fixed forms and the creativity of the examinees. By 1487 in China a specific form for writing examination papers was adopted, "under eight main headings, with not over 700 characters in all and with much use of balance and antithesis. This was the famous 'eight-legged essay' style, later denounced as imposing a tyranny of literary structures over thought" (Fairbank et al. 190). Some scholars now see this examination system as having "degraded education and made it a mere appendage to the examination system" (China Handbook 4). Today we continue to worry about whether or not the format of an essay examination will have a negative effect on students' creativity and thinking or, worse, that our tests may become more important than our curriculum.

Another question we debate is frequency of retesting. How often should students be asked to repeat tests that they have not passed? According to Scharfstein, the answer in nineteenth-century China was so many times that "many candidates sat for these examinations for twenty or thirty years or more. At the age of eighty or ninety, candidates who had failed repeatedly might be given a consolation degree. They were failures, but honorable ones" (17). Few of today's colleges exhibit either such patience or such compassion. Neither, for that matter, does the rest of our culture.

An additional problem is the control of cheating. As one expects when the stakes are high enough, there may be desperation on the part of some of the candidates. In nineteenth-century China, for example, "expert stand-ins were hired" or "clothing was lined with thousands of microscopically written essays to which the 'padded' candidate had an index" (Scharfstein 18). Soldiers inspected the candidates for hidden papers, sometimes going "so far as to cut open dumplings in order to examine their bean-jam fillings" (Miyazaki 44). Despite these attempts, in certain periods, cheating was rampant.

Perhaps the most fundamental question troubling testmakers throughout time has been the question of equity. After all, the assumption of the civil service tests in China was an assumption of the basic good of a merit system. Whether tests are designed to mark a transition, to assess specific knowledge, or to sort candidates, the question of equality of chance to pass the test is universally present. The attempt that the Chinese made, over 1300 years ago, to sort candidates according to merit was admirable in theory. The reality, however, differed, for despite the attempts to make each examinee equal to all others, the system still

avored the sons of the rich. These examinees went to national schools at the capital. Moreover, many of these students could afford tutors and came from "scholar-official" families, which afforded them the additional advantage of a role model at home (Fairbank et al. 104, 190). Thus in the Chinese merit system, social class and wealth made some examinees more equal than others. Needless to say, the problem of equity in theory and reality persists in a variety of forms today.

We find ourselves kin to the examiners in China thousands of years ago, and as we move through the history of educational testing, we see other similarities in the examinations for university degrees awarded to the candidates of the first Western universities. Here the earliest examinations were oral; written examinations began in the thirteenth century, several centuries after the introduction of paper to the West. As Fairbank notes in *Chinabound*, "Europeans ... had argued in their universities for hundreds of years before Gutenberg while Chinese scholars had been using paper, brush, and printed books all the time" (372).

Still later the Jesuit order, founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, pioneered in the systematic use of tests in education. They used written tests both for placement of students and for ascertaining proficiency after instruction. In 1599 they published their statement of procedures for examinations in the lower schools. While some of the procedures seem quaint, others have a decidedly familiar ring:

*The writing should be done in a style befitting the grade of each class, clearly, and in the words of the assigned theme and according to the fashion prescribed. Ambiguous expressions are to be given the less favorable meaning. Words omitted or changed carelessly for the sake of avoiding a difficulty are to be counted as errors.*

*After the composition is finished, each one, without leaving his place, should diligently look over what he has written, correct and improve it as much as he may wish. For, as soon as the composition is given to the prefect, if anything then has to be corrected, it should by no means be returned. (DuBois 9)*

The strictures to be specific, to avoid ambiguity, and to proofread the paper have a timeless quality and are reminiscent of directions given to students for many large-scale essay examinations today.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, both oral and written examinations were routine in England, on the Continent, and in the United States, and written examinations were recognized "as an appropriate basis for important decisions: who should be awarded degrees; who should be permitted to exercise a profession, such as law or teaching or medicine; and who should serve in a government post" (DuBois 10).

In the nineteenth century in England, various refinements of the grading procedures for essay examinations were developed. DuBois notes that in 1864 the Reverend George Fisher of Greenwich, England, collected samples of academic writing and arranged them in a "'Scale Book' with assigned values from 1, the best, to 5, the poorest. Intermediate



values were indicated by fractions. Work by any student could then be graded by direct comparison with a set of specimens arranged in order of merit, thus providing a fixed standard of grading in each of the subject matter areas" (69).

Slowly, procedures were developed for measuring what students had learned by examining their writing. Fisher's "scale book" made explicit what was implicit in the minds of the examiners. Similarly, many educators who direct writing assessment programs today believe that it is important to illustrate raters' criteria through "scale books" that illustrate each point on the scale with real examples of student writing.

As we look at the growth of testing, we note that throughout history "whole" tasks were the rule: tasks performed as part of initiation rites and lengthy oral and written responses to questions. It is only in recent times that we have developed the notion of indirect measurement. When multiple-choice tests—easier to score and administer—arrived, we greeted them joyfully:

*A great stimulus for the growth of educational measurement was the invention of the multiple-choice item, first used extensively in the Army Alpha. Educational test makers soon discovered that an item consisting of a clearly written stem, followed by four or five alternative answers, of which one is correct, provides a flexible format for the measurement of both knowledge and skill.*  
(DuBois 73)

The 1920s saw an explosion of such test construction for use in the schools and colleges. Not surprisingly, "Instructors liked the 'new examinations' because they were far more comprehensive than earlier methods of testing and because the chance of personal favoritism influencing scores was practically eliminated" (DuBois 76-77).

In 1900 the College Entrance Examination Board was founded to provide the country with a systematic testing program. Traditionally, only essay examinations had been used for college admissions, but after the development of the multiple-choice format during World War I and the uses of objective testing at Columbia College, objective tests were introduced into the board's testing program (DuBois 125). Varieties of other testing programs, such as the National Teachers Examination, soon began. In 1947 the three major education groups involved in testing, the American Council on Education, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the College Entrance Examination Board, founded the Educational Testing Service (Ebel 22). Multiple-choice testing was in.

The multiple-choice test has become so firmly entrenched in American life that it now seems revolutionary to call for "whole" tasks such as writing samples. But we must remind ourselves that our immediate past—a mere half century—is hardly the whole of human history. Short-answer tests, which permeate popular culture in our magazines, are but one example of a pervasive societal quest to find simple, quick answers to complex questions.

There are many other examples. Television has woven the short-question, short-answer format tightly through our lives, not merely through quiz shows and sitcoms but through news reporting itself. Nightly, much of life is also reduced to "And what did you feel when you saw the body?" "I felt scared." Sixty-second spot commercials first became 30 and are now 15 seconds long. Worse, in classroom after classroom, educational level after educational level, short questions and short answers have become the norm. As John I. Goodlad asserts, students spend most of their time listening, some of their time reading short passages and writing short responses to questions on quizzes, and virtually none of their time reading or writing anything of some length. The destructive nature of the short-question, short-answer mode of living is apparent: not all of life's complexities can be summed up in one-sentence questions, much less one-sentence answers.

Despite the advantage of short-answer tests—the skills and knowledge that can be sampled and the ease of administration—a fundamental criticism remains. What many people consider to be the most important goal of education, coherent thought and expression of that thought, simply cannot be measured by multiple-choice or short-answer tests. Clear thinking and clear writing are inextricable. Writing makes us accountable in a way in which neither the spoken word nor short-answer tests do.

If we were to agree that coherent writing, which both produces and reflects thoughtful understanding and analysis, is the primary goal of education, the question of how to assess it would be easier to answer. But obviously we are not, as a group, in agreement on the primacy of writing in education, for both anecdotal reports and surveys tell us of the increase in both multiple-choice and short-answer testing in courses throughout colleges and universities. Even though most college faculty members know that they get a different kind of information about students' knowledge and abilities from essay tests than from short-answer tests, short-answer tests continue to proliferate.

A recent interesting experiment conducted with undergraduates at Florida International University supports the value of learning by writing. Students were divided into groups and were given a 4800-word passage to read. Each group was told to expect a different kind of test: an essay, multiple-choice, "memory," or some other unspecified kind of test. All the students took the same test, which included both multiple-choice and short-answer items. Students who were told to expect an essay test did better even on the multiple-choice items. The researchers theorize that when students prepare for an essay, they "take a broader focus" and try to organize facts by integrating them into a larger context. This kind of preparation apparently aids recall of the specific details needed to answer the multiple-choice questions (Cramer 17). Although research is not conclusive, it is hard to believe that teachers have not acknowledged the results of this study simply by intuition, if only from memories of the way in which they, as students, prepared for essay tests.

This point brings us back to the original question, Why test? The question must be answered—and with more than a short answer—before we

can discuss assessment instruments. Most English teachers would immediately say that we test to place students, to diagnose specific strengths and weaknesses so that we can help writers improve, to determine growth, and, finally, to assess either competency or proficiency. Some would say that we test so that we may design courses that will help students to become better writers. A few would add that sometimes we test students to determine whether our courses have succeeded or failed.

But the more fundamental question is, What, as a society, do we value? Is the ability to write a critical skill for success in our culture? If so, assessing student writing is an appropriate ritual. What form should that ritual take? Our ultimate goal should be to improve teaching and learning. Yet testing, which should be an outgrowth of and subordinate to curriculum, in reality often drives curriculum. Therefore, our choice of assessment instruments is crucial. If we do not want to encourage students in writing classes throughout the country to sit in classes and fill in blanks in workbooks or on computer screens, we will not use short-answer or multiple-choice tests. If we want to signal to faculty in both secondary and postsecondary institutions that the business of a writing class is writing, our assessment instruments will be essay tests.

Faculty members in departments other than English bemoan the fact that students cannot write. When pressed for an explanation, teachers say that students do not know how to isolate and stick to an idea, develop that idea, and illustrate it with specific examples. They talk less about surface and mechanical errors (the elements that are measured by short-answer tests) than about issues of logic, coherency, and detail. Short-answer tests are not our answer if what we want is a primary educational focus on thinking skills rather than editing skills.

A clear relationship exists between the curriculum we teach and our assessment instruments but we should not assume a total overlap between teaching and testing. No test, whether in a political science, biology, or writing class, can tap the entire domain of what the student has learned during an entire semester's work. No single instrument can deliver that kind of information.

A current example of the simplistic assumption of the complete overlap between curriculum and testing is the popular cry, "We teach process, but we test product." Like the 15-second spot advertisement on television, the complaint has a catchy ring but masks the complexities of assessment. Of course, the best teachers do help students learn something about their own writing processes, to overcome the points in their writing processes at which they are hopelessly stuck, to expand the repertoire of skills that students use when they write, and to learn the patience needed for creation and the joy of tinkering with their own prose. But in the end, it is a lie to tell students that "product" does not matter. As readers, for example, you are not interested in the 20-odd drafts that resulted in this chapter. The brilliant insight that may have flourished briefly before fading in the course of the writing process is of no use to anyone except, perhaps, the writer. What is altered does not matter to the reader, nor does the ease with which the writer composes. In the real world, product is all we can share with each other.

In an idealized universe, there is unending time for vision and revision. Nevertheless, curricula in our writing courses should allow time for students to explore many types of writing, from the quick and largely impromptu prose that most writing tests demand to the longer, more reflective essays for which students will have days or weeks to imagine, plan, write, discuss, tear up, revise, and write again and again. As teachers, we hope that in addition to learning skills, students somehow will learn to love a writing process that allows them to discover something of themselves and the world around them as they think through problems and learn to communicate their ideas in effective prose.

Our colleges and universities must decide what they value and what skills their students must have before they develop testing rituals. Each institution must weigh the benefits and disadvantages of different models of testing. Short-answer tests may have economic and temporal advantages, but they have gross disadvantages: they cannot assess the important rhetorical skills that students must learn, and they cannot elicit the kind of writing that our literate community professes to value.

Whatever our reasons for testing writing, the instruments that we develop will be, of necessity, imperfect. Whether we test for competence or excellence, to sort or to rank, we borrow, knowingly or unknowingly, methods used 1300 years ago to evaluate writing and thinking. And we suffer from the limitations of whatever assessment instruments we choose—as did the Chinese in centuries past. We agonize about the possibility that our tests will discriminate against students who have not had adequate preparation prior to the time we test; we worry about reader bias in essay testing; and we argue about the long-term effects of our tests on our students' writing. Is form dominating content and stifling creativity, as the Chinese feared in their "eight-legged essay"?

Ritual and testing are interrelated, as we can see in the initiation rites of early societies. The values of a group are symbolized in the tests one must pass in order to become a member of that group. We are being forced to test outside of college courses today because as educators we have refused to agree on and articulate our values within our courses. That there is a general distrust of college faculty is exemplified in the statewide and citywide involvement in testing in colleges and universities. Early societies developed *rites de passage* that reflected their values and their needs, depending on the way in which they lived, worked, and believed. Within the group, admission into adulthood depended on the ability to demonstrate mastery of specific tasks. So we in colleges and universities today must decide on the values and needs of membership in the group to which our students aspire. If they need skills in thinking and in making connections between disparate ideas, if drawing material together into a coherent written whole is vital to membership in a group of educated adults, essay tests will be part of our essential rituals.

As faculty and writing program administrators, we must assume leadership in assessment. We must clarify and profess our values. What do we want our students to know? What kind of thinkers should they be? What will they need to move into the complexities of the next century? Our tests should be *rites de passage* to help our students live well in that world.

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Gao Jie  
Marie Jean Lederman

# INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT OF WRITING IN CHINA: THE NATIONAL UNIFIED ENTRANCE EXAMINATION FOR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

*Editor's Note: For background on the history of writing assessment in China and the United States, see the preceding article "Why Test?" by Marie Jean Lederman.*

*Marie Jean Lederman (MJL)*

It is only a slight exaggeration to say that in the beginning was not the word but the examination. The Imperial Examination System began in China during the Sui Dynasty (589 A.D.-618 A.D.) and lasted until 1905. In this earliest attempt to create a merit system through competitive

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*Gao Jie is an associate professor of English at Shanxi Mining College in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province, People's Republic of China, where he directs the program in the teaching of English. Among other professional activities, he served as translator at the Sino-American Academic Exchange Conferences on Teaching Methods in Higher Education held in Taiyuan in 1985 and in New York in 1986.*

*Marie Jean Lederman served for six years as university dean for Academic Affairs and director of the Instructional Resource Center of The City University of New York. She also served for two years as dean for Freshman Skills at LaGuardia Community College, CUNY. Lecturer, consultant, and author of over forty articles on education, literature, and film, she has recently returned to her position as professor of English at Baruch College, CUNY.*

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examinations for government positions, candidates wrote essays on the teachings of Confucius, a body of material setting forth the moral and ethical basis of society. The examinations were given on three levels, culminating in the capital examination in the Forbidden City in Beijing. There the top three hundred candidates sat for a three-day examination, presided over by the Emperor. The stakes were high, for not only jobs but social position, wealth, and power were obtainable—for any man<sup>1</sup>—through the examination system.

The examiners in ancient China faced many of the same problems we face today in writing assessments throughout the world. A prime example is the problem of reader reliability. By the fourteenth century in China, the procedure of using two independent readers and a third in case of disagreement was developed. Other problems not so easily solved but debated through the centuries were the tension between the examination's fixed form and the candidates' creativity, the control of cheating, retest policies, and the overarching problem of equity.

In 1905, the Imperial Examination System was abolished as a result of a series of imperial edicts. One reason was that by the turn of the century social advancement via degrees from modern schools and universities (and school examinations) already had begun to substitute for advancement via the Imperial Examinations. Implicit in this change was the belief that knowledge of the teachings of Confucius was less vital to government officials than knowledge of disciplines such as science and technology.

Throughout the tumultuous years of the twentieth century, China's examination policy mirrored her political and social needs and values—as, indeed, examinations do in all cultures. For example, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) there was enormous suspicion and hatred of those systems which ranked people on a purely intellectual dimension. Competitive examinations for the universities were abolished, and entrance to the relatively few institutions still open in those years depended solely on a candidate's service to the party and work history. When the Cultural Revolution ended, however, there was a dramatic return to emphasis on academic qualifications for university admission. Once again this was ascertained through testing, this time through a combination of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions.

Since writing assessment began in China over thirteen hundred years ago, evaluation through writing has become increasingly important throughout the world. It is fascinating to see that much of what we do in the west in assessing student writing was done centuries ago in China. We have adopted, largely unknowingly, many of her practices and procedures. We have inherited many of her problems as well. As we continue to struggle with issues which were incendiary in China in the fourteenth century, it is interesting to see how Chinese educators deal today with the assessment of writing in their current examinations for university admission.

The National Unified Entrance Examination for Institutions of Higher Education began in 1978. Requirements for passing this demanding entrance examination have been stiffened almost every year since. The

examination is composed of a number of sections, depending on the student's prospective discipline. However, *all* candidates must take the section on Chinese language and literature and, since 1981, achieve a minimum score on this section in addition to their overall score. A written essay counts for between forty to fifty percent of the Chinese language and literature section.

The teaching of writing to students in the middle (secondary) schools, the writing task on the national entrance examination, and the assessment of this writing are the subjects of this article. But first a word about how this dialogue came about. Gao Jie and I met in the summer of 1985 at the Sino-American Academic Exchange Conference on Teaching Methods in Higher Education. Co-sponsored by The Chinese Educational Association for International Exchange, Shanxi Branch, and the Chancellor's Office of The City University of New York (CUNY), approximately fifty educators from both countries met for two weeks in the city of Taiyuan. I was then directing CUNY's minimum competency assessment program and Professor Gao was directing the teaching of English at Shanxi Mining College. It was natural for us to talk about the writing skills of college students and how we assess those skills. At a second conference held in New York the following summer, we made plans for co-authoring this article. We decided that Professor Gao would describe the background and current practices in teaching and assessing writing in the middle schools as well as issues involved in assessing student writing on the current national university examinations. I, in turn, would suggest comparisons with similar issues and practices in the United States. We feel that the material we discuss here offers perspectives on assessment of basic writing and, indeed, writing at all levels.

### *Gao Jie (GJ)*

It is difficult to collect materials on writing assessment. While there are a lot of general materials about writing techniques, very little information can be found about writing assessment; it seems to be a topic rarely dealt with. Writing assessment is undoubtedly a very complicated problem and, unfortunately, there are too few people doing research on it. The only authoritative documents available now deal with the method of writing assessment used in the National Unified Entrance Examination for Institutions of Higher Education (NUEE). Because of the importance of the examination, great efforts have been made to improve the method of writing assessment.

### *MJL*

Current interest in writing assessment in the United States was generated by the increasing importance of the results of large-scale testing programs and the impact of these assessments on writing instruction. In the last eight or nine years many statewide and systemwide writing assessment programs have begun on levels ranging from the elementary schools through the universities. Such programs may identify students in need of additional instruction, determine the nature of that instruction,



certify competency or proficiency, and/or help institutions rank candidates. Major professional journals published in the United States today contain numerous articles reporting on these large-scale writing assessment programs as well as on writing assessment in the classroom. Articles range from highly polemic pieces to reports on carefully controlled research. Moreover, several books on writing assessment have appeared within the last two years. Despite all of this activity in the United States most of us would agree that we still don't know enough.

## GJ

Before we look at writing assessment in China today, we should go back a little in history and look at the teaching of writing in the middle (secondary) schools of old China. The Chinese course consisted of reading and writing, and students took the course through all six years of school. They read many articles, most in classical literary Chinese, and wrote compositions, one each week or two. Students learned to read and write in a natural way, without formally learning grammar or logic; they acquired writing and reading skills largely through practice. As Du Fu, a famous poet of the Tang Dynasty wrote, "After having read ten thousand volumes of books, you will write excellently as if helped by Gods."

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949), great efforts were made to modernize the teaching of Chinese, and the comprehensive Chinese course was split into two courses, Chinese language and Chinese literature. The language course was based on linguistic theories, but this did not work well. Teaching language and literature separately was unsuccessful because teachers often forgot the purpose of the course. They focused on teaching the knowledge of language and literature but paid little attention to helping students develop an ability to use the language. As a result, writing was neglected. Students knew a great deal about the language but could not use it efficiently as a tool of communication.

After much trial and error, a new comprehensive system of Chinese was set up which was a combination of Chinese language, literature, logic, and rhetoric. Students read a number of works of Chinese and world literature and are taught some fundamental knowledge of logic, rhetoric, and grammar. This has been the practice for the last twenty-five years and has proved successful. In this new comprehensive system, students read articles as models for writing, and they learn to write through frequent writing. We must admit, however, that in China middle school students are not always trained adequately. They do not always have frequent writing practice and their compositions may not always be corrected properly. As a result, they write poorly. Fortunately, there are also many effective writing teachers who give students suitable topics and pertinent instruction before the students start writing. These teachers correct student compositions carefully and comment on them. In my opinion, this is the only way to teach writing.

*MJL*

Professor Gao talks of the role of the teacher in improving student writing. While we would add the importance of students reading and writing for each other, few of us would disagree with the importance both of frequent writing and a patient, sympathetic teacher to respond to that writing.

The history of writing instruction in the United States also shows the splitting apart and recombining of the teaching of reading, writing, and grammar. Most language teachers agree today that reading and writing should be taught together and that students learn to write by writing. In the summer of 1987, an important English Coalition meeting was organized by the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Conferees issued a joint statement on the importance of linking the study of writing and literature at all educational levels. Yet many, if not most, high school and college systems have frozen "separateness" into their bureaucratic structures through separate disciplines, licenses, programs, and departments of reading and writing.

As in China, the teaching of language skills varies widely throughout a given department, institution, or region. While the best writing teachers try to integrate the study of language and literature into frequent writing practice, it remains a juggling act. Now we know that language teachers half a world away have also been trying to keep those same aspects of writing balanced in the air.

*GJ*

I would like to turn now to the ways in which we score school pupils' compositions in China. We use two systems: the grade system and the hundred-mark system. Some teachers mark their students' compositions in four grades, which are equivalent to your A, B, C, and D. Some find this system too crude and further divide each of the grades into three subgrades with pluses and minuses, thereby making a twelve-grade system. Other teachers use the hundred-mark system. In Chinese schools the hundred-mark system is used in all other subjects, so it is sometimes necessary to convert a grade-system score into a hundred-mark system score, especially on examinations. Because of this, a correspondence was established between the two systems by defining a range of marks for each grade. However, both systems are really relative, because there are no clearly defined criteria generally accepted by all or at least by most schools in a city or region, much less in the whole country.

*MJL*

This sounds familiar. Teachers in schools and colleges in the United States also use either letter or numeral grades on student compositions, although sometimes they use narrative comments instead of grades. Nevertheless, students' work must be evaluated at some point in a more public way, and generally that evaluation is expressed either in letters or numbers. While each school or college works on the assumption that

these letters or numbers have the same meaning, in reality we do not have clearly defined and accepted criteria for writing any more than in China. That is one of the reasons why many colleges and universities use SAT or ACT scores as part of their admissions criteria. It is also why so many colleges have decided to test students' writing skills after they have been admitted.

### *GJ*

In recent years, a new factor has promoted the development and perfecting of writing assessment methods in China: the National Unified Entrance Examinations for Institutions of Higher Education (NUEE). Reading and writing are considered a very important part of education, and both are assessed in the NUEE. Every candidate, whether he or she is going to pursue science, engineering, or liberal arts, must take the Chinese language and literature part of the examination. This part used to be worth 100 points as is each of the other parts of the examination. But after 1982, the value was raised to 120 points, indicating the relative importance of this section. The writing part is a composition, covering 45-50 points out of the 120 points.

These examinations are held in China once a year, usually early in July. Every summer, tens of thousands of graduates from middle schools all over the country take the examinations. The assessing of examination papers is carried out in each of the provinces in the same time period. In each province, hundreds of college and school teachers are organized to read the examination papers. Candidates are accepted or rejected according to the total sum of marks in all subjects. Universities and colleges want to select the best students, and students either gain or lose the opportunity to pursue higher education on the basis of this examination. Therefore, the scoring must be as fair and objective as possible, and clearly defined unified criteria are essential.

This is less difficult with other subjects where referential answers are provided and necessary principles defined. However, assessing writing is much more complicated. The quality of a composition is determined by many different factors which may influence the examiners in complex ways. In schools, the same composition might be given very different scores by different readers. Such a state of affairs must be avoided in any examination and, especially, in one as important as the NUEE. It was evident that some appropriate unified criteria had to be worked out for the readers to follow. So every year the Committee for the NUEE provides a set of Criteria and Principles for assessing all of the subjects on the examination, including the writing part. This document is not published but provides working guidance. It is the only authoritative document concerning writing assessment available at the present moment in China.

### *MJL*

English teachers in the United States spend much time debating the best kinds of topics as well as the fairest and most accurate ways of assess-

ing student writing. It is informative, therefore, to discover how these matters are being handled today for China's most important examination.

GJ

We are continuously making efforts to improve the writing assessment system in the NUEE, and significant changes occurred between the 1984 and 1985 examinations. I will talk first about writing topics and then about scoring. In both 1984 and 1985 the writing part of the NUEE was worth 50 out of the possible 120 points in the Chinese language and literature section. However, the writing tasks were quite different. These were the directions for the written part of the 1984 examination:

Some students say, "When we are to write a composition, we often feel that we have nothing to say and can only hash some empty talk or cook up materials to make a cut-and-paste essay." On the other hand, some teachers say, "Every time the students write compositions, I take great pains to correct and comment on them. However, the students do nothing more than glance at the score, paying little attention to the problems in their compositions. Therefore, they make little progress in writing."

Relating the above two passages to your own writing and that of your classmates', write an argumentative essay commenting on the situation of middle-school students' compositions. The examinee should give an appropriate title to the essay. The length of the essay should not exceed 800 Chinese characters. The essay should have clear ideas, certain analysis, and true feelings.

This was the 1985 topic and directions:

Suppose that the Qianjin Chemical Plant near the Chengxi Middle School eliminates harmful waste water and gas to the surrounding area every day. Because of the pollution of the environment, the health of the teachers and students and others living in the vicinity is impaired and their work and study disturbed. In recent years, the school has asked the plant numerous times to solve the problem satisfactorily, yet the plant's leaders have been dragging their feet on the pretext of burdensome production tasks, insufficient technical ability, and the high cost of necessary changes. Therefore, the problem remains unsolved.

Based on the information given above, on behalf of the Students' Union of the Chengxi Middle School, write a letter to the editorial department of the *Guangming Daily* describing the situation and appealing for a prompt solution to the problem.

(The *Guangming Daily*, by the way, is one of the most influential newspapers in China.) If you want to see a sample paper actually written in response to this topic as well as detailed comments written by a teacher, please turn to Appendix A. Both the article and comments were published in the periodical *Xiezu* (Writing) No. 5, 1986. Of course it

is not possible to write such detailed comments when we actually grade the examinations, but this should give you an example of the criteria which we follow.

### *MJL*

A comparison of the two topics indicates that the 1985 topic is much more highly rhetorical than in 1984. Audience and purpose are both specified, and the issue dealt with is a significant one in China today. The question of specified audience and purpose is hotly debated in large-scale writing assessments in the United States. Most believe that such specification makes it easier for students to write, but others believe that, especially on timed writing tasks, specification makes it more difficult. Research at the moment is inconclusive, and much more needs to be done. But the decision of the NUEE Committee to use a highly rhetorical prompt will probably be seen as an enlightened one by most English teachers.

### *GJ*

Improvements were also made in 1985 in the criteria for grading the essays. These criteria are offered every year as a working document by the NUEE Committee.

The scoring system which we use is a combination of the grade system and the one hundred-mark system. Usually four to five grades are set up, with a certain range of marks (within clearly defined upper and lower limits) corresponding to each of them. When reading a paper, one first considers which grade should be given and then, after that, what mark should be given. The final score is given in a one hundred-mark form. This has been the general practice in China since the entrance examinations for universities and colleges were resumed after the Cultural Revolution. I believe that it combines the best of both the grade and the hundred-mark systems for three reasons:

To begin with, because a grade must first be given, the reader must get a general impression. This reduces the possibility of undue influence by any particular factor in the essay. Of course, subjective factors sometimes do surface, so we have a series of steps to recheck the readings. If a rechecker comes up with a different grade, he approaches the original reader and discusses it with him. In case of disagreement, more people will be involved in the discussions. Finally, a generally accepted conclusion is arrived at. In practice, this rarely occurs. Second, the one hundred-mark system offers a better quantitative differentiation of essays. One can easily compare the quality of papers which have been assigned the same grade; the grade alone would not permit this differentiation. Last, a final score in one hundred-mark form can be easily included in the total score of the examinee as all parts of the NUEE are scored in this way.

A comparison between the original four-grade system and the 1985 five-grade system is illustrated in Appendix B.

MJL

This method combines what we in the United States call holistic and analytic scoring. The Chinese method is in keeping with the newest trend in writing assessment in the United States. This trend, referred to as “post-holistic breakouts,” has resulted from a recognition of the limitations of holistic scoring. While holistic scoring has many advantages, a holistic score alone does not allow for description of the component elements which contribute to that score. Many English teachers here see a combination of both holistic and analytic scoring as an improvement because it gives diagnostic information which can help in writing instruction. Certainly, for examinations which seek to rank candidates, such a combination of methods differentiates among candidates far more than a holistic score alone.

GJ

As you can see, the 1985 modifications allow us in China to distinguish more easily among the essays. Grades I and II differentiate the excellent essays from the good ones. Grade III essays, basically good essays, form the largest “subset” of our population. Grades IV and V allow us to make distinctions between low and very low quality essays.

MJL

On a five-point scale, we in the United States have also found that the scores tend to cluster around the middle. When we assess student writing with the purpose of placing students accurately in writing classes, such a scale may be a problem. However, if the purpose is ranking candidates, this is less important.

GJ

Using both the 1984 and the 1985 criteria, the reader first decides on a grade and then on a basic score, which usually falls in the middle of the range of numerical marks for the grade. However, in 1985 far more detailed instructions were given concerning the conditions for raising or lowering the basic score. Three specific areas were to be considered: (1) *content*, (2) *language*, and (3) *structure*.

The most important change in 1985 was the emphasis placed on the use of *language*. Any Grade I or II essay must meet two requirements, of which the language requirement must be one. If language is a strong point in a Grade III essay, it will get a score higher than the basic score. This is remarkable when we consider the historical background of China. Traditionally, the most important feature of writing was its political content, and stylistic or artistic considerations came second. It was natural that ideological content was overstressed and language was undervalued in writing assessments as well. This was diametrically opposed to the goals of the Chinese language course, which was to train students in the ability to use language as a means of communication. Inevitably, it led to a neglect in teaching writing skills. That the 1985 criteria stresses the importance of language, without paying less attention to the content of essays, is a great step forward.

*MJL*

Based on conversations with Chinese colleagues, I assume that the change reported by Professor Gao resulted from a general perception that the writing of students coming from the middle schools was not as good as it should have been. The focus on language in the NUEE, then, ought to improve writing instruction in the middle schools. It is an example, of course, of examinations driving curricula. Many of us involved in writing assessments at the college level hope that assessments will also focus elementary and high schools on the importance of writing. The larger question, however, of why there has been a decrease in writing skills of students in both cultures—and, it seems, throughout most of the world—is a more provocative one, but one which should be the subject of another paper.

*GJ*

The NUEE is the largest-scale examination held in China. No other examination involves so many young people or is as important both to the young and their parents. It gives the successful candidates the opportunity of receiving higher education—something that the younger generation longs for more than anything else. Because it is so important to the lives of so many, continuous efforts are made to improve assessment methodology and techniques, including those for writing assessment. Prior to 1984, the NUEE criteria for writing assessment were similar. In 1985 great progress was made, and the 1986 criteria were similar to those of 1985. Will new criteria for writing assessment be worked out which are better than those of 1985—more scientific, more accurate, more sensitive? The answer is undoubtedly “yes.” We hope so.

*MJL*

We echo that hope here. During the six years that I directed the minimum-competency testing program at CUNY, I was comforted by what I learned about the history of writing assessment in China. We in the United States are so impatient to discover all of the answers that it is important for us to remember that the problems with which we are now struggling are ancient. No one, during the more than thirteen hundred-year history of the ancient Imperial Examination System, discovered perfect resolutions. It is especially interesting to learn about what those who invented examinations are doing today in assessing student writing. Like their colleagues in the United States, administrators and teachers in China are struggling with ways to improve teaching and learning. The changes in writing instruction in Chinese schools as well as writing assessment on the NUEE are examples of that struggle. We can all learn from each other; certainly, Utopia is equidistant from both of our countries.

A final word about language and languages. Professor Gao is multilingual. Of the languages he knows, he once said that English is his weakest. Yet he is a fluent translator and conversationalist in English, and I have done only the most minor editing of his writing. We reach

each other as friends and colleagues across vast distances only because he has mastered my language. He can, therefore, enter into my culture in a way in which I cannot enter his. I am grateful to him for allowing me a glimpse into that culture through its teaching and assessing of student writing. That we can all share Professor Gao's knowledge, experience, and hopes proves the importance not only of mastering our own language but also the languages of others.

## Appendix A

### Example of an Examinee's Composition of 1985

#### *A Letter to the Editorial Department of Guangming Daily*

Dear Sir,

We are writing to you with great concern to reflect a situation, i.e., near our middle school (Chengxi Middle School) there is a chemical plant, "Qianjin" Chemical Plant by name, which eliminates harmful waste water and gas to the surrounding area every day. Because of the pollution of the environment, the health of our teachers and students and the people living in the vicinity is impaired and our work and study influenced. Although our school has more than once made proposals on how to solve the problem satisfactorily, the leaders of the plant have been dragging their feet on the pretext of heavy production tasks at the plant, insufficiency of its technical force, and also the very high cost for doing this. Therefore the problem remains unsolved. We think, such a case may not be a unique one. In our vast country there may be many similar cases like this one which may make a serious social problem worth paying attention to.

Our country used to be a beautiful one, which was described by our ancient writers as a paradise full of singing birds and fragrant flowers, where "autumn water and the vast sky show the same charming color and a lonely crane is flying alongside rosy sunset clouds; where two orioles are singing amidst green willows and a row of white egrets are flying into the sky." How comfortable it would be to work and study in such a nice environment! Unfortunately, with the rapid development of industry, more and more factories are eliminating waste water and waste gas, which contain a lot of harmful substances, such as hydrogen sulfide, hydrogen cyanide, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, etc. These substances are not only threatening to crops but are also harmful to human health. Take sulphur dioxide for example. When breathed in, it will do great harm to the human body while when falling with rain it may destroy the crops. If we imagine Nature as a human body, then the atmosphere would be its internal environment, and man nothing but a tiny cell. Just as a man will become sick or even die when toxins exist in the internal environment of the human body, so human health will be in danger if the atmosphere is polluted.



For these reasons, we strongly appeal for the spread of ecology education —let it be covered through the whole period of school, from the course of “common knowledge” in primary schools through the course of “Biology” in senior middle schools. We also appeal to you to propagate to the whole society the meanings of beautification of the environment, laying stress on the hygiene and the beauty of the environment.

We would like to appeal to the directors and managers of factories to take “serving the people” as their guiding ideology and make efforts to learn the knowledge of ecology and to train qualified technical personnel in this field so as to solve the problem of the control and reuse of the waste gas and water. Now that many directors and managers are complaining that their production tasks are heavy, we would like to ask: Is it correct to exclude the treatment of the harmful wastes from the production tasks?

We would also like to appeal to all the society to mobilize to take part in the activity of planting trees and making forests. Many kinds of trees such as lilac and plane trees, by absorbing the toxins in the atmosphere, can help to neutralize the harmful substances and purify the air.

If only we can do this, why can't we expect birds to come back and flowers to restore their beauty? We have every reason to believe that our country will become a beautiful garden full of flowers, that we ourselves and our sons and grandsons will enjoy healthy and happy long lives, that our agricultural production will be further developed, and that the physique of our nation will be further improved.

Dear Sir, your paper has a high reputation. That is why we ask you for some space in your paper to make our appeal and propagate our ideas. Thank you very much.

Best wishes to you.

The Students' Union Chengxi Middle School

### *Comments on the Example*

As can be seen from the composition, the examinee has made a serious study of the materials. The fact provided is that the elimination of wastes by a factory has been polluting the environment, and the problem has remained unsolved for a long time. The examinee is required to write a letter to the Editorial Department of *Guangming Daily* on behalf of the Students' Union of the Chengxi Middle School “to reflect the situation appealing for a prompt solution of the problem.” The composition is developed strictly according to this basic demand and around this basic fact.

The composition is well organized, having a complete and compact structure. The whole composition contains four parts. The first part consists of the first paragraph, which is devoted to “reflect the situation” and describes the basic fact of the pollution of the environment. The second part includes the second paragraph, in which the writer gives the

reasons for the necessity of the control of the pollution. The third part contains the third, fourth, and fifth paragraphs, in which the writer appeals for a prompt solution of the problem and suggests some measures for the control of the pollution. The fourth part, composed of the sixth and seventh paragraphs, looks into the future. The structure of the composition is quite natural. Sound logical connections exist between different parts.

The writer shows certain skills for arranging materials and reasoning. In the first part, the writer starts with describing the condition of the pollution near the Chengxi Middle School and immediately after that he associates the situation in the whole country. By enhancing a particular problem to a general situation and the pollution in a particular place to a social problem, the writer will surely be able to draw the readers' attention to the problem. In the second part the writer first uses the method of contrast, comparing the beautiful scenes of nature of the past with today's polluted environment. He also uses illustrative examples to support his ideas, explaining in detail the harms which sulphur dioxide may do. This endows the problem with a sense of urgency. In the third part the writer does not merely make a general appeal for the control of the pollution, but he also proposes some practical measures and methods. The composition is substantial in content because each of its parts has some concrete content and because the writer uses various methods of reasoning to support his opinions.

The language of the composition is concise and lively. Appropriate words and phrases are used. In the second part, the writer cites two lines by Wang Bo\* and two lines by Du Fu\*\* thus adding some literary grace to the article. At the end of this part the writer compares Nature to the human body and man—a tiny cell, the polluting substances—existing in the human body, the metaphors being original and understandable.

Some words and phrases are used incorrectly. In addition, there are some mistakes in punctuation and some miswritten or wrong Chinese characters.

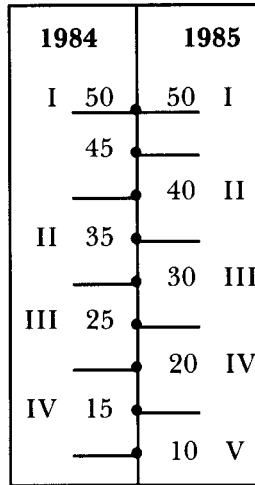
\*Wang Bo (649-676 A.D.) Famous poet of early Tang Dynasty

\*\*Du Fu (712-770 A.D.) Great Chinese poet living and writing in the Tang Dynasty

*(Continued)*

## Appendix B

### Comparison of 1984 and 1985 Scoring in China



#### 1984

- Grade I* Compositions good in all aspects  
*Grade II* Good compositions with some shortcomings  
*Grade III* Compositions with serious shortcomings  
*Grade IV* Very bad compositions

#### 1985

- Grade I* Compositions good in all aspects  
*Grade II* Good compositions  
*Grade III* Compositions with good content and structure but some shortcomings in language  
*Grade IV* Compositions with serious shortcomings in any of the three areas of content, language, or structure  
*Grade V* Compositions which are very bad in one aspect

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>I use *man* intentionally. Women were excluded from the examination system.

Kathryn R. Fitzgerald

## RHETORICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SCHOOL DISCOURSE FOR WRITING PLACEMENT

Recent emphasis on literacy and writing competence has caused composition researchers and evaluators to develop, review, and revise prompts and evaluation systems aimed at valid and reliable assessment of student writing. It is commonplace now that multiple-choice tests are invalid because they rely on the doubtful assumption that writing competence can be measured by mastery of its parts. Instead, evaluators have developed holistic scoring methods whose intent is to assess the effect of a sample of discourse as a whole on a human reader. Readers using this method are trained to internalize criteria for judging writing so that they can assign a reliable ranking to student writing samples on the basis of one reading. When holistic scoring was proved feasible by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), researchers, liberated from multiple-choice mass testing, immediately began to investigate ways to make holistic scoring ever more valid and reliable. Richard Lloyd-Jones found holistic scoring as used by ETS wanting, mainly because it admits no differences in the demands of various modes of writing. Together with Carl H. Kraus and others under the auspices of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), Lloyd-Jones advanced the art of evaluation by making rhetorical concerns paramount. These researchers redesigned prompts to specify a full rhetorical situation: accordingly, the main criterion for judging the writers' level of success is the writers' control of the primary rhetorical demand, labeled the primary trait, of the particular assignment.

As NAEP implemented Primary Trait Scoring, the primary trait came to be identified with purpose. Ina V.S. Mullis states, "the method [Primary Trait Scoring] recommended for use by NAEP in the second

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*Kathryn R. Fitzgerald serves as coordinator of the Preparatory Writing Program and coordinator of Placement for The University of Utah's Writing Program. The author wishes to acknowledge the seminal contribution of Susan Miller to this project.*

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assessment would evaluate the capacity to write for precisely defined purposes" (9). Thomas Newkirk, however, questions the possibility of providing students with purposes. He admonishes, "...we can no more present the students with purposes than we can present them with happiness. There is something coldly external about the way the term is used [by NAEP]" (111). The question of purpose in writing assessment is indeed problematic. Newkirk's criticism implicitly points to a larger problem in this regard, the ambiguity of purposes in what Les Perelman has recently termed "institution-based prose," especially school prose. In arguing that teaching writing as a way of knowing or means of discovery ignores the institutional context of classroom assignments, Perelman notes that students "...write papers not to fulfill some intrinsic goal but because the essays are assigned by an instructor" (471). He adds, "Even when we try to give an assignment that constitutes a 'real' act of personal exploration, the institutional context predominates over any real sense of authentic purpose and actual audience" (471). In other words, the students' dominant purpose is institutionally determined: in the case of school discourse it is to please a teacher to get a good grade.

In institutions other than the academy, writing is motivated by the functions it is intended to perform. In educational institutions, however, the situation is complicated in a way that is assumed but rarely addressed: students' purposes are at least dual. While their external purpose is to please the teacher to get a good grade, students must, at the same time, *invent* an internal purpose, one intrinsic to the writing. In other words, in school, unlike other institutions, there is a marked difference between the external purpose, the stimulus that prompts the writing, and the intrinsic purpose, the one conventionally encapsulated in the thesis sentence. Students are expected to use the latter, the message, in support of the former, the institutional evaluation.

This duality of purpose is also true of most testing situations, though not of assessments like the NAEP, which have little impact on the students themselves. Usually, tests result in evaluations that affect students immediately, so the students' external purpose is inherent in the situation. In the case of placement essays for freshman level writing courses, the performance determines the level of the writing course at which students begin their college writing instruction. Since the testing and the classroom writing contexts both manifest this duality of purpose, evaluators can and should incorporate this similarity into their criteria for placement scoring.

In this essay, I am suggesting that students' ability to use their intrinsic purpose (the purpose *in* the writing) to support their external purpose (the purpose *of* the writing) is an important measure of their understanding of the complicated rhetorical context of college writing. Students vary greatly in their awareness of how to handle this problem. Basic writers are certainly less able to manipulate content for rhetorical purposes than better-prepared students. I hope to support the proposition that the rhetorical problems of basic writers are as fundamental to their difficulties in college writing as their syntactical and mechanical errors. If this is the case, it has important implications for the focus of teaching in basic writing.

At The University of Utah we begin each placement essay writing session by fully explaining to students the actual rhetorical situation in which they are writing. The essay administrator explains the four levels of freshman writing courses that we offer, informs students that they are writing a placement essay to determine which one will best introduce them to college writing, reads a simplified list of our evaluation criteria, and tells students that their placement will depend on the readers' assessment of these features of college level writing. In other words, students are told the purpose *of* the writing; they will produce a piece of writing that will be judged by college readers as evidence of their readiness for college writing.

The prompts used at Utah allow students considerable latitude to invent a purpose intrinsic to the writing. Students may respond to the prompt by informing, persuading, or arguing. No artificial rhetorical situation is specified or needed because the students are apprised in the instructions of their real situation. Their task, then, is similar to their task when writing college assignments: to invent a purpose within the writing that will demonstrate their competence in managing the demands of the external rhetorical situation.

If ability to control these rhetorical features of school discourse is a valid indicator of students' readiness for college writing, then rating criteria must focus on them. Proposing such criteria, however, could be seen as prescribing a generic set of criteria for use regardless of individual situations. Edward White in *Teaching and Assessing Writing*, while stressing the value of scoring guides to symbolize community agreement among readers (97-99), questions the validity of using a single guide across essay questions and student populations (228-229). He points out that different questions even having the same format vary in difficulty and that student populations vary in ability, requiring situation-specific criteria (227-229). White's points are persuasive, and I wish to emphasize that I do not offer Utah's criteria as a single scale that should be used by all institutions. On the other hand, since Utah's criteria address the rhetorical situation of every college student, they can be applied to a variety of local situations. Utah's student population is relatively homogeneous, consisting mostly of urban and rural White, middle class (in its broadest sense) students, though the approximately 12,000 students whose essays have been rated by these criteria have included representatives from across the socioeconomic spectrum. Utah's criteria have also been adapted for use in both the University's English-as-a-Second-Language Program and at a community college.

The description of the rhetorical qualities of good student writing given below were conceived by Susan Miller and have been refined and developed by me over the four years that we have required a placement essay at The University of Utah. Our categories—the writers' relationship to readers, to subject matter, and to the genre—reflect our focus on the institutional context of the placement essay. The readers we have in mind are college professors and teaching staff. When we speak of relationship to the subject matter, we mean students' ability to control their subject matter to support their intrinsic purpose. We rather loosely term the genre in which the placement essay operates as "college student writing."

## Category 1: The Writers' Relationship to College Readers and Writers

### *Expectations:*

The most proficient writers recognize that any single piece of college writing is part of an ongoing written discussion about a topic and that they are expected to make a contribution to the discussion. They recognize that an authority (professor, test giver) identifies topics for discussion.

### *Evidence in the Writing:*

- Writers participate in the discussion by acknowledging other perspectives of points of view, or by identifying the context which gives rise to their own point.
- Writers make a contribution by stating a point and creating individualized terms of discussion. In placement essays, writers usually individualize the discussion (a) by claiming a limited territory within the discussion as their own; or (b) by consciously redefining the prompt for their own purposes; and (c) by using details to support their point (in the case of Utah's prompts, students derive these details from personal experience or prior knowledge). The tone of the writing is qualified, ironic, or humorous.

## Category 2: The Writers' Relationship with their Subject Matter

### *Expectation:*

College writers control their subject matter, pressing it into service to support the purpose *in* their writing.

### *Evidence in the Writing:*

- The writers follow an agenda, either explicitly stated or implicit.
- Style and diction serve the writers' purpose.
- Various levels of abstraction are logically related.

## Category 3: The Writers' Relationship to the Conventions of the Genre

### *Expectations:*

College writers employ syntactical units appropriate to their thought, precise vocabulary, and the mechanics and spelling of standard written American English.

The criteria as described above summarize the expectations for good college student writing only. In this essay I will not reproduce our entire scale for differentiating specific placement levels, because, as previously mentioned, scales should be determined in the local situation. I do want, however, to articulate the lower end of the continuum for Categories 1 and 2, because they involve somewhat more than simple negation of characteristics already described.

*Category 1:* Unsuccessful writing in this category is characterized by failure to address the prompt, by failure to make a point, and/or by failure to acknowledge other perspectives or points of view. Absence of multiple perspectives often makes the writing seem dogmatic.

*Category 2:* Unsuccessful writing is characterized by lack of an agenda and/or lack of distance from the subject. Writing usually remains on a single level of abstraction throughout, though the level may be either fairly abstract or fairly concrete. Lack of distance is suggested when a writer appears to be ingenuously absorbed in the subject matter to the point that the subject, not the writer, drives the writing.

Examination of a few examples of placement essays written by freshmen at The University of Utah will show how these criteria work. Students were given 45 minutes to write to the following prompt:

Unsatisfactory situations are a part of everyone's life. We may be forced to endure a job we dislike; we may be irritated by limited options for transportation; we may be unhappy with the difficulty of making friends in a given situation; we may be frustrated by a lack of personal attention from teachers in overcrowded classrooms. Briefly describe a situation that disturbs you, explain the changes you would like to see made, and discuss the reasons you feel these changes are necessary.

As I discuss the student essays below my emphasis is on the generally unrecognized demands imposed on students by the dual nature of school discourse: students have to invent a purpose within their writing that will serve their external purpose, impressing a grader. Certainly, other characteristics of college level writing—control of syntax, appropriateness of diction, and mastery of mechanics, for instance—are also important features of college writing, but they are commonly recognized and, I think, do not require further discussion here.

The first writer chose terrorism, a global issue sure to impress college readers, as his "unsatisfactory situation." He determined that his purpose *in* the writing was to convince readers that the United States must take action against terrorism.

### *Paper 1*

The spread of terrorist acts against the United States is a great concern to all Americans. America has become the sounding board for terrorists. American citizens are being kidnapped and killed. The Iranian hostage crisis and the recent TWA hijacking are two events that show how American citizens have become bargaining chips for terrorists. On other innumerable occasions Americans have been held hostage, tortured, and killed by terrorists.

Not only must we be concerned with the increase in terrorism, but we must also be concerned with our ability to deal with these



activities. America seems unable to deal effectively with terrorists. Our concern for the safety of hostages and innocent people has prevented us from using military force against terrorists. Popular opinion in America has also kept our military force inactive. The American people are reluctant to let their government use force, either openly or covertly, to deal with terrorism. Many people feel that using force would bring us to the level of the terrorists themselves. The result is that Americans become the targets of terrorist acts.

The American people must change their attitudes about terrorism. We can no longer afford to let terrorists use American lives to gain headlines in newspapers. We must be prepared to defend ourselves against terrorism. Covert infiltration of terrorist organizations is one method of deterrence. By supplying faulty information and arms to terrorists, we could destroy terrorist organizations from the inside. Infiltrators could alert the American government to planned terrorist activities. Government warnings on travel abroad could help keep American tourists out of dangerous places and situations. American media restraints could deny terrorists the headlines they seek. Although a media blackout is not possible, the media could adopt voluntary restraints that would help reduce terrorist acts against Americans. And finally, the American people must accept that our military force must occasionally be unleashed against terrorists. In extreme situations, we must not be afraid to use military action to destroy terrorism.

Infiltration, government warnings, media restraints, and occasional military action are steps that can help America deal effectively with terrorism. By denying terrorists their goals, America can deter terrorism. President Reagan's harsh words mean nothing if the American people are not willing to take steps to save themselves and others from the hands of terrorists.

This writer managed quite successfully to use his intrinsic purpose to meet the expectations of his audience. First, college students are expected to recognize that any single piece of writing is part of an ongoing discussion about a topic and to assume the authority to participate in the discussion. This writer acknowledges the discussion by summarizing several views: "*Our concern for the safety of hostages . . . The American people are reluctant . . . Many people feel that using force . . .*" before moving to his own position, which he states with the authority of a person confident of his or her right to speak and be heard: "The American people must change their attitudes about terrorism." This student is clearly aware that the discussion of terrorism precedes him, and assumes that he can contribute to it.

College students are also expected to distance themselves from their subject so that they can marshal their subject matter to support their purposes. This student's agenda demonstrates that he manipulated his information both to support his internal argument and to address the prompt. He begins by stating the problem, America's vulnerability to

terrorism (the unpleasant situation), and then narrows to his particular concern, our reactions to terrorism, first stating reasons for the failure to react adequately, then positing his solutions (the changes he would like to see), and finally summarizing his position by telling us why the changes are necessary. His internal control of agenda is impressive. Note the statement in the final paragraph, "By denying terrorists their goals, America can deter terrorism." Though he does not say so explicitly, I think this refers to the statement in the introduction that "American citizens have become bargaining chips for terrorists." His suggestions, to provide misinformation and faulty arms to terrorists, to infiltrate terrorist organizations in order to get accurate information to American officials, and to warn tourists away from dangerous areas, are all intended to make Americans unavailable as bargaining chips, which would deny terrorists their goals. Clearly, he follows the course he set for himself at the beginning of the essay. But more impressively, he weaves the essay prompt's agenda into his own writing so well that it appears that describing an unpleasant situation, suggesting changes and explaining why they are necessary (the requirements of the prompt) were entirely his own idea. To accomplish that, he employs the required description of the unpleasant situation as the context or background information for his essay in his introductory paragraph, uses the required reasons for change to complicate the problem in the second paragraph, uses as his thesis a generalization about the change he would like to see (Americans must change their attitudes about terrorism), and incorporates more specific suggestions for changes into support for his point.

College readers also expect a qualified, exploratory tone as opposed to single-minded didacticism. Another of this student's achievements is that he manages even-handed treatment of opposing viewpoints in spite of his clear preference for active opposition to terrorism. He gives legitimate reasons for opposing action: our concern for the safety of hostages and other innocent people, the conviction that using force would bring us to the level of the terrorists themselves, and the fear that using force would provoke more attacks on Americans. He also refrains from insisting on what he sees as a particularly useful solution, a news blackout, because he implicitly recognizes that it is contrary to American values ("Although a media blackout is not possible . . ."), and suggests instead that "The media could adopt voluntary restraints . . ." This student has maintained a tone of reasonableness while discussing a highly charged issue.

This student manages to control his agenda, subject matter, and tone so that they serve his internal purpose of recommending active opposition to terrorism and, at the same time, fulfill the rhetorical expectations inherent in college writing. Though the essay has faults, it is clearly the work of a rhetorically sophisticated student.

The second paper that I will discuss is not as sophisticated.

## Paper 2

Many unsatisfactory situations are bound to exist in one's life. Such situations appear as one must make a career choice. Personal satisfaction, income, and other benefits must all be considered. In many fields unsatisfactory conditions are present in one of these areas. The fine arts major must deal with several of these problems, including possible low incomes and a lack of interest in many regions.

The area of dance is particularly affected by these hardships. The wages of a dancer are extremely low and frequently force the artist to obtain a second job. In many situations stagehands are paid a higher salary than a dancer. It is ironic that one who trains and studies for most of his life receives a lower income than one whose job requires little background.

Low incomes in the fine arts field are often due to the lack of interest by the public. Greater appreciation of the arts is needed in many parts of the country. Such interest must be sparked in order to allow the artists to receive the benefits they deserve. Clearly, unsatisfactory situations exist in the areas of fine arts. However, in the future, such conditions will hopefully be improved as a greater appreciation of the arts is developed.

This student's first problem is her failure to come up with a clearly stated internal purpose appropriate to the prompt, but we can guess that she intends to convince us that artists are not appreciated, as evidenced by their low salaries. Granting her this implicit point, we can further examine her rhetorical awareness. We expect students either to posit a point of their own, or, if that's asking too much, at least to appropriate a common position as their own. The position this writer adopts is not her own, but a common complaint among artists (as well as humanists), and, more important, she does nothing to appropriate the complaint. She might have given specific details about her own experience or presented a case for change as the first student did, but she misses both opportunities. I do not think we have the evidence in this paper to hypothesize about whether she *could* have met these expectations had she been aware of them; the evidence in her writing simply tells us that she was not aware. Indeed, if we assume she could make an individual contribution to this discussion of artists' wages if she were only aware that she was expected to, we are given clear direction for teaching.

Another expectation is that college students acknowledge the previous conversation on the topic. In her introduction this writer participates in the conversation by sketching the outline of a general discussion about benefits and disadvantages in any career before narrowing to her area, fine arts, and, particularly, dance. But, beyond the introduction, the writer gives us only her own perspective. For instance, she seems to think that her opinion that "It is ironic that one who trains and studies for most of his life receives a lower income than one whose job required little background" is self-evident, needing no development or exploration. There is little sense of a conversation with multiple perspectives beyond the first paragraph of the essay.

Besides recognizing that they are participating in an ongoing written conversation, college students are expected to control their subject matter to support their intrinsic point. Part of the evidence of such control is the presence of an agenda in the writing, an agenda which also needs to support the demands of the external rhetorical situation. These complex requirements both comprise the area of this writer's best achievement and, at the same time, point to her lack of sophistication. Her introductory paragraph establishes the agenda, competently setting the context for her discussion by relating the prompt to her intrinsic purpose, to show that artists are not appreciated. Her second paragraph develops the point by moving a step towards concreteness with the example of dance. Thus far she has followed an agenda for supporting her implicit point. But, at the beginning of the next paragraph, the dual agendas cause trouble. The writer demonstrates her awareness of the external demand to respond to all parts of the prompt by shifting from discussing the problem to addressing the prompt's second requirement, that she describe the changes she would like to see. Here this writer fails to make her intrinsic purpose conform to the demands of the external rhetorical situation. She is unable to bridge the gap between her own agenda showing that artists are underpaid and the (accurately) perceived requirement to address the second part of the prompt; in fact, after retreating to the passive in her attempt to address needed changes, she finally gives up and concludes with a simple summary. And, by retreating to the passive in the final paragraph, she avoids personally contributing to the discussion: "Low incomes . . . *are often due to the lack of interest by the public*. Greater appreciation of the arts *is needed* . . . . Such interest *must be sparked* . . . ." Though this student is aware of the dual rhetorical demands of her situation, she has trouble coping with them. She does not respond with the sophistication of the terrorist essay writer.

Reading placement essays from this perspective does more than illuminate salient features of writing for accurate placement; it also expands the reader's understanding of how student writing succeeds or fails.

To further illustrate this, I'll examine one more example, this time from a student who was placed into Utah's preparatory writing program.

### *Paper 3*

I feel that while at work women are looked on as less capable workers. I have found that men also feel that they being men, assume that a woman should be treated as nearly a sex object and therefore harass women with vulgar and disgusting comments about their bodies. Another large problem is found when men, jokingly or seriously, grab the woman's body against her will. These irritating working conditions can in return cause stress or extra tension to the persons being harassed by men.

Today women work with men in almost all fields. We are no less intelligent or capable of doing the job then a man, yet we are not protected against harassment. I feel that there should be a stop put to the sexual harassment of women on the job. We should be

treated equal to our intelligence, treated as if we are capable of doing our jobs! Woman was created by a man's rib not from his head to be above him, not from his feet to be below him, not from below his arm to be protected by him, but from his side to be his equal. Put here to share the difficulties of life with him and not to be dominated by him. I feel that if sexual harassment was to be stopped women and men could work together, side by side with less difficulty. together more can be accomplished then when bitterness flows in the mind of one and disrespect and hatred for ones accomplishments!

This writer encounters difficulty in meeting most of the rhetorical expectations for college writers. She neither acknowledges the ongoing conversation about women's liberation nor makes the point her own. Her recognition of other points of view, with one exception that I will mention separately, consists only of positing a male attitude about women in the workplace. In contrast to the writer of the terrorist paper, this writer does not use opposing views to complicate the discussion or to qualify her own views. The opposing view serves merely as the occasion of her diatribe. Though this writer did succeed in inventing an intrinsic purpose in her writing, to show that women are treated unfairly at the workplace, she avoids appropriating it to herself. She presents herself with the opportunity with the sentence, "We should be treated equal to our intelligence, treated as if we are capable of doing our jobs!" Without the exclamation mark, this writer could have appropriated the topic at this point by giving examples from her own experience, which, indications are, is rich with material, but instead she appends the homily, "Woman was created by a man's rib not from his head . . . ." Again, we cannot tell from the writing sample whether the writer could individualize the issue if she knew she was expected to; we know only that this is one expectation of college writing of which she is unaware.

The degree to which students can maintain distance from and control over subject matter is, we have found, one of the most telling rhetorical expectations for identifying students needing basic writing. Evidence of students' ability to distance themselves from their subject matter can be found in control of the agenda, the presence of a reasonable, ironic, or humorous tone, and stylistic choices that show a writer crafting a work. This essay offers an intriguing study of unsuccessful attempts to control these features. The sentence, "Another large problem is found when men, jokingly or seriously, grab the woman's body against her will," manifests the writer's struggle to maintain distance from a close subject. She begins in a reasonable, even-handed tone by adding the free modifier "jokingly or seriously," recognizing that men may think their approaches are playful rather than offensive. (This is the single example I mentioned above of the writer's recognition of other points of view.) But she loses the distance with the next word, "grab," a verb not capable of ambiguity. At this point, the writer does not seem to know whether she should go with the emotionally charged language that her feelings suggest or maintain what she sees as proper academic distance.

That she opts for academic distance is illustrated by the next sentence, which ends with the hyper-formal “. . . conditions . . . cause stress or extra tension to the *persons being harassed by men.*”

The writer loses control throughout the second paragraph, though she begins by attempting to address the second part of the prompt (the changes she would like to see). But, once she states that a stop should be put to sexual harassment, no recognizable agenda remains. Instead of employing her subject matter, which I take to be her personal experiences with harassment, to support the purpose *in* her writing, she seems to fail to recognize that this could be her content. Then again, the problem may be that she guesses the homily about Adam's rib is more appropriate to formal academic prose than specific experience, in spite of the cues in the prompt. In either case, her past writing experience has not taught her what is considered appropriate evidence in a college essay. The penultimate sentence gives indications of regaining control: the syntax is competent and diction suggests reasonableness. However, she loses control entirely in the final sentence, “together more can be accomplished then when bitterness flows in the mind of one and disrespect and hatred for ones accomplishments!” This is not the sentence of a writer crafting her material, but of an experiencer so caught in the emotions of the experience that she loses control of agents and objects. This writer is to be admired for engaging a topic of personal significance and for struggling with an intractable problem, but she needs to learn how to make her argument convincing in an academic context.

In our experience reading placement essays at The University of Utah we have found that failure to control rhetorical features invariably identifies students in need of preparatory writing. These students are unaware of the rhetorical expectations of the university. They do not have the confidence to appropriate a position for themselves, they do not know what tone to adopt for college writing or what considerations determine the tone, and they do not know what they can legitimately use as evidence. Inability to control these fundamental concepts renders students incapable of the more sophisticated expectations we have for style, diction, and organization. The important implication for teaching from evaluating student essays in these terms is that preparatory writing classes must address these rhetorical expectations to give students a chance for success in college writing. In David Bartholomae's words, our role is to teach “the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community” (134). To concentrate on atomistic aspects of writing, such as sentence structure, paragraph development, or modes of discourse—still the staples of many basic writing courses—is to deny students the opportunity to learn the rhetorical expectations essential for successful college writing.

I do not claim that students can be placed accurately solely on the basis of the rhetorical terms of The University of Utah's first two categories. Writing assessment is as complex as writing itself. But our rhetorical criteria do illuminate a generally unacknowledged dimension of school writing that has important implications for teaching. If our goal in freshman composition classes is to help students succeed in

college writing, we must explicitly address the complex rhetorical expectations of school discourse.

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Paul Hunter  
Nadine Pearce  
Sue Lee  
Shirley Goldsmith  
Patricia Feldman  
Holly Weaver

## COMPETING EPISTEMOLOGIES AND FEMALE BASIC WRITERS

In her proposal for a new model of psychological and moral development in women, Carol Gilligan argues for a distinct female epistemology, one which conceives of "knowing as a process of human relationships" (173). The question of epistemologies, or ways of knowing oneself and the world, is one factor which drew our research team to undertake a study of female basic writers. Rather than studying groups of men and women, we focused on female students only; therefore, we cannot extend to male basic writers the conclusions we draw from our research, even though some of our conclusions may hold true for males as well as for other groups not defined by gender. Other studies, some referred to below, have described the differences between discourse produced by males and discourse produced by females; our study attempts to describe how the female language characteristics (as reported by those studies) affect the writing processes and written products of female basic writers.

One goal of our study was to seek ways of enabling female basic writers to coexist with the often alienating linguistic expectations of the academy. Another goal was to attempt to describe the epistemological foundations of the female basic writers in our study and to clarify thereby the epistemological assumptions and expectations that should be articulated in basic writing instruction. We were interested in Patricia Bizzell's statements about the "world views" of basic writers:

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*Authors Pearce, Lee, Goldsmith, and Weaver are adjunct instructors at North Lake College (Irving, TX), where Lee is also coordinator of the Center for Independent Study and where Hunter, whose work appeared recently in College English, is director of Basic Writing. Feldman is director of the Reading Center at Southern Methodist University.*

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[Basic writers'] difficulties, then, are best understood as stemming from the initial distance between their world views and the academic world view, and perhaps also from the resistance to changing their own world views that is caused by this very distance.

To understand basic writers' problems in these terms, we need to ask three questions: what world views do basic writers bring to college? What is the new world view demanded in college? And do basic writers have to give up the world views they bring to college in order to learn the new world view? (297)

The results of our study posit the following answers to Bizzell's questions: First, the world views of the female basic writers in our study may best be characterized as personal and relational. Second, the academic world view may be characterized as mechanical and formal, consonant with the distinct male epistemology described by Gilligan as viewing "knowledge as correspondence between mind and form" (173). Third, the basic writers in our study appear to perceive, at some level, that they are being asked to abandon a familiar way of knowing (through personal experience and the subjective sharing of that experience) in favor of an alien way of knowing (through analytical reasoning and win-or-lose argumentation). Thus, these basic writers are faced with competing epistemologies.

Before we describe our study, we want to explain what we mean by competing epistemologies. We turn to Barry Brummett, who differentiates three types of epistemologies: mechanical, subjective, and intersubjective. He rejects the mechanical because "Observation cannot be value-free" (26). Though mechanical epistemology is the dominant world view of the academic community, it is now being challenged in many fields, both in the sciences and in the humanities. Brummett also rejects the subjective because "in its pure form [it is] solipsism" (30). In the group of female basic writers we studied, we observed dependence on subjective epistemology, but we observed that it was a pragmatic subjectivism focusing on their relationships with others, not the "pure form" of subjectivism which Brummett rejects as focusing on only the self. In their writing, the female basic writers struggle to bridge the gap between their own subjectivism and the mechanical expectations of the academic discourse community, but for most the gap is not bridgeable. Brummett proposes the third, intersubjective (or "process") epistemology, as the most appropriate for our age. "Participation in shared meanings" (31), Brummett writes—participation which reconciles the private and the public—is the hallmark of intersubjectivity.

To set a context for reporting our study, we need also to explain our interest in women's language in academic life. Ever since Robin Lakoff's study of women's language was published in 1975, feminist researchers have sought to point out not only the distinctive characteristics of language produced by women but also the sexist bias that occurs when a male paradigm of language is used to judge female language as deficient. In one study, Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker contrast the ways in which females and males learn to use language: females to create and

maintain relationships, males to assert dominance; females to criticize in acceptable ways, males to control an audience; females to interpret accurately the words of others, males to assert themselves when others are speaking (205-207). The differences pointed out by Maltz and Borker help explain why women and men experience higher education differently. As Paula Treichler and Cheris Kramarae observe:

The university can be viewed as a subculture that men and women experience and relate to differently. This subculture typically fosters interaction patterns more compatible with men's established interaction patterns than with women's, and it is this fundamental inhospitality to women's talk that helps account for the "chilly climate" that significant numbers of women experience. (118)

Several studies of college students have described six of the "interaction patterns" referred to by Treichler and Kramarae:

1. In classes with male instructors, student-teacher interactions involving male students are much more frequent than those involving female students (Sternglantz and Lyberger-Ficek 345).
2. In classes with female instructors, student-teacher interactions involving male or female students are more equal than in classes with male instructors (Sternglantz and Lyberger-Ficek 345).
3. Male students exhibit significantly more aggression (interruptive behavior) than do female students in both male and female instructors' classes (Brooks 683).
4. Student participation, regardless of sex, is significantly higher in female instructors' classes (Kajander 3).
5. Male students are the majority sex more often in male instructors' classes, but an equal number of male and female students are usually found in female instructors' classes (Sternglantz and Lyberger-Ficek 345).
6. Female students visit female instructors' offices more often than they visit male instructors' offices (Boersma 775).

These studies suggest that communication is much better between female students and their female instructors than it is between female students and their male instructors and demonstrate concretely the "inhospitality to women's talk" noted by Treichler and Kramarae.

Let us turn now from speech in the academy to writing in the academy. Several feminists conclude that formal academic discourse has been designed, as Julia Stanley puts it, "by men for the edification of other men" (800). Dale Spender explains that, over the last several centuries, women have been expected to write only "about feelings and emotions" but not about "the more significant intellectual issues" (199). Consequently, the social status quo is maintained "by permitting women to write for a *private* audience (which can be extended to encompass other women) but discouraging them from writing for a *public* audience, that is, men" (192; our emphasis). Spender concludes that "the woman writer

who intends her words for the public confronts a different set of problems from a man when she begins to write" (197).

Pamela Annas makes explicit the "different set of problems" pointed out by Spender. Annas notes that the academic environment values "hierarchy, competitiveness, detachment, and objectivity" (361), qualities corresponding to male uses of language and to mechanical epistemology, while female uses of language are more likely to exhibit "an emphasis on the particular, the contextual, the narrative, the imagistic" (371). Noting that "what sometimes has been perceived as the weaknesses in women's writing . . . are in fact some of the strengths of women's writing" (371), she argues for reform in writing instruction. She calls for writing which "brings together the personal and the political, the private and the public" (370), though she admits that such writing "may or may not be outside the range of what we are accustomed to recognize as strong expository writing" (370). To paraphrase Annas with Brummett's epistemological classifications, writing springing from intersubjective epistemology may or may not be consonant with the mechanical epistemology of the academy.

Several of the generalizations of Spender and Annas are made more concrete by Susan Peterson's analysis of the argumentative compositions of male and female university freshmen, an analysis in which she describes a number of sex-preferential linguistic features. For instance, her finding that the women's compositions use "I" over 50 percent more often than the men's indicates a greater female emphasis on personal experience. Second, her finding that the women's writing uses "you" 200 percent more often than the men's indicates a greater female emphasis on sharing experience and on giving advice. Third, her finding that women's writing exhibits higher *kinesis* (the presence of action in clauses) indicates that it is more anecdotal than men's writing. In short, several of Peterson's findings suggest to us that the writing of the female university freshmen in her study corresponds less closely to the mechanical epistemology of the academy than does the males' writing. Peterson, Annas, Spender, and Stanley all seem to agree that the language of mechanical epistemology is more likely to alienate women than to alienate men.

We turn now to our study which examined whether the sex-preferential linguistic features reported by Peterson are more or less frequent for female basic writers than for female freshmen writers. Also, in order to reach some conclusions about the types of topics found alienating by female basic writers, we examined what kinds of linguistic patterns developed when the women responded to different types of topics and also when the women revised their writing.

We observed the writing processes and analyzed the written products of twenty female students—ten from basic writing classes and ten from freshman composition classes—as each composed nine drafts. Of the twenty students, most were mature women (over 26); four were Black, four Hispanic, ten nonHispanic Caucasian, and two had been educated overseas (one in the Middle East, one in Europe). According to nationally normed reading tests, the Nelson and the Nelson-Denny, the freshmen

read over the twelfth grade level, while most of the basic writers read well below college level, half of them below the fortieth percentile for ninth-graders. Of the basic writers, eight were drawn from a special class for welfare-dependent mothers (a component of a special job-training program) and two from regular basic writing classes.

The nine drafts produced by each student consisted of three series of three drafts, each written one week apart. The first draft in each series was *reflexive*, a term used by Emig and by Perl to describe writing that is more personal and more private than traditional academic writing. The second topic was *extensive*, the opposite of reflexive; its subject corresponded to the previous week's reflexive draft. For instance, one of our reflexive topics asked students to, "Describe how well you were able to make friends in school earlier in your life. How much did your friends help you enjoy going to school?" The corresponding extensive topic asked, "Discuss the importance of making friends in school. How important is friendship in education?" In both sessions, the students were observed by a researcher who recorded the frequency and type of the writers' pauses. Also, the students were told in both sessions not to worry about correcting errors. The third draft in each series was a revision of the extensive draft; here the students were not observed.

Our comparison of the two groups reveals four important patterns:

1. Both the basic writers and the freshman writers *paused more frequently when composing extensive drafts* than when composing reflexive drafts. The *basic writers* demonstrated *more hesitation* than did the freshman writers.
2. In both groups, use of *first person pronouns* dropped dramatically when writers shifted from the reflexive draft to the extensive draft but *rose during revision*. The decrease was similar in both groups, but the *increase* was *much greater among the basic writers* than among the freshman writers.
3. In both groups, use of *second person pronouns* *rose dramatically* when writers shifted from the reflexive draft to the extensive draft but *dropped during revision*. Again, the *increase* was *much greater among the basic writers*, but the decrease was similar in both groups.
4. In both groups, *kinesis*—the presence of action in clauses—*dropped* when writers shifted from the reflexive draft to the extensive draft but *rose during revision*. This was equally true of both groups.

Our findings indicate that both groups showed hesitancy when confronting an extensive topic even though they had written a reflexive theme on a corresponding topic the previous week. Part of their hesitancy, we surmise, was a search for extensive language. When responding to an extensive topic, students started to use second person pronouns in an advice-giving mode, the basic writers to a greater degree than the freshman writers. When revising, both groups tended to edit out the "advice language"; however, they returned to the first person pronouns and

the higher kinesics more characteristic of the reflexive drafts. Thus, both groups, but especially the basic writers, depended on the female language patterns described earlier: sharing personal experience, giving advice, relying more on anecdotes than analysis.

To return to Bizzell's questions, what do we think our study says about the world views of basic writers? Though our sample is small and our conclusions are tentative, we find strong evidence of a subjective epistemology: a way of knowing based on personal experience and relationships with others. Not only does this subjective epistemology seem to pervade the private/reflexive discourse of the basic writers in our study, it also pervades their public/extensive discourse, even after revision. The freshman writers in our study, on the other hand, were able in their revisions of extensive discourse to produce prose which resembled more closely the language and reasoning of intersubjective epistemology, language which brings together and reconciles the private and the public.

The cases of Maria and Brenda provide specific illustrations of our procedure and our claims. Maria, a single Hispanic mother in her late teens, is representative of the basic writers. She reads at the sixth grade level and, according to the writing apprehension scale developed by John Daly and Michael Miller, is "highly apprehensive," as were most of the basic writers in our study. Brenda, a single Black mother in her early thirties, is representative of the freshman writers. She reads above college level and is "moderately apprehensive" about writing, as were most of the freshman writers in our study.

The shift from reflexive to extensive writing, as we reported earlier, is characterized by diminished first person perspective, increased second person perspective, and a drop in the presence of action in clauses. Brenda's writing illustrates all three:

*Reflexive:* I remember belt lashes across my behind, feet, and elsewhere below the waist as I ran, tried to hide and retreat from the punishment.

*Extensive:* The first thing that is learned is that you have authority over your child.

Maria's extensive writing also shows a shift to second person perspective; however, she seems to grow tired of it and returns to first:

*Reflexive:* When we were dating we weren't careful on whether or not I was going to get pargnet again. After 3 months had pass I had told my husband that I was expecting another baby. Then after that he decided not to see me or Cindy again.

*Extensive:* Before deciding if you want a relationship you will have to know the person real well. If you decide that you want a relationship to go as far as marriage. You would have to be even with doing cleaning and working and helping out with my two kids . . . . This person that I plan to get involve with would have to take on responsibility as well as any thing else for our marriage to be success and for it to last a long time also.

Maria seems to believe that the second person perspective, an advice-sharing mode, is more appropriate for the extensive topic than is the first person perspective, but she appears unable to sustain her discourse in second person perspective. Later in the semester, Maria stopped her efforts to shift perspective when composing an extensive draft:

*Reflexive:* When I was a child I was disciplined for all the things that I did bad. My parents would hit me was [with] belt a board or anything in handy.

*Extensive:* Well I know this much if they [Maria's two children] did do something wrong, I would find some kind of punishment for them. I will still have to way [wait] a minimum of time to really know what kind of punishment I will give my children for the bad things that they do.

Like most of the basic writers in our study, Maria tried early in the semester to shift the perspective of her discourse to respond to the extensive topic, but the effort was difficult and unsuccessful. In the final series of her drafts, there was no noticeable difference between her reflexive and extensive drafts; both were personal, anecdotal, and subjective.

Revision of extensive prose was characterized in both groups by diminished second person perspective, increased first person perspective, and increased level of action in clauses—especially among the basic writers. Maria's *unrevised extensive prose* often exhibits shifts in perspective. For example, in the following three-sentence passage her perspective changes with each sentence and her prose quickly loses its ability to communicate:

Another responsibility that I have is that I have to get to the places I need to get to on time. If you don't do this there will be a great chance that you might not be able to see whoever you are going to see. People should try to stay with their responsibility so that there will be things worked out and not be responsible for others.

Her revision avoids incoherence by shifting back to first person perspective and by becoming more anecdotal; however, she no longer attempts to draw generalizations:

My ex-husband broke a promise when he said that he would get me my wedding band, but he never did. We always had disagreements when I wanted to do something and he didn't. We also had a disagreement on me trying to get him to take me to my check-ups when I was pregnant with the girls. He didn't want to take me to the hospital when it was time.

Brenda's revision, representative of the freshman writers' revisions, also illustrates diminished second person perspective, increased first person perspective, and increased level of action in clauses, but unlike Maria's revision, Brenda's does not avoid drawing a generalization:

*Unrevised Extensive:* Friends are such a needed part of school—but especially in grades 4-12. They are needed so that you can collaborate on assignments.

*Revised Extensive:* I imagine that when kids recognize they're different, they retreat to a corner to find another child with a similar "condition" whom they can befriend. I was a different child and there was not one other child in school like me. I didn't know how to be accepted, so I just resigned myself to just work hard at my school work and become smart.

Brenda's revision seems more intersubjective than Maria's; Brenda generalizes then illustrates with an example from her own experience. Maria's revision, however, seems to avoid generalizations in favor of anecdotes; such revising was typical of the basic writers in our study.

Overall, in our sample of 20 female students and their 180 written drafts, the compositions of basic writers exhibit several sex-preferential linguistic traits to a greater degree than the compositions of freshman writers do. Also, the basic writers demonstrate more difficulty than do the freshmen in producing and revising extensive discourse. We suggest that the two phenomena are related. Writers whose world view is highly subjective cannot be expected to respond successfully to topics which seem to come from "another world"—that is, from a discourse community with a different epistemological base. The basic writers in our study seemed to recognize the difference between a reflexive topic and an extensive one, but they tended to interpret the extensive topics in ways that would allow them to respond in a personal, advice-giving mode. Their use of language strikes us not as deficient, but as characteristic of the female epistemology described by Gilligan as a way of knowing based on relationships with others rather than on formal and abstract rules.

Since women like those basic writers described here are not in the least uncommon in open admissions colleges, we suggest that basic writing instruction attempt to address with sensitivity the difficulties these students are likely to encounter. We do not suggest that women's language be "corrected" or that subjective world views be criticized. On the contrary, basic writing instruction—without regarding subjective epistemology as deficient—should attempt to guide female students toward an intersubjective epistemology. Also, basic writing instruction should help female students learn to coexist with the often alienating linguistic expectations of the academy without upholding the characteristics of language produced by males as the preferred paradigm. Indeed, basic writing instruction, in trying to achieve these two objectives, can help to effect epistemological and linguistic changes in the academy as a whole—changes that are, as both Gilligan and Brummett argue, both necessary and overdue.

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Ann B. Dobie

## ORTHOGRAPHY REVISITED: A RESPONSE TO KRISTINE ANDERSON

In the Fall 1987 *JBW*, Kristine Anderson argues with my proposals for a short course in spelling that can be carried out in the context of a freshman composition course. Her argument does more to support my recommendations than criticize them. Our points of agreement are several and fundamental; sometimes we not only advocate the same principles and strategies, but even express them in the same language. Because I am pleased to have the opportunity to restate some of the significant aspects of teaching spelling, let me list a few that Professor Anderson and I seem to hold in common. As I read her essay, we agree on the following:

1. English orthography is complex, but it follows a more orderly pattern than was once assumed.
2. Because most poor spellers have not intuitively absorbed the basic principles underlying the spelling of many words, they are unable to recognize their problems or solve them.
3. Students profit from looking for patterns in their mistakes, then adopting, adapting, and planning strategies for dealing with them. As I stated in my essay, "If students discover their own mistakes and the reason for a particular spelling, they will adopt the correct spelling more quickly."
4. Instructors must provide students with guidance and instruction to give them the means to deal with their problems.
5. Spelling is not simply a low-order memory task, but a highly complex and active intellectual accomplishment.
6. Instruction in spelling should take place in the context of general language study, allowing students the opportunity to explore connections between the spoken language and the written form and to discover how they can apply that knowledge.

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*Ann B. Dobie, associate professor of English at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, is the author of a number of textbooks, the most recent of which is Comprehension and Composition, published by Macmillan. Currently she is preparing a book on Louisiana literature for publication.*

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If I have accurately noted the basic assumptions that Professor Anderson and I share, it becomes clear that our differences have more to do with emphasis than with substance. Specifically, she takes issue with three aspects of my course: (1) it includes too little explanation of error analysis by students; (2) it suggests using learning techniques that involve the auditory sense; (3) it recommends strategies that she described as “low-order memory tasks.” Let me briefly comment on each point.

The short course I have described begins, grows out of, and ends with each student’s analysis of his or her own errors. It starts with a diagnostic test made up of words that have been drawn from student papers. It develops with class discussion of patterns of error. It concludes with individualized tests composed of words the students themselves have deemed to be troublesome. I acknowledge that the students are asked to examine words exemplifying specific types of problems (homonyms, affixes, consonant alteration) along with techniques for avoiding errors; I further acknowledge that such direction on the part of the instructor reduces the initial involvement of the students in analyzing their work. The procedure is, however, designed to facilitate learning, to help students find “a systematic reason why a word should be spelled the way it is,” and to discover “regularities” of correct spelling as well as patterns of misspelling. As I stated in my essay, while spelling improvement must be arrived at inductively, instructors should make the process as efficient and productive as possible.

In answer to Anderson’s charge that developing the auditory sense of students is an inappropriate approach for poor spellers who often err by relying on “how words sound,” let me point out that I said that the study of phonics will not solve all problems, and I recommended its use “to some small extent in classroom work, if only to heighten students’ awareness of what they are saying and hearing” (Fall 1986 *JBW*, 46). If instructors can *improve* students’ sense of the correspondence between sound and words, then the effort will not have been wasted.

As for the “skill and drill” aspect of my proposed course, I confess to being found guilty—if that is the term Professor Anderson chooses for practical strategies that instructors can give students to use on their own over a long period of time. I cannot take the charge as a very serious one, however, because Anderson recommends many of the same strategies in her article. Several of the “appropriate activities and instruction” that she lists are identical to the “skills and drills” she finds in my proposal to be “low-order memory tasks that involve repetition.” For example, we both discuss the advantages of work that helps students make connections between words with similar patterns, apply appropriate rules *when called for*, develop their visual memories, integrate acquisition of spelling skills with other writing tasks and language study, and use mnemonic devices. Anderson’s charge is further deflated when she suggests the use of “flashcards of demon words.” I can think of no drill that is more repetitive and of a lower order.

One final word: the spelling survey included by Professor Anderson is a welcome device for helping students and teachers diagnose spelling deficiencies. It asks important questions and should elicit helpful results. With her permission, I intend to use it. It should fit in comfortably with my short course on spelling.

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## NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

**The Seventh Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition** will be held July 6-9, 1988 at State College, PA. Among the Featured Speakers are James Berlin (Purdue), Richard Enos (Carnegie-Mellon), Jeanne Fahnestock (Maryland), Anne Herrington (Massachusetts), Carolyn Miller (North Carolina State), Marlene Scardamalia (Ontario Institute for Studies in Education), Robert Scholes (Brown), and James Sledd (Texas). Contact: Professor Jack Selzer, Department of English, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802.

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**The University of Wyoming's 1988 Wyoming Conference on English, "Future Studies in Language and Literature Inside and Outside Departments,"** will be held June 20-24, 1988 at Laramie, WY. Invited speakers include Janet Emig (Rutgers), Dan Kirby (Georgia), William Labov (Pennsylvania), Mary Louise Pratt (Stanford), Renato Rosaldo (Stanford), and Jane Tompkins (Duke). Contact: Tilly Warnock, English Department, Box 3353 University Station, Laramie, WY 82071.

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N.B. Deadlines for participation proposals for the above conferences expired before this issue of *JBW* went to press.

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