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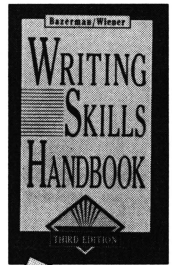
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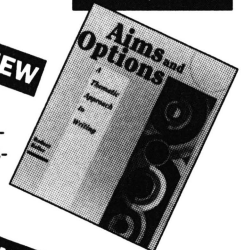
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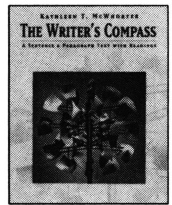
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JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

VOLUME 14 NUMBER 1 SPRING 1995

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Journal of Basic Writing

announces its fourth biennial

MINA P. SHAUGHNESSY WRITING AWARD

given for the best *JBW* article every two years (four
issues). The cash prize is $500, now courtesy of Lynn
Quitman Troyka. This fourth competition covered papers
published in the 1992 and 1993 issues of *JBW*.

Winner: PATRICIA O. LAURENCE
The City University of New York
for
"The Vanishing Site of
Mina Shaughnessy's
Errors and Expectations"
published in

Fall 1993 *JBW*
Volume 12, Number 2

Jury Members: LYNN Z. BLOOM
Aetna Chair of Writing
Department of English
University of Connecticut, Storrs

NONDITA MASON
Department of Academic Skills
Hunter College, CUNY

JOHN S. MAYHER
English Education
New York University

Editors' Column

We are honored to have been selected as the new editors of *JBW*. The previous editors—Mina P. Shaughnessy, Sarah D'Eloia Fortune, Lynn Quitman Troyka, and Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller—have shaped the professional lives of just about every teacher who ever taught basic writing. From these five editors, our profession inherits a rich intellectual history, a critical consciousness, and an obsession with crafting powerful prose.

In 1975, Mina Shaughnessy began *JBW* in response to a momentous change in higher education. We, too, begin our editorship during a time of change and turmoil, a time of reassessment, restructuring, and reevaluation. In her first *JBW* "Editor's Column," written exactly twenty years ago this month, Mina wrote the following about the journal's focus:

> The plight of such students—of young men and women who want to be in college, who have the intelligence to do college work, but who are not skilled enough when they arrive on campus to survive in a rigorously academic environment—has begun to reshape the freshman English course in many colleges, linking it to the work being done in other disciplines such as linguistics and psychology, and most important, challenging teachers who came into their departments of English to teach poems or novels, plays or criticism, to take a closer look at the job of teaching writing.

Two decades and thousands of scholarly articles later, many students are still experiencing this "plight." And many teachers still need "to take a closer look at the job of teaching writing."

Despite all of the critical insights into writing gained from research in composition, psychology, and applied linguistics, many basic writing courses are still remedial, many writers are still subjected to skills/drills pedagogies, and many schools continue to define student writers as "basic" based on their ability to identify and correct errors on multiple-choice tests. Our goal for *JBW* thus remains much the same as Mina's: to provide a forum for colleagues to discuss programs and

pedagogies that enable students to use writing to evolve a more thoughtful and satisfying intellectual life, in and out of the academy. We also believe that *JBW* plays an important role in enabling us to examine and reflect upon the nature of our students, the structure of our programs, and the politics of our profession.

JBW serves a unique readership: teachers, researchers, and administrators dedicated to helping college students improve their writing skills and thus achieve full participation in the academic community. In the past, these readers have expressed a desire for the journal to address the particular needs of their students, whether these students have been labeled as "basic" writers or "inexperienced" writers or "nontraditional" writers or—as Mina labeled them—"beginners." Because so many teachers depend on *JBW* to chart the course of scholarship in basic literacy, we are hesitant to broaden, diffuse, or change the journal's focus or direction. Moreover, we hesitate to meddle with Mina's legacy.

However, as basic writing teachers and administrators, we are constantly questioning the appropriateness of our courses, methods, and materials. We have listened carefully (and uncomfortably) to our colleagues' critiques of basic writing. Within the past two years, colleagues whom we respect and admire have spoken at various conferences about the need to reenvision basic writing. Some have characterized basic writing programs as tracking systems which serve to preserve the idea of nontraditional students as being "different." Several scholars have asserted that basic writing courses "ghettoize" students, prevent them from joining the mainstream of college-level courses, and often serve as obstacles rather than opportunities. Others have challenged our profession to provide evidence that basic writing courses "work."

We have begun questioning whether our definitions are still accurate, whether our placement procedures are still valid, whether our strategies do, in fact, still work. Basic writing programs and teachers have changed much over the past decade (probably in response to the institutionalization of basic writing as a legitimate field of study). If *JBW* is to remain the leading scholarly journal in the field, it must be proactive and give voice to our profession's changing concepts of literacy and basic skills education. Thus, we hope to solicit reasoned, scholarly examinations of the ways in which the construct of basic writing has changed and is continuing to change. We welcome

essays examining the social and psychological consequences of being labeled a basic writer. We are particularly interested in essays that explore the politics of basic writing. We also look forward to seeing essays that analyze program evaluation, rethink program objectives, and critique program models—essays that help readers figure out whether their programs and courses have or have not met their objectives. Most importantly, we hope to see essays that examine the concept of basic writing and that explore new ways of helping underprepared, inexperienced writers.

Recently, several colleagues have proposed a change in the journal's title. In 1975, the term "basic writing" helped teachers move from a remedial paradigm to a developmental and humanistic model. In 1995, we may need to change paradigms again, to emphasize similarities and inclusion over differences and exclusion. A new title would underline the fact that all freshman writers have strengths and weaknesses and can benefit from working with concerned and respectful readers.

Of course, the current title does have the advantage of designating a niche for the journal to fill. When we asked colleagues to consider a new name for the journal, many responded with a simple word: "Why?" Thomas J. Farrell, added the following comments:

> The name "Journal of College Writing" does not name a niche, but an expansive territory—all writing in college. We already have two NCTE journals that presumably cover that expansive territory, *CE* and *CCC*. Why do we need to have another journal cover the same expansive territory? As to the name "The Journal of Teaching and Learning Writing," that name is still more expansive. Who would want to subscribe to or even regularly look at a journal that would include articles about teaching and learning writing at any and all levels of schooling?

And Mike Rose warned of a different problem:

> I do like the idea of your taking these issues head on and thinking about the title of the journal. But I also think that we must not succumb to the danger of denying that some students come to us with significant difficulties, and we need to address these. Otherwise, we make changes in titles, in programs, in instructors—and our students still come out not writing well.

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We invite readers to speculate on the wisdom of changing *JBW*'s title. We also invite you to submit essays that address the shifting definitions and status of basic writing and essays that confront the concerns of administrators and legislators. These are the issues addressed in the first collection of essays that we have had the privilege of editing.

In the opening essay, Lynn Z. Bloom reviews the twenty-year history of *JBW* to underscore the role played by the journal in establishing the discipline of basic writing and in distinguishing the scholarship in our field.

In "Teaching People Who Don't Write Good," Alan C. Purves explores the idea that the computer has changed the construct of writing. Purves states that writing today involves "the moving around of images" and has become "an act of visual composition and arrangement," a world in which "we are all neophytes." This leads him to suggest that *JBW* be renamed the Journal for Imagining Composition.

Gordon Brossell and Mary Sheridan-Rabideau assert that basic writing classes enable teachers to meet the needs of basic writing students and to provide them with extensive feedback better than in mixed-proficiency classes. In addition, they conclude that the community, support, and safe place provided by basic writing classes more than justify their existence in our colleges today.

In a reply to recent scholarship positioning the basic writing classroom as a site of struggle, a "contact zone," Joseph Harris argues for writing classes in which differences are articulated, but negotiation is also valued. He explains why teaching intervention and compromise can lead individuals, neighborhoods, disciplines, and communities to reach beyond their borders of separation.

Lee Odell counters the "deficit pedagogy" notion of teaching basic writing by presenting real-life assignments that engage students in complicated, interesting, and meaningful community-based writing—assignments that place students in "a climate of uncertainty." Odell states that such writing will prepare students to be literate citizens of the twenty-first-century society.

J. Milton Clark and Carol Peterson Haviland describe their collaboration on a project in which basic writing students, ESL, and non-ESL, worked together to interpret and reflect upon texts written in French, Chinese, and/or Spanish. In addition to expanding the students' ideas about writing, reading, and un-

derstanding, Clark and Haviland provide evidence that these collaborations transformed asymmetrical power and privilege relations in the classroom.

Now we would like to call your attention to an essay that appeared in the Fall 1993 issue of *JBW*: "The Vanishing Site of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*" by Patricia O. Laurence, who teaches at The City College of The City University of New York. This essay has just won the Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award chosen from articles published by *JBW* in the years 1992 and 1993. This $500 cash prize is given to the author of the best *JBW* essay every two years (thanks to the support of Lynn Quitman Troyka). Pat Laurence's essay was selected by a jury of scholars which included Lynn Z. Bloom, Nondita Mason, and John S. Mayher (see announcement box on a previous page). We congratulate Professor Laurence, and we thank the jury for their invaluable service.

We also want to thank our predecessors, Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller, who brought a new critical consciousness to *JBW*. They did a superb job of broadening the journal's scope and audience. They traveled across the country, soliciting manuscripts from authors who represented different theoretical, academic, social, and political points of view. Under their leadership, the journal became a provocative forum for dialogue, research, and discussion about writing, basic and otherwise.

We are grateful to Peter and Bill and to all the other people who have supported *JBW* and who have been so gracious to us: Lynn Quitman Troyka, former *JBW* Editor; Marie Jean Lederman, former Dean of *JBW*'s publisher—the CUNY Instructional Resource Center; Elsa Nuñez-Wormack, the current Dean and CUNY Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs; Marilyn Maiz, former Associate Editor; Richard Mandelbaum, Copyreader; Mary Carney, Subscriptions; the superb *JBW* Editorial Board members (who also serve as Consulting Reviewers); and, of course, Ruth Davis, our wonderful Associate and Managing Editor.

We would also like to express our appreciation to the *JBW* Editorial Board members who have agreed to remain on the Board and serve as Consulting Reviewers during our tenure as Editors: David Bartholomae, Sarah Benesch, Nancy Carriuolo, Brenda M. Greene, Muriel Harris, Irvin Hashimoto, Warren Herendeen, Myra Kogen, Patricia Ondek Laurence, Elaine O. Lees, Andrea Lunsford, Susan Miller, Jerrold Nudelman, George Otte, Jane Peterson, Lynn Quitman Troyka, Evelyn Webb, and Harvey S. Wiener. We also thank the new members joining the

We end our column with the closing lines of the first issue of *JBW*; this issue ended with an essay on "Putting Error in Its Place" by Isabella Halstead:

> There is no short-cut to teaching writing, and in my view, "skills" cannot be considered separate from all the factors that make up the process. This is particularly true for our students whose negative attitudes about writing are nearly insuperable obstacles. A student who does not want to learn something will not, and so our main concern must be to convince our students that writing—with all its components, including acceptable forms—is more than worth the effort. This can only be done when we make clear what it is for, by giving them the opportunity to sense what they have to say is worth listening to, that others are there, and the work involved in putting it in writing opens up new possibilities for communication. If we can do this, we may also find ourselves learning much more than we ever could about our students, their language, and, incidentally, ourselves.

Twenty years later, these words still ring true.

—Karen Greenberg and **Trudy Smoke**

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<div align="right">Lynn Z. Bloom</div>

A NAME WITH A VIEW

ABSTRACT: *The title of an academic journal should identify its subject area, embody the spirit of the discipline, distinguish its orientation to the field, present a positive image of its subject, and accommodate—if not reflect—the current state of the art. Because the scope of* Journal of Basic Writing *has been expansive over the years, and because the connotations of "basic writing" have changed since the journal's inception, it is appropriate, under new editorial management, to consider changing the journal name to reflect these changes.*

To exist humanly, is to *name* the world, to change it.

—Paolo Freire

A man's life proceeds from his name, in the way
a river proceeds from its source.

—N. Scott Momaday, *The Names*

A Story of Names, with Many Morals

I always loved my name, even before I could spell it. *Lynn.* Feminine, but not cute, it was easy to pronounce and, as a one-syllable word, hard to nickname. Best of all, it was unique and

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Lynn Z. Bloom is professor of English and Aetna Chair of Writing at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. Her publications include Doctor Spock: Biography of a Conservative Radical *(Bobbs-Merrill, 1972);* Fact and Artifact: Writing Nonfiction. *2nd ed. (Blair/Prentice Hall, 1994);* The Essay Connection. *4th ed. (D.C. Heath, 1995),* "Teaching College English as a Woman" *54.7* College English *(Nov. 1992); and the forthcoming* Coming to Life: Reading, Writing, Teaching Autobiography *(Prentice Hall Studies in Writing and Culture).*

therefore special. No one else in my entire elementary school in Durham, New Hampshire—or even at Dover High, or for that matter no one I knew at the University of Michigan, had that name. If people said "Lynn," they had to mean me. Whatever my name was, I was.

During my first pregnancy, as a graduate student in literature and linguistics, I became aware of the profound significance of naming. To name is to be human. We prepare to name our children all our lives. Every person we meet (and sometimes places and animals, as well), every book and newspaper we read, every film or TV program we watch provides a host of possibilities—to accept, reject, or ponder. Our repertoire is continually under revision; as the present becomes the past, tastes and namesakes change. The Mildreds become the Patricias who become the Tammys who become the Kimberleys and so they go—each more beautiful, then ultimately more dated than the next, full of unanticipated, unacknowledged but nevertheless powerful connotations, public and private.

Thus in the hope, faith that children will grow to fit their names, Martin and I named our firstborn son *Bard*, for you know who; and our second son *Laird*, for you know where. Masculine, timeless, unusual; tough to nickname, and easy to say. Fitting companions for brothers and for a mother with a one-syllable, still avant-garde name. You already know, or can infer, these public connotations. But you know scarcely a whisper, until I give you a hint here, of the private connotations. To us these British names symbolize my academic major and Martin's graduate year at Edinburgh. They also embed our marriage in Epsom, Surrey, exiled by my parents' threat that if I married "that Jew," they would have "nothing to do with him, or you, or any children you might have"—the motif of a complicated story that, with luck and grace, our children may outlive. With your new knowledge, the character of our community—as writer and readers—has changed. Oh—and yes, I married Martin and embraced his name as my own.

Academic Journal Names

A name, any name, is both a manifestation of the namer's authority, and a code word to the cognoscenti. In "The Power of Naming," Armstrong and Fontaine discuss the negotiations that govern writing program administrators' authority to name and rename courses, job titles, program descriptions, and the discipline itself. The names themselves "create and define the disci-

pline." The arrival of a new WPA on the scene, they explain, provides the opportunity to examine the status quo and—at "important points of growth or tension in the field"—to initiate changes reflected in changes of name (5).

Similar considerations apply to the naming, or renaming, of academic journals.[1] *Journal of Basic Writing*—not *The* Journal, although from both grammar and habit we supply the *the*—will turn 21 in 1995, though having given precocious evidence of maturity right from the start. *JBW* has reached this milestone, and has at the same time acquired new coeditors, who are examining the title at this juncture and asking the questions, "Should *JBW* have a new name? If so, why? And, what should it be?" The first two questions are easier to answer than the third.

Yes, *Journal of Basic Writing* should have a new name. Here's why.

A journal title should identify its subject area, and embody the spirit of the discipline (see note 1). *JBW* has been published, since its first issue in 1975, under the auspices of the CUNY Instructional Resource Center—a fitting, perhaps inevitable affiliation, given Mina Shaughnessy's landmark work with basic writers at CUNY in the 1970s. That Shaughnessy from the very first page of *Errors and Expectations* chose to call "severely unprepared" freshman *basic writers* was a carefully calculated choice of name.

For the term *basic writers* sent a humane political message not just to the profession but to a world which even in the mid 1970s had to be convinced that these students were not to be seen as *remedial*; they were not retarded or sick; they should not be disciplined or punished or medicated or flushed out of the system. In the political manifesto for educators with which she concludes *Errors and Expectations* Shaughnessy summarizes—and castigates—"the remedial model":

> Colleges must be prepared to make more than a graceless and begrudging accommodation to this unpreparedness, opening their doors with one hand and then leading students into an endless corridor of remedial anterooms with the other. We already begin to see that the remedial model, which isolates the student and the skill from real college contexts, imposes a "fix-it station" tempo and mentality upon both teachers and students. (293)

Instead, says Shaughnessy, these students should be met wherever on the educational continuum they begin college.

They should be understood and respected as human beings and therefore as language users; their teachers, says Shaughnessy, "confronted by what at first appears to be a hopeless tangle of errors and inadequacies, must learn to see below the surface of these failures the intelligence and linguistic aptitudes" of their students (292). Teachers thus have the moral as well as pedagogical obligation to treat their students not as hopeless failures but as *basic writers*, "capable of learning what [the teacher] has learned, and what he now teaches" (292).

JBW has faithfully reflected Shaughnessy's spirit in the language of its title. For its first decade of publication the journal issued calls for papers on specific topics, some of which were framed in terms of basic writers. For example, a Fall/Winter 1978 call for articles on vocabulary invited submissions

> which discuss successful methods of teaching vocabulary to Basic Writing Students. Articles should justify the choice of methods, analyze Basic Writing students' central difficulties with words, and discuss the features of academic language that pose the most serious problem for Basic Writing students. (62)

Yet even in the same issue, the call for articles on *Reinforcement* focused on learning to produce the kinds of writing "demanded" in the "physical and natural sciences, the social sciences, business or technical writing"—a facility that, as the theme of *Reinforcement* implies, might be developed later in a student's academic career than would basic writing.

Comparable calls in 1980 for submissions for *JBW* issues on *Revision* and *Academic and Non-Academic Writing* could elicit papers dealing with a student population more diverse than "basic writers." That right from *JBW*'s inception its scope was conceived of more broadly than its title implies is apparent from what the editors actually published. Between 1975-85, as indicated from their titles, 31 of its 98 articles—31.61%—were not necessarily on basic writing.

A journal title should distinguish its orientation to, and particular niche in, the broader field. Since 1985, the *Call for Articles* has explicitly acknowledged the "wide diversity" in the term *basic writer*. Editor Lynn Troyka and her successors, Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller, define *basic writer* as "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" ("Call," n.p., 1985 ff). For the editors this

descriptive term has no pejorative connotations (but see the next section, below).

If we look at the *Call for Articles* regularly printed in *JBW* since 1985, the term *basic writing* can scarcely encompass the vast and varied range of topics the editors suggest:

> We invite authors to write about matters such as the social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; 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 (n.p., with slight variations, every issue).

Many of the articles published in response to this call inevitably spill over even the loose boundaries implied by a title that over the years may have become more restrictive than its current use warrants. For instance, over 50% of the articles in a typical recent issue (Fall 1990), could with few, if any, modifications, transcend the designated niche of *basic writing*: Zak's "Exclusively Positive Responses to Student Writing," Slattery's "Applying Intellectual Development Theory to Composition," Moberg's bibliographic essay, "The Revival of Rhetoric," and my own essay on teaching new writing teachers, "Finding a Family, Finding a Voice." This diversity is reinforced by an examination of the titles of all the articles published in *JBW* 1986-Spring 1994. Between 1986-88, 11 of 45 articles (24.4%) were on topics broader than basic writing, a figure that rose to 37.8% (14/37) 1989-91 and attained 33% (12/36) 1992-94.[2] This eclecticism is not only appropriate but inevitable in such an amorphous and diverse field as composition. It would be regrettable if a title originally intended to be liberatory had a ghettoizing effect on its subject.

Moreover, a title more fully reflective of *JBW's* actual breadth of subject would presumably attract an even wider range of contributors than *JBW's* current—and fairly diverse—roster, and would consequently broaden both its subscription and advertising base.

A journal title should present a positive image of its subject. Over the years so accustomed have we in the profession become to the term *basic writers* that we take it for granted; we no longer look *at* it, we look *through* it. Nevertheless, during the past two decades, its connotations have subtly changed, in two ways. One is in the direction of more diversity, as is indicated in the "Call for Papers" above.

The other direction is more negative. As *basic writing* became the normative term in the field, various negative connotations previously attached to *remedial* accrued to this new term, as well. As Tom Fox argued in his plenary address at the Fourth National Basic Writing Conference: "Easy claims about the relationship between language mastery and academic or economic access are false." They obscure "real social and political boundaries, such as racism, sexism, elitism, homophobia that really do prevent access." These underlying discriminatory features are incorporated, subtly or not so subtly, in the connotations of *basic writers* held not only by conservative commentators on education such as William Bennett and Dinesh D'Souza, but by mainstream writing teachers, as well (Fox 37). (See also Mike Rose, "The Politics of Remediation," in *Lives on the Boundary.*)

Even if the cognoscenti know, in their hearts and in their classrooms, what *basic writing* really means (*JBW* editors did not define the term until 1985), it may be preferable to effect a positive transformation in the field by changing an existing journal title which has ambiguous or creeping negative connotations. That minority and disadvantaged groups do this regularly is illustrated in the changing labels, positive and negative, for colored people/Negroes/Blacks/African Americans. . . . As Audre Lorde understood, "If we don't name ourselves we are nothing. If the world defines you it will define you to your disadvantage" (in Ostriker 59).

A journal title should accommodate, if not reflect, the current state of the art. This is not to be construed as license for idiosyncratic editorial caprice—with, say, a change of title every time there's a change of editor—but rather as an opportunity for the title to reflect changes in the field's prevailing paradigm(s) and terminology. Journal editors are chosen for their stature in the field and their commitment to the discipline, and Karen Greenberg and Trudy Smoke are no exceptions. Journal editors expand their already considerable contributions to the field by their willingness to undertake the labor

of love (there may be less elegant words for this) that editing a journal requires.

The contemplation by Greenberg and Smoke of a new journal title is not intended as a negative reflection on their predecessors' excellent work, but rather an acknowledgement of the numerous changes in the field which their work has influenced. Yet a title should allow some room to express the editors' philosophy; new managers of any enterprise want to initiate some changes to mark it as truly their own, to signal to their clientele their particular orientation. So they redecorate even if they don't remodel; they alter the menu; they change titles to convey nuances, subtle or more profound, in the community's operative code.

Conclusion

It is not up to this occasional contributor to suggest what that new title should be. My own taste, signaled by my lifelong affection for my own name and reflected in the names of my children, is for a name that's short, functional, elegant, timeless, and on target. The journal's name should, of course, signal its membership in the writing family, and its particular location on the family tree. Ideally, the name should also reflect its history as well as forecast its future—a lot to do in three or four brief key words. But because, as Freire says, to name the world is a way to change that world, whatever the name is, the journal will become.

Notes

[1]It has not escaped my notice, however, that the most prestigious academic critical journal in America has had since its inception an extraordinarily ugly and unpronounceable name, whether written out in full or abbreviated to *PMLA*. This four-syllable abbreviation stands for *Publications of the Modern Language Association*—fifteen syllables, forty-two letters, an uncomfortable, inadvertent meter, and a weak rhyme. The title is inaccurate, since the plural refers to a single publication. Moreover, the title *PMLA* is difficult to find in standard bibliographic indexes, which catalog the journal not under *P*, or *PMLA*, but under *Modern Language Association*. That this title is not only tolerated but revered is a comment on the values, indeed the discourse, of the profession that promulgates it.

[2]Examination of the articles' content rather than their titles might change the percentages slightly, but it would not affect the point.

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Alan C. Purves

TEACHING PEOPLE WHO DON'T WRITE GOOD

ABSTRACT: *In this brief excursus, the writer critiques the metaphors out of which basic writing has emerged and looks jocularly at the new possibilities. He then suggests that with the new technologies of writing, we are all at a novice level and need to rethink what we mean by composition in an age when writing is the manipulation of images in hyperspace.*

When Karen and Trudy asked me to write a piece for their inaugural issue of *JBW* or, as I think of it, the *Journal for (of) Teaching People Who Don't Write Good*, they told me to be amusing. That's a hard assignment. I would rather be direct. The readers may decide whether I am amusing, curmudgeonly, or obtuse.

We have a fairly large number of people coming to colleges and universities who appear to have trouble with the tool that we call writing. The tool is complex. Having trouble writing is like having trouble playing the piano, cooking, or doing carpentry or plumbing. The problem with writing as opposed to those others is that people in institutions of higher education expect students to do it reasonably well. After all, most of the faculty

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Alan C. Purves, director, The Center for Writing and Literacy at The University at Albany, SUNY, is a writer, teacher, and editor. He has recently completed editing The Encyclopedia of English Studies and Language Arts *(Scholastic, 1994), and coauthoring a text* Creating the Writing Portfolio *(NTC, 1995). He is currently at work on a study of the relationships among visual and rhetorical patterns in writing, and is authoring a book,* Finding God in Hyperspace *(Rutgers UP, forthcoming).*

and administrators are pretty good at it (or so they think), and they are genuinely surprised to find a student who has trouble with syntax, organization, diction, or tone, much less finding something to say about a supposedly controversial topic that few really care about. Probably teachers in cooking schools and other crafts have the same set of expectations and look with surprise and disdain on those who come into the school at the novice level.

What's wrong with these students that we have to put them in special courses for poor writers? When I first entered the profession, it was thought that there was an anatomical deficiency; we called the course "bonehead English." We attempted to apply various prostheses like grammar. Then we called it "remedial writing," which perpetuated a medical image, and we sought such cures as programmed instruction. (The American Psychiatric Association still lists it as a "disorder.") Then, in the 1970s we called it "basic writing," as if the students missed certain fundamentals and had to enter a kind of boot camp for writers and be treated with some form of "tough love." Some have called it "developmental" as if there was a break in a natural organic process. More recently we might come to think of the students as "rhetorically impaired" or "orthographically challenged." These imply some sort of benign abnormality.

I have argued elsewhere and earlier in this journal that the students whom we have labeled as "rhetorically different" (to put the most charitable construction on their situation), have not been fully clued into the academic writing game, and that all we need to do is apprise them of these rules. But that's like taking them into the kitchen and showing them all the tools and then all the procedures, and telling them to make a linzer torte.

We do not learn cooking that way; we learn it by making certain relatively easy things through mixing and heating, thus learning about simple dishes and sauces, then moving to baking and grilling. We also learn about the appropriateness of tools, the nature and properties of different vegetables and oils and spices, and the aesthetics of the stir-fry or of the presentation of dishes. But learning to make casseroles is not learning to make salads or to do certain kinds of cake decorating, or other forms of pastry. And then there are the ethnic cuisines and the blends, nutrition, and color.

Writing is about as complex as cooking. Yet it has become about as basic. My brother can barely scramble an egg. I am

pretty good at breads and oriental cookery; my wife is a great soup maker and pastry chef. None of us is an expert chef. We'd never make it in a restaurant. But two of our children would. I am a pretty good journey writer. But I lack the artistry or passion of some writers whom I really respect.

I suspect that most of our students are culinarily challenged as they are rhetorically challenged. The problem is that we are often confused about what it is we should teach them. We have spent a lot of time teaching them about planning the menu, assembling the ingredients, and tasting for the herbs and spices, but we have neglected the cooking and serving and presentation of the dish (that's being product-oriented). But our students know where the proof of the pudding is—and it ain't in the preparation. After all, as consumers at McDonalds, they see the product in its paper and styrofoam glory.

When the *Journal of Basic Cooking* [*Writing*] was established, the focus was on nutrition rather than packaging. That is a healthy approach, but it is perhaps a bit narrow. Today we have become aware of a variety of cuisines and approaches to food preparation and we are unsure about where to begin. Should we make Italian, Chinese, or good old meat and potatoes? We also are unsure as to whether we should focus on open-hearth cookery and the cleaver or on food processors and microwaves.

As writing teachers we are unsure of both ends and tools. Let me drop the analogy and stick to my subject.

How are we unsure of ends? We are not clear as to what sorts of writers we want to train (and I use the word advisedly for we do train students most of the time and sometimes we educate them). We are unsure about the genres in which we want them to be proficient and why those genres. We are unsure about whether we are more concerned with the handling of content, of structure, of style and voice, or of various aspects of inscribing. We are unsure of whether we want them to be academic writers or not (even though we are employed by the academy). Do we want them to "invent" the academy or put it on like a costume? Do we know what they want (besides to survive)? Does it matter to us what they want? Do we want to save their souls or simply give them technical prowess to seek their own salvation or damnation? Are we interested in individual performance or the development of community and the effacement of self? And in what ways do we want the self to disappear and reemerge? I would suggest that these are not easy questions to ask nor questions that we should address as ideologues. Rather

we need to engage in a dialogue and seek (at each institution at least) some sort of community understanding.

How are we unsure of means? Obviously means follow ends. But there are some instances in which the means become important to consider. Let us take the example of the computer. When we begin using the computer in writing instruction, do we explore with students the fact that they are engaged in working with a multiauthor hypertext? They are there to enter their draft, let's say, but then they need to realize that within the chips are other "authors": a formatter, a speller, a grammarian, an organizer, a production specialist. They can also access a data base, perhaps, or use graphics or sound in their production. They can work with all of these, do their part, and then say, "O.K., Ms. Speller, you have a go at it." They are already doing collaborative writing. They can bring in another human too, if they are networked, or even if they bring their disk to another person. The writer with the computer is never alone. How does using these power tools alter writers, change the nature of writing, and of the text, or change the ways in which novices and experts understand these matters? Should writers trust their invisible colleagues?

Another set of means we tend to dismiss, but which electronic technology has brought to our attention, is the process of writing. The traditional terminology of planning, drafting, revising, and editing may no longer be appropriate, or may need to be reconstrued. The fact of the stored text on the diskette means that we may leave it at any time and return to it endlessly. The program takes us back to the beginning of the text each time. We are thus invited to begin again or to revise what we have written before we go on to the next part. We are also never sure when we have completed a draft. We are never sure whether the segment we wrote today will go in one composition only or be reused as a part of another. The very finite nature of the book or the text has disappeared. We are like the painter returning to the studio rather than like the musician returning to the score or the cook returning to the kitchen to prepare yet another meal. But that analogy is not truly appropriate either. Today's finished portrait is tomorrow's sketch. Space and time are rearranged in the new configuration of text and hypertext. Do we have a pedagogy that helps us deal with this new sense of text and change and completion?

How do we help students who are both scared of texts and unsure of the new machinery? What are the best ways of help-

ing students work through the cycle of production of a finished text? How do we get them to work out their own modus operandi? We are ourselves too new as members of this electronic world, a world which is changing as we move from idea to finished text. The worlds of hypermedia and electronic bulletin boards are changing the nature of composition before our very senses. The forms of texts and the forms of text production are in flux. How can we know what is "basic" or where to begin with students?

Perhaps we should think of ourselves as introducing students to a technology, a program. Let me illustrate. In 1993, I taught a new course in general education on the history of literacy. What was new about it was that the students were given as their textbook a disk in the hypertext program, Storyspace™. The program had about 200 spaces with topics and references in them, from which students had to construct their text. Several students thought they could approach the course the way they approached other courses, cutting classes and then pulling an "all-nighter" to finish the assignments. They failed. Interestingly, some of them blamed the machine, much as neoliterates blame their glasses or texts. Other students began systematically learning the program so that they could use it to do the assignment, and they learned how to work with each other to share its 200 spaces.

The point is that these students were in much the same sort of predicament that many of our "students who don't write good" find themselves—the state of trying to figure out the technique as they also try to learn the theory or the content. Perhaps we should see students as needing to consider both the models of academic working and the tools for making those models real.

Having written that, I see that it is a banal statement, and at the same time a difficult one, for it does not tell us where to begin. Writing on the computer, even more blatantly than earlier forms of writing, involves the manipulation of images. It is an act of visual composition and arrangement. We do not manipulate words (things with meaning), or graphemes (signs of things with meaning), as much as we manipulate segments of space (which contain graphemic signs of things with meaning). Our manipulation takes place in space (not on a page or a sheet of paper or a scroll), but on a simulacrum of space. We manipulate intangibles; eventually they may become tangible.

Students can become fairly adept at this kind of composi-

tion, but it is a new composition, one that deals with arrangement and playful arrangement as much as with the generation of language for ideas. It is one to which many of us are newcomers, and we are trying to work with our students as teachers must have done with students who were learning writing in the days of incunabula. They still practiced monastic copying when that was no longer the problem that writers faced. It took about two hundred years for people to realize that copying was not composition. Now we must realize that "writing" is not composition.

Composition is manipulation of images for a rhetorical effect. The images are not only the traditional graphemes, punctuation marks, and paragraphs; they are type faces, illustrations, images, sound effects, a complex arrangement of digitized information. In this world, we are all neophytes. Some artists and a few rhetoricians have been looking at the manipulation of images for the past thirty years. However, our lead in teaching composition may well come from the concrete poets, the makers of comic books, and the designers of Las Vegas, as well as from rhetoricians such as Richard Lanham and Christopher Alexander.

Basic writing, writing for the rhetorically challenged, writing for people who don't write good, these are all possible themes for this journal, but I would suggest that *JBW* break ground by renaming itself the *Journal for Imagining Composition.*

Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau
Gordon Brossell

FINDING BASIC WRITING'S PLACE

ABSTRACT: *Recent questions about the value of basic writing ask educators to review what the authors claim basic writing does. The authors believe basic writing serves a vital function by providing writing support for at-risk students, basic writing serves the needs of a growing student population that universities accept yet feels needs additional writing instruction; while there may be problems with the name of this course and how institutions support these programs, the basic writing classroom is still the most effective educational support for these at-risk students and their writing.*

The term *BW* [Basic Writing] *student* is an abstraction that can easily get in the way of teaching. Not all BW students have the same problem; not all students with the same problems have them for the same reasons.... The teacher must try to decipher the individual's code, examining samples of this writing as a scientist might, searching for patterns or explanations, listening to what the students say about punctuation, and creating situations in the classroom that encourage students to talk openly about what they don't understand....

—Shaughnessy *Errors and Expectations* (40)

Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau received her Master's degree from The University of Illinois at Chicago, where she now teaches. She has worked with basic writers while teaching writing at a New York City high school, composition at The University of Illinois at Chicago, and adult/workplace literacy at neighborhood literacy centers. Gordon Brossell is professor of English and director of English Education at The University of Illinois at Chicago. His articles have appeared in College English, College Composition and Communication, *and* English Journal, *as well as in various books about writing pedagogy and writing assessment.*

The essential challenge for basic writing teachers is to help inexperienced writers improve their writing, and their primary task is to provide extensive reviewed writing practice that encourages more student writing. As fundamental as this argument is, recent discussions of basic writing seem to discount it. While we welcome the critical reflection that recent discussions foster, we feel those who propose dismantling basic writing programs go too far. We believe that if a university accepts students who write below a defined level, it has an obligation to help them write better. Basic writing is, we think, the best way for a university to cultivate the success of these students.

Inherent in these discussions are the contested definitions of basic writers. Our definition emerges from reflecting on our students' essays. Inexperience is the common factor among basic writing students, and it causes difficulties that are more intractable than the struggles most students undergo as they define themselves within academic discourse. Basic writers have consistent trouble starting a piece of writing, expressing ideas clearly, and revising what they have written. Their writing often demonstrates what Shaughnessy called an "orchestration of error," her term for students' thoughtful and consistent nonstandard language usage. However, there is a tremendous range of problems among basic writers, and it would be dangerous to lump all basic writing students into one category. Some students feel they can write only one kind of essay, others feel they can write no more than a paragraph about their subject, and still others write essays that even they have difficulty deciphering. Understanding this diversity of student problems will help teachers engender learning that taps students' strengths.

In the process of defining basic writing, several people have tried to recast perceptions about this field and renegotiate basic writing's role within the university by proposing a name change. Basic writing teachers must lead the effort to define our field— that is what this issue of *Journal of Basic Writing* explores—but how basic writing is perceived depends on more than basic writing instructors. In part, it is the status the university gives to these courses that makes it clear to students how basic writing is valued. When was the last time a tenured faculty member taught basic writing on a regular basis? When was the last time extensive funds were allocated to bring in speakers on basic writing education (as opposed to speakers on a literary topic)? Whatever the name of a basic writing course, educators and

administrators need to reexamine the priority they give to basic writing not only within composition instruction, but also within the university's mission. Students respond to universities' cues.

At The University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) where we teach, all students are required to take two composition courses, Freshman Composition and Research Writing, and growing numbers of students are also required to take basic writing. The extensive writing load may be a basic writing student's first consistent writing experience; in an attempt to address students' lack of preparation, basic writing courses often proceed at a slower pace. However, the texts and assignments of our basic writing courses maintain the rigor of university classes. Contrary to Bartholomae's claim in "The Tidy House," that basic writing "is necessarily prior to or lesser than the mainstream course" (20), we believe this curriculum makes basic writing necessarily prior to but in no way less than other writing courses.

The existence of basic writing courses is hardly an academic anomaly. Many disciplines—the sciences, languages, mathematics—require students to have a certain level of facility or to take a course that helps students gain that facility. As a discipline, composition has similar standards. Composition teachers expect students to achieve a certain level of writing proficiency so that they are better prepared to succeed in composition courses.

Not surprisingly, basic writing students who demonstrate a lack of writing preparation often have difficulty with other college courses. Since basic writers often do not connect their previous preparation with their present level of academic achievement, they find their difficulties mysterious or uncontrollable. For example, students report copying essays out of books as high school class exercises in the same breath they report failing their history essay exams even though they studied for hours. In one essay, a basic writing student whom we taught wrote the following: "While I was in high school we really didn't do much writing.... The last that I can remember writing would be in grammer school." This student almost failed his criminal justice research essay even though he loved the class and worked on the essay "forever."

Unfortunately this scenario is not atypical. Unfamiliar with and underprepared for fulfilling the university's writing expectations, basic writers are often exploring writing practices that more experienced writers may already be quite comfortable

with. More-experienced writers may have seen school-based literacy modeled at home more frequently, may have explored prewriting, composing, and reviewing strategies at school more regularly, or may have participated in extracurricular writing activities more often. In basic writing courses we have observed, teachers attempt to foster these same kinds of experiences. Both students and teachers model the processes that they believe successful writers do and explore writing styles that may be successful for them. At UIC, basic writing classes have additional benefits that allow teachers to review students' writing more often: Basic writing courses meet for more hours and have fewer students than other composition courses. By creating structured situations for extensive feedback on common basic writing patterns, basic writing teachers can address writing issues in ways composition teachers of larger, mixed-proficiency classes cannot.

Basic writing classrooms also frequently provide safe spaces where students are encouraged to address their writing difficulties within a supportive environment. This situation differs from many mixed-proficiency classes that assume a certain level of writing facility, a level basic writers often do not meet. "Best part of this class [basic writing]" wrote an anonymous mid-term evaluation respondent "is we... don't always feel like your an outsider or that you are alone there are people with the same problem in writing as myself." As this student says, too often basic writers feel their writing is inferior to others' more experienced writing.

With the added comfort of a community of writers who share similar writing experiences, basic writers are more likely than other at-risk students (students whose proficiency exams, class rank, and ACT scores make the university feel the students are at risk of dropping out of school) to write drafts that help them understand their writing and develop personal writing strategies, processes more experienced writers have already experimented with. Taking away the opportunity to receive reviewed writing practice with students at a similar level makes basic writers less confident and more likely to shut down. One of our basic writing students reported his feelings about a mixed-proficiency class that did not provide support for his writing: "Before I enrolled in English 152 [basic writing] I used to be afraid of writing. I think that fear came from ignorance. Since I didn't know how to write, I was afraid someone would find out I couldn't write and tell everyone else."

Some educators who oppose basic writing classes feel that

all students should take the same composition courses. In their classrooms, they often focus so closely on valuing diversity that the individual needs of writers can be overridden. Though we recognize that valuing diversity and attending to the needs of individual writers are not mutually exclusive, we remain convinced that the primary goal of basic writing is the practical improvement of student writing.

Furthermore, new teaching assistants may be unaware of how to handle mixed-proficiency classes. Teaching assistants [TAs], already attempting to tap the strengths of wonderfully diverse students like those at UIC, are the least-experienced teachers at the university level and are the most likely to be teaching freshman composition. Compounding this problem, more experienced TAs often teach discussion sections of literature courses or upper-level writing courses, leaving the newest of the new TAs to teach students who cut across ethnic, gender, age, and ability groupings. We question whether new TAs have the experience and knowledge to attend to the needs of a mixed-proficiency classroom, where students' diverse strengths and problems can overwhelm both TA and student. In such a classroom, we believe underprepared students will find their writing needs unmet.

Other critics believe basic writing courses "brand" students. However, university basic writing courses are not like high school tracks, which too often provide separate and unequal education. Quite the contrary, university basic writing courses precede but do not replace a student's matriculation into the general English curriculum. During the semester that students take basic writing, they are not prohibited from taking other courses within the university, they are not thrown off sequence (many freshmen do not take their English requirement their first semester), and there isn't a separate building for basic writing classes. Indeed, unless basic writing students tell others, there is no way to determine who is in basic writing. We've found that far from feeling labeled, basic writers often express their appreciation for having the chance to accomplish in basic writing classes what they could not in regular classes: improve their writing skills and develop a sense of comfort and confidence as writers.

We are not implying that one fifteen-week basic writing course can create a highly successful writer by itself, but we believe it can prepare a student to participate actively in future classes. The additional personal attention and reviewed writing practice allow a teacher to know the student well enough to

create opportunities for successful associations with writing. As one of our former students wrote in her journal, "I never thought in a million years that I would ever enjoy writing. Since I entered college I discovered my writing style... I found that everyone can write, people just have to find what kind of writing their good at." Once students become more comfortable with their writing, they are more apt to engage themselves in the tasks associated with it: they are more likely to think of themselves as writers, to imagine an audience, and to rewrite for clarity. These opportunities together with additional practice can help a writer become proficient.

Basic writing serves a crucial need for a growing group of underprepared students who come from schools that fail to provide the kinds of writing practice necessary for college work. Whatever we call it, the practical yet safe environment that offers underprepared students the writing experiences they need is the one to be honored. That environment remains, in our view, the basic writing classroom.

Joseph Harris

NEGOTIATING THE CONTACT ZONE[1]

ABSTRACT: *The author begins this article by charting a brief history of the teaching of basic writing, suggesting that work in the field has been shaped by three overarching metaphors of growth, initiation, and conflict. He then argues that recent views of the basic writing classroom as a site of struggle, as what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "contact zone," have failed to offer a compelling view of public discourse as a forum not only for expressing but negotiating cultural and political differences.*

> What I want less is multiculturalism, which suggests the equal right of each group to police its boundaries, than a polyglot, cosmopolitan culture in which boundaries break down and individuals are free to reinvent themselves, not just affirm what they've inherited.
>
> —Ellen Willis
> "Sex, Hope, and Madonna" (xxxii)

This article stems from a paper that I wrote several years ago and that went nowhere at the time—that was in fact rejected for publication, and I now think quite justly so, by reviewers for the *Journal of Basic Writing*. That paper was called "Growth,

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Joseph Harris directs the composition program at the University of Pittsburgh, where he also teaches courses in writing, literature, and popular culture. His articles on teaching have appeared in CCC, College English, *and the* Journal of Advanced Composition; *and Allyn & Bacon has recently published the textbook,* Media Journal: Reading and Writing about Popular Culture, *that he coauthored with Jay Rosen. Harris also is the editor of* CCC: College Composition and Communication.

Initiation, and Struggle: Three Metaphors for Basic Writing," and in it I tried to delineate three stages of thinking about the teaching of composition—the first centering on metaphors of individual growth, the second on metaphors of initiation into academic discourse communities, and a third and evolving view emphasizing the need for students to name, confront, and struggle with a whole range of discourses of which they are part (home, school, work, religion, the media, and so on). The problem with my argument, as the readers for *JBW* were quick enough to point out, was that I treated my three central terms quite differently. While I offered a strenuous critique of the metaphors of growth and initiation, I glamorized notions of struggle and conflict, talking about them as though they were somehow the final answer to the difficulties of teaching writing. For a long while I didn't know how to respond to this criticism. It seemed fair; I just wasn't sure of how to gain a critical edge on a view of teaching that I found exciting and was only then beginning to formulate. So the paper sat there. In the meantime, quite a number of people have begun to talk about things like contact zones and conflict and struggle—enough to make the terms seem a little more accessible to critique. And so I'd like to pick up here where I left off in that paper, to point out some of the limits of the new vocabulary we have begun to use in talking about the aims, practices, and politics of teaching writing.

But first let me cover a bit of old ground. I'll do so quickly.[2] I'd argue that most serious approaches to teaching writing in the last twenty years have been framed by the competing metaphors of *growth* and *initiation*. Talk about learning has of course long been suffused by metaphors of growth. The strong effect these metaphors have had on the current teaching of writing in American colleges, though, stems in large part from the work of the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar, where many Americans were introduced to a "growth model" of teaching and learning that centered on the attempts of students to find increasingly rich and complex ways of putting experience into words. Many early studies of basic writing in the 1970s and 80s drew on the metaphor of growth in order to talk about the difficulties faced by basic writers, encouraging teachers to view such students as inexperienced or immature users of language and defining their task as one of helping students develop their nascent skills in writing. A continuum was set up between what inexperienced writers could already do and what they would be asked to do at

a university. Academic discourse was presented not as something different from the sorts of writing and speech students were already familiar with, but as simply a more complex and powerful way of using words. The task set for student writers, then, was not so much to learn something new as to get better at what they could already do, to grow as users of language. The growth model pulled attention away from the forms of academic discourse and towards what students could or could not do with language. It also encouraged teachers to respect and work with the skills students brought to the classroom. Implicit in this view, though, was the notion that many students, and especially less successful or "basic" writers, were somehow stuck in an early stage of language development, their growth as language users stalled. Their writing was seen as "concrete-operational" rather than "formal," or "egocentric" rather than "reader-based," or "dualistic" rather than "relativistic."[3] However it was phrased, such writers ended up at the low end of some scale of conceptual or linguistic development—as children in a world of adult discourse.

Yet this conclusion, pretty much forced by the metaphor of growth, ran counter to what many teachers felt they knew about their students—many of whom were returning to school after years at work, most of whom were voluble and bright in conversation, and almost all of whom seemed at least as adept as their teachers in dealing with the ordinary vicissitudes of life. What sense did it make to call these young adults "egocentric"? What if the trouble they were having with writing at college was less a sign of some general failing in their thought or language than evidence of their unfamiliarity with the workings of a specific sort of (academic) discourse? In a recent *JBW* article, Min-Zhan Lu shows how this tension between the metaphors of growth and initiation ran through the work of Mina Shaughnessy—as can be seen especially in her 1977 *Errors and Expectations*, where Shaughnessy wavers between a respect for the diverse ways with words students bring with them to the university, and an insistence that, once there, they put them aside in order to take on a supposedly neutral and adult language of public transactions" (Shaughnessy 125, Lu 35).

But if she was unable to resolve such conflicts, Shaughnessy did succeed in bringing questions of social context back into a discussion that had long been preoccupied with the thought and language of the writer viewed as an isolated individual, and it was this social bent in her thought that many of her most

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influential followers were to pick up on. In 1978, for instance, Patricia Bizzell invoked Shaughnessy in arguing that what basic writers most needed to learn was the "ethos of academic discourse," the characteristic ways in which university writers represented not only their work but themselves to their readers. From there, her next step was to argue that the academy formed a kind of "discourse community" with its own distinctive ways of using language. If this were so, then the task of teachers was not to help students grow into more complex uses of language but to "initiate" them into the peculiar ways in which texts get read and written at a university—an argument Bizzell was to make throughout the 1980s along with others like Mike Rose, Myra Kogen, and David Bartholomae.[4]

These theorists argued that in coming to the university students confront discourses that draw on and make use of rules, conventions, commonplaces, values, and beliefs that can be quite separate from (and sometimes in conflict with) those they already know or hold. These new forms of speech and writing are not only often more complex and refined than their own, they are *different* from their own. What student writers need to learn, then, is how to *shift* from using one form of discourse to another, which in turn means that many of the issues they face are not only intellectual but political and ethical as well. But if metaphors of growth tended to gloss over such conflicts and differences, metaphors of initiation have often seemed to exaggerate them. It soon became commonplace to argue that one masters a discourse by entering into the community that uses it, by accepting the practices and values of that community as one's own. But this seemed to lead to yet another transmission metaphor for learning in which experts initiate novices into the beliefs and practices of the community. In acquiring a new discourse the student was pictured as moving from one community to another, leaving behind old ways of interpreting in order to take on new forms of organizing experience. Learning was equated with assimilation, acculturation, conversion: You need to get inside to get heard, but to get in you may have to give up much of who you used to be. As Bizzell put it in her 1986 essay on "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College," "Upon entering the academic community, [students are] asked to learn a new dialect and new discourse conventions, but the outcome of such learning is the acquisition of a whole new world view" (297).

And so by the late 1980s, a number of teachers and theorists,

myself included, had started to argue that this is not the case, that the metaphor of initiation—with its split between insiders and outsiders—misrepresents not only the task faced by student writers but the conditions that give rise to much good writing. For both the metaphors of growth and initiation view the student writer as a kind of special case: The first sees her as an adult whose uses of language are mysteriously immature, the second as someone who has found her way into the university and yet somehow remained an outsider to it. But what if students were viewed instead as dramatizing a problem that all of us face—that of finding a place to speak within a discourse that does not seem to ignore or leave behind the person you are outside of it? If this is so, then the job of a student writer is not to leave one discourse in order to enter another, but to take things that are usually kept apart and bring them together, to negotiate the gaps and conflicts between several competing discourses. The goal of courses in writing would thus become less the nurturing of individual student voices, or the building of collaborative learning communities, but the creation of a space where the conflicts between our own discourses, those of the university, and those which our students bring with them to class are made visible.

Such spaces have been named "contact zones" by the theorist and critic Mary Louise Pratt, who in coining the term borrowed from the sociolinguistic notion of a "contact language"—that is, a sort of creole or pidgin that speakers of differing languages develop when forced into communication with one another. In an influential article that she wrote for *Profession 91*, Pratt defines contact zones as "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today" (34), and then puts the term to use in theorizing a teaching practice which seeks not to erase linguistic and cultural differences but to examine them. Her ideas have held strong appeal for many teachers of basic writing, perhaps since our classrooms seem so often a point of contact for various and competing languages and perspectives, and in the last few years a growing number of theorists have cited Pratt in arguing for pedagogies that are open to conflict and controversy.[5]

In her *Profession* article, Pratt draws on her experiences both as the parent of a school-age child and as the teacher of a large introductory course in "Culture, Ideas, Values" at Stanford

University in order to sketch out what a classroom might look like if thought of as contact zone rather than as a unified community. She analyzes moments where teachers fail not only to deal with dissent but even to acknowledge it. For instance, she tells of how when told to write about "a helpful invention" he would like to have for his own use, her fourth-grade son came up with an idea for a vaccine that would inoculate him with answers for stupid homework assignments (like this one, presumably). What did he get in response? "The usual star to indicate the task had been fulfilled in an acceptable way" (38-39). In a similar vein, Pratt tells of a conversation she had with her son when he switched from a traditional to a more progressive school:

> "Well," he said, "they're a lot nicer, and they have a lot less rules. But know *why* they're nicer?" "Why?" I asked. "So you'll obey all the rules they don't have," he replied. (38)

In both cases conflict and difference get dealt with by not being noticed—much as the views, experiences, and writings of minority cultures have been studiously ignored in most American classrooms, even in schools where many students are African American, Asian, Hispanic, or working class. This leads Pratt to call for classrooms where such voices do get heard, even if at the cost of some conflict or confusion—for pedagogical contact zones rather than communities.

This is an appealing idea. Pratt is vague, though, about how one might actually go about making sure such dissenting voices get their say. What she seems to be doing is *importing* difference into her classroom through assigning her students a number of readings from diverse cultures. Students are thus brought "in contact" with writings from various cultures, but Pratt never explains the kinds of talk about these texts that occur among and across the various groupings *of students* that make up the class. That is, at no point does Pratt speak of how she tries to get students to articulate or negotiate the differences they perceive among themselves. How, for instance, might white students speak with black classmates about a text written by an African author? What forms of evasion, overpoliteness, resistance, hostility, or boredom might be expected to interfere with their talk? And how might these be lessened or acknowledged so something more like conversation and less like a simple trading of positions can take place? Or what happens when a student finds that—due to the accidents of race or class or

gender—he or she has somehow become the "representative" of a text (and by implication, culture) that the class is reading? In what ways is this student free to criticize or resist as well as to celebrate or identify with the claims that the text may be making? Or, conversely, how do students who are not members of the same culture as the author of a text gain the authority to speak critically about it?

Pratt has little to say about such questions. Part of the problem no doubt has to do with the logistics of teaching a large lecture course. But I think her silence about practical issues in teaching also points to a real difficulty with how she has conceptualized the idea of a contact zone. Pratt's phrasings evoke images of war and oppression, of "grappling and clashing" in contexts of "colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths." And yet many students whom I have asked to read and write about Pratt's article have chosen instead to view the contact zone as a kind of multicultural bazaar, where they are not so much brought into conflict with opposing views as placed in a kind of harmless connection with a series of exotic others. While I think this is a misreading of Pratt, it is one encouraged by her examples, which tend to be either innocuous or esoteric—a clever dodge on a homework assignment, an odd Peruvian text (more on this later). Taken either way, as hinting at conflict or at connection, what is missing from such descriptions of the contact zone is a sense of how competing perspectives can be made to intersect with and inform each other. The very metaphor of *contact* suggests a kind of superficiality: The image is one of cultures banging or sliding or bouncing off each other. Pratt offers little sense of how more tolerant or cosmopolitan cultures might be created out of the collisions of such local groupings, or of how (or why) individuals might decide to change or revise their own positions (rather than simply to defend them) when brought into contact with differing views.

So far as I can determine, contact languages do not often seem to hold the sort of symbolic or personal value for their users that native languages do; they are rather born out of expediency, as a way of getting by. It is thus a little hard to see who (except perhaps for a teacher) would have much at stake in preserving the contact zone, since it is not a space to which anyone owes much allegiance. And, indeed, in her descriptions of her own teaching, Pratt quickly retreats to talk about the importance of what she calls "safe houses," which she describes as places for "healing and mutual recognition... in which

to construct shared understandings, knowledges, claims on the world" (40). Pratt thus fails to do away with the idea of a unified and utopian community; she simply makes it smaller, reduces it to the level of an affinity group. And so while her aim is to offer a view of intellectual life in which difference and controversy figure more strongly than in descriptions of seemingly homogenous discourse communities, she is left in the end with no real answer to the question of how one constructs a public space in which the members of various "safe houses" or affinity groups are brought into negotiation (not just conflict or contact) with other competing views and factions. Or, to put the question in terms of classroom practice, Pratt never makes it clear how a teacher might help students move between the exhilaration and danger of contact zones and the nurturance of safe houses.

Much of this issue was recently the subject of intense debate in the pages of *College English*, sparked by Min-Zhan Lu's 1992 piece on "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" Lu argues that in seeking to make their classrooms more comfortable and less threatening, many basic writing teachers end up disallowing the very expression of conflict and difference that could lend real interest to the writings of their students. Such teachers thus enforce a kind of stylistic and intellectual blandness by in effect making sure that students never get to draw on their strengths as writers— since doing so would surface the very sort of conflicts in culture, language, and politics that many teachers hope to contain and assuage. Lu's piece attracted a number of vehement responses which appeared in a "Symposium on Basic Writing" the following year in *College English*. Her critics argued variously that she romanticized the underclass, didn't work with "real" basic writers, was too hard on her students, and was intent on imposing her own political program upon them. Lu replied that she had been misunderstood, and that it was not she but her respondents who were acting as if they had sure knowledge of what the needs, abilities, and concerns of basic writers were. And thus it was they, not she, who were verging on intellectual and political dogmatism.

Basically, I agree with Lu on all counts. But I found myself troubled by the form the debate had taken, which reminded me of several difficult and polarizing arguments that had recently occurred in the department where I work over issues in personnel and required course offerings. For while there was plenty of

conflict and struggle in these arguments, very little if any of it seemed to result in a useful negotiation of views or perspectives. Instead the exchanges quickly devolved into a kind of position-taking, as the competing factions on both sides of the issue soon retreated back to and defended the very arguments they had entered the debate with. As it happens, I was on the losing side of one of those departmental arguments and on the winning side of the other, and I can say that I felt equally miserable after both. For neither argument produced anything but a victory or a loss; no refinement of ideas, no negotiation of perspectives, no real surprises (at least of an intellectual sort) came out of either. And I felt much the same way reading the arguments in *College English*: I knew what side I was on, but that was pretty much it; I didn't feel as though I had learned much from the encounter. Such experiences have helped to convince me that there is something missing from a view of teaching that suggests that we simply need to bring people out of their various "safe houses" and into a "contact zone"—and that is a sense of how to make such a meeting of differences less like a battle and more like a negotiation. We need, that is, to learn not only how to articulate our differences but how to bring them into useful relation with each other.

Pratt tends to downplay the importance of such negotiation and to romanticize the expression of dissent. "What is the place of unsolicited oppositional discourse" in the classroom? (39), she asks, but her few examples of resistance are all suspiciously sympathetic. Her son is clearly a smart and likeable kid, and we appreciate his parodies of schooling even if his actual teachers do not. And the only other example Pratt offers of a writer in the contact zone is rather exotic: Guaman Poma, a seventeenth-century Peruvian cleric who wrote a long and slightly mad letter to the King of Spain, explaining and defending his home culture to its new colonial ruler. Pratt praises Poma for his blurring of western and indigenous discourses, dominant and oppositional ideologies, but his writing could just as readily be seen as a negative example of two cultures brought into contact but not meaningful interaction—since the letter Poma wrote quite literally made nothing happen: The King of Spain never read it and it lay unnoticed in an Amsterdam archive for the next three centuries. Tellingly, much of the current appeal of Poma's text has to do with how it voices the very sort of "opposition" to the status quo that, as liberal academics, we now most tend to value. Poma's letter is a

hypererudite version of the sort of writing we wish we *would* get from students but rarely do. In particular, Poma says just the right sort of thing for advocates (like both Pratt and myself) of a more culturally diverse reading list for undergraduates in the current debate over the canon. His unsolicited oppositional discourse has made it to *our* mailboxes if not to the King of Spain's. We have read it and we agree.

But what about discourse we don't agree with? What about students or writings that oppose our own views or authority? The "Culture, Ideas, Values" course that Pratt taught was the focus of a highly publicized debate over political correctness" at Stanford a few years ago.[6] While I don't side with its detractors, I do think we have to see how the inability of Pratt (and many others) to articulate how the competing views of students in their courses are acknowledged, criticized, and negotiated points to a legitimate worry about the micropolitics of teaching—about whose voices get heard in what classrooms and why. This is not a concern that can be answered with new theories or new reading lists; it calls instead for attention to the details of classroom work, to how teachers set up and respond to what students have to say.

And this is precisely where teachers of writing can powerfully extend and revise the agenda of recent cultural criticism. For instance, in his recent "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone," Richard E. Miller contrasts two differing and actual forms of response to what was, in both cases, truly unsolicited and unwanted discourse. In the first instance, the chairman of a large corporation responded to a racist illustration in a company magazine by firing several of the people involved with its production and writing a letter to his employees calling the cartoon a "deplorable mistake" and urging them to "tear that page out and throw it in the trash where it belongs" (389-90). In the second case, an openly gay teacher responded to a homophobic student narrative by treating it as a work of fiction and commenting on its effectiveness as a story—a strategy which, while in some ways dodging the politics of the piece, did not totally avoid or dismiss its troubling content and also kept student and teacher on good working terms. Miller notes that when this teaching situation was discussed at a recent meeting of CCCC, most of the teachers present argued for a response much closer to that of the corporate chairman's—namely, "that the student be removed from the classroom and turned over either to a professional counselor or to the police" (392), while

others insisted on ignoring the content of the piece altogether and commenting on its formal surface features alone. Though Miller admits that the teacher's decision to treat the essay as fiction was in many ways a problematic one, he argues that:

> [The chairman] did not address the roots of the problem that produced the offensive cartoon; he merely tried to make it more difficult for another "deplorable mistake" of this kind to further tarnish the image of multicultural harmony the company has been at such pains to construct. [The teacher], on the other hand, achieved the kind of partial, imperfect, negotiated, microvictory available to those who work in the contact zone when he found a way to respond to his student's essay that... kept the student in his course. (407)

The lesson to be learned here, then, is not that treating troubling student writings as fiction is always or even usually a good idea, but that if we hope to get students to rethink (rather than merely repress) what strike us as disturbing positions—if we want, that is, to work with students who voice beliefs that are not so much "oppositional" as they are simply opposed to our own—then we need first to find ways of keeping them an active part of the conversation of the class. Miller deepens the idea of the contact zone by imagining it not as a space which one can form simply through bringing differing groups and views together, but as a forum which one can only keep going through a constant series of local negotiations, interventions, and compromises. The contact zone thus becomes something more like a process or event than a physical space—and it thus needs to be theorized, as Miller does, as a local and shifting series of interactions among perspectives and individuals.

A similar interest in how differences get negotiated (or not) in varying situations by particular teachers and students now characterizes some of the best work being done in composition. Tom Fox, for instance, has explored how African-American students can learn to use writing not only to enter into the university but also (and at the same time) to criticize some of its characteristic values ("Repositioning"). Similarly, Geoff Chase and Bruce Herzberg have described writing courses that have helped students from comfortable backgrounds (white, suburban, upper-middle-class) take on a much more critical stance towards mainstream American culture than might have been expected while, conversely, Cy Knoblauch and James Berlin

have noted how students can often resist or tune out teachers who seem to push a particular political line too openly or aggressively. And Bruce Horner and Min-Zhan Lu ("Professing") have both written on ways of teaching students to edit their writing that problematize easy distinctions between "error" and "style," and thus point to very specific and local ways in which a writer's phrasings can be linked to a set of political choices and affiliations. Such work does more than take the concerns of recent cultural criticism with conflict and diversity and apply them to the classroom. It redefines those concerns by looking for signs of difference not only in the revered texts of a culture (whether these are seen as authored by Guaman Poma or William Shakespeare, Alice Walker or Saul Bellow, Emily Dickinson or Janet Jackson) but also in the views and writings of ordinary people. Rather than representing life in the contact zone through a set of ideal texts or suggestive yet brief classroom anecdotes, such work populates it with the differing and sometimes disturbing writings of actual students. The contact zone thus becomes less of a neomarxist utopia and more of a description of what we now often actually confront in our classrooms: a wrangle of competing interests and views. And the goals of pedagogies of the contact zone, of conflict, become not the forcing of a certain "multicultural" agenda through an assigned set of readings or lectures but the creating of a forum where students themselves can articulate (and thus perhaps also become more responsive to) differences among themselves.

Still I worry about the view of intellectual life that the idea of the contact zone seems to promote. One of the central aims of public education in America—at least when viewed from a certain liberal or Deweyite perspective—is that of working towards the forming of a nation state that is not tied to any single ethnicity, of helping to create a public culture open to all individuals regardless of race, gender, or social rank. To invoke this sort of democratic culture is *not* to call for a return to a set of shared and communal values; rather, it is to call for a forum in which issues and concerns that go *beyond* the borders of particular communities or interest groups can be worked through collectively, debated, negotiated. It is to call for a sort of public discourse, that is, that dialogue about contact zones and safe houses often seems to work against. Look, for instance, at this brief glimpse Pratt offers us of her Stanford course:

> All the students in the class had the experience, for
> example, of hearing *their culture* discussed and objecti-

fied in ways that horrified them; all the students saw *their roots* traced back to legacies of both glory and shame; all the students experienced face-to-face the ignorance and incomprehension, and occasionally the hostility, of others. (39, my italics)

"Their culture" and "their roots" subjected to the uncomprehending gaze of "others." There is no hint here that, despite the differences in their backgrounds, these students might also hold some experiences in common as members of contemporary American culture, or even that they might share a certain set of concerns and issues as U.S. citizens. Instead we are offered an image of a balkanized classroom: a collection of different "cultures" with separate "roots" clustered in their various "safe houses." Who could blame students in such a class if they chose not to venture into the "contact zone" that sprawls dangerously beyond? What reason, beyond the thrill of the exotic, have they been offered for doing so? Why should they care about what goes on in the contact zone if they already have their safe houses to live in?

I don't mean in any way to suggest that we should step back from a valuing of difference or a willingness to work through the conflicts that may result from doing so. But I am growing less inclined to valorize notions of conflict or struggle in and of themselves. I want instead to argue for a more expansive view of intellectual life than I now think theories of the contact zone have to offer—one that admits to the ways in which we are positioned by gender, race, and class, but that also holds out the hope of a more fluid and open culture in which we can *choose* the positions we want to speak from and for. To work as teachers towards such a culture, we need to move beyond thinking in terms of fixed affinities or positions and the possible conflicts between them. We instead need to imagine a different sort of social space where people have *reason* to come into contact with each other because they have claims and interests that extend beyond the borders of their own safe houses, neighborhoods, disciplines, or communities. We need to find ways of urging writers not simply to defend the cultures into which they were born but to imagine new public spheres which they would like to have a hand in making.

Notes

[1] I have had the opportunity to present various versions of this article at a number of conferences—CCCC, the National

Conference on Basic Writing, Penn State—and thus owe thanks to the many colleagues who have talked with me about these issues. But I would particularly like to thank Tom Fox, Richard Miller, and Phil Smith for the advice they offered me in refining this piece for publication.

[2]I have criticized each of these metaphors at some length in "After Dartmouth: Growth and Conflict in English" and "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing."

[3]These terms come from three pioneering works on basic writing: Lunsford's "Content of Basic Writers' Essays," Flower's "Revising Writer-Based Prose," and Hays' "Development of Discursive Maturity in College Writers."

[4]See Bizzell's "College Composition" and "What Happens," Rose's "Remedial Writing" and "Language of Exclusion," Kogen's "Conventions," and Bartholomae's "Inventing."

[5]See Lu's "Conflict and Struggle," Fox's "Basic Writing as Cultural Conflict," Bartholomae's "Tidy House," and Bizzell's "Contact Zone."

[6]Pratt herself offers an account of this debate in "Humanities for the Future."

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<div align="right">Lee Odell</div>

BASIC WRITING IN CONTEXT: RETHINKING ACADEMIC LITERACY

ABSTRACT: *A number of writers have made it clear that we need to rethink the basic writing course. What may not be so clear is that we also need to rethink the view of literacy on which the course is often based. This article questions certain aspects of academic literacy and suggests ways we might reform writing instructions at all levels by looking at literate practices outside the academy.*

From any number of sources, we hear the call to rethink, to reform the basic writing course. The need for this reform is clear. Jerrie Cobb Scott reminds us of the widely shared concern that the course often reflects a "deficit pedagogy," a set of teaching practices based on the notion that students in basic writing classes possess relatively few rhetorical or communicative skills. This course and pedagogy often become, as Peter Dow Adams points out, a self-fulfilling prophecy: teachers expect relatively little of basic writers, and they live up to—or down to—those expectations. Consequently, as David Bartholomae tells us, those who teach basic writers may find they have "once again produced the 'other' who is the incom-

Lee Odell is professor of composition at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He is currently working on programs to bring nonacademic literacy into all levels of education, kindergarten through graduate study. His publications include Evaluating Writing, *with Charles Cooper (NCTE, 1977);* Writing in Non-Academic Settings, *with Dixie Goswami (Guilford, 1985); and* Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing *(Southern Illinois UP, 1993).*

plete version of ourselves, confirming existing patterns of power and authority, reproducing hierarchies we had meant to question and overthrow way back then in the 1970's" (18).

Clearly, then, it is important to get away from a deficit pedagogy, redesigning the course so that it builds on students' capacity for making inferences (Wiener) and develops their capacity for higher-order thinking (Brown). But what would such a course look like? And how would it relate to other courses—the public school courses that precede it and the advanced undergraduate or graduate courses that might follow it?

One answer to these questions is implicit in a trend Adams describes: increasingly, instructional practice in basic writing courses is moving "in one direction: toward that of the freshman composition course" (24). In one respect, this trend makes great sense; if students are to develop as writers, they have to do what writers do—drafting, learning from peers, revising— rather than work on decontextualized exercises. But in another respect, this trend is problematic: it assumes that current literacy practices of freshman composition and of the larger academy should be taken as a given, that they comprise a goal toward which students should be moving. My argument, however, is that, at all levels of our educational system, these academic literacy practices are, at best, questionable and, at worst, harmful. Basic writing needs rethinking, but no more so than does writing instruction for kindergarten children or graduate students. What we need to do is reexamine our assumptions about what students are capable of and about what it means to be a literate citizen of the twenty-first-century "information society." This reexamination leads to a powerful critique of customary academic practice and suggests ways we might go about transforming our teaching.

Understanding Students' Capabilities

To illustrate why we need to examine assumptions about what students can do, here are four assignments, four rhetorical tasks I have seen students carry out successfully in the last year or so:

1. Assess and revise a 100-page document the Chamber of Commerce provides to citizens who want to volunteer for various programs in the local school.

2. Prepare a fact sheet for low-income people to use when looking for a nursing home for elderly relatives.

3. Prepare a brochure for a local library; explain resources and clearly establish rules while creating a friendly image for the library.

4. Plan and carry out a conference for approximately 2000 people; take care of everything from writing a proposal to hold the conference, to negotiating fees for speakers, to preparing packets to give to people when they register.

One of these assignments was done in a twelfth-grade class composed of "disadvantaged" inner-city students, most of whom, if they go to college at all, will likely be assigned to a basic writing course. The other assignments come from a third grade classroom, an upper-level university writing course, and a graduate course in technical communication.

When I have shown this list of assignments in workshops, people are almost never able to figure out which tasks were done at which grade level. Indeed, it's not unusual for people to suggest that none of these tasks is within the capability of the third or twelfth graders. Only two workshop participants have ever correctly identified the task done by third graders, and one of these participants justified his identification in a way that said as much about his view of me as about his view of students' capabilities. He reasoned that I intended for people to be surprised to learn which students did which task, and he was certain that planning and carrying out the conference was the literacy task that lay farthest beyond the reach of third graders. Yet it was not. Their "Young Authors Conference," which drew approximately 2000 students and parents, required that the third graders: analyze the work of professional authors and determine which ones would be most attractive to their audience of parents and elementary school children; write letters of invitation to those authors; negotiate with publishers regarding authors' speaking fees; write proposals that would win administrative support for the conference; write introductions for featured speakers; design the packet of materials participants would receive when they registered for the conference; and so on. These, of course, are demanding tasks for adults; consequently, people routinely assume that they are well beyond what we might reasonably expect of third graders.

Similarly, workshop participants rarely guess that it was the "disadvantaged" high school students, those prospective enrollees in a basic writing class, who revised the 100-page Chamber of Commerce handbook. By the most charitable estimation,

the original handbook was a mess. Information was incomplete, and the entire document was so badly organized that prospective volunteers could not possibly figure out what they might volunteer for, how they could go about volunteering, or even why they might want to do so. The students had to rethink the document, trying to make it possible for readers to find the information they might be interested in and discovering the information that would fill in the substantial gaps in the original document. In short, they had to do the same things that faculty at my school have to teach graduate-level technical writers to do. And, in so doing, they produced the document that the school district currently provides to prospective volunteers.

Rethinking Literacy

The third graders' and the high school students' success with their assignments challenge routine assumptions about what students of different age and ability levels can do. These assignments combined with the library brochure and the fact sheet (both of which I will discuss later), also challenge some assumptions about what it means to be literate in our society.

Routinely, people equate literacy with the ability to encode and decode, the ability to get the point or "main idea" of a reading passage or to write a text that observes accepted conventions of usage, syntax, organization, and idea development. But this view of literacy is a gross oversimplification, one that bears little resemblance to the complexity of literacy practices required in our society. This view of literacy represents, to borrow Alton Becker's term, a "graphocentrism" that ignores ways in which visual aspects of a text contribute to the text's message. Such graphocentrism seems unreasonable not only in light of Becker's work but also because of recent theory and research in technical communication. This theory and research demonstrates how the communicative power of a text comes not just from its words but from visual elements—its pictures and graphs, for example, and also from the text's arrangement on a page, its use of headings and subheadings, even the style and color of typography. These visual elements can make it easier for readers to locate the information they need, see relationships between sentences, remember information, or understand the organization of a text. (Thomas R. Williams and Elizabeth Keyes provide useful surveys of work in this area.)

Consider, for example, the library brochure that was com-

posed—I started to say *written*, but that word is not exactly accurate—by a graduate student in technical communication, who found herself limited to a single sheet of paper which would take the form of a trifold brochure. This format would allow her to fill each side of the sheet with three columns of information, each column approximately 2½ inches wide. She knew that library patrons would be unlikely to read the entire pamphlet from beginning to end; they were most likely to use it to find information about specific questions or concerns. Consequently, she had to work with headings, subheadings, and white space to make it possible for readers to locate information about specific topics. And these visual constraints helped shape the substance of what she said in the pamphlet.

This need to work with visual as well as written information introduced an unusual level of complexity to the work of this student and all the others I have mentioned. This complexity was only increased by a further assumption: the most engaging literacy practices flourish in—perhaps even require—a climate of uncertainty. In all of the assignments I've been talking about, students knew they were dealing with ill-defined problems. They knew there was no one authoritative source they could turn to in order to find out exactly what they were to say or how they were to say it. Further, their job was not one of satisfying a single reader but of meeting the needs of a wide range of readers, some of whom might be more knowledgeable than the students but many of whom would know far less and would, therefore, be depending upon the students' work in order to understand something they currently did not understand or do something they currently did not know how to do. Students had to figure out for themselves how they might best balance the diverging needs of these different audiences. Students could turn to their teachers for advice, but the authority of that advice was tempered since students knew that their teachers themselves were trying to figure out what the assignment demanded.

This was certainly the case with the nursing home "fact sheet" composed by the university juniors and seniors. At least initially, these students did not appreciate the wide range of readers the fact sheet would have to accommodate. Only after they got well into the project did they realize that their document would address a variety of audiences, ranging from low-income citizens who could be easily overwhelmed by complicated legal documents to attorneys who specialized in this area of the law. Moreover, neither the students nor their teacher

knew exactly what such a fact sheet would look like or what they would have to do in order to compose one. Nor did they understand the complexity of finding and making sense of the information that would eventually go into the fact sheet. Ultimately, they had to read existing laws for licensing nursing homes; try to interpret those laws by talking with lawyers and state officials; assess the reliability of the interpretation provided by a given lawyer or official; and talk with low-income people who might be eligible for the program in order to find out what their questions and misapprehensions might be.

Critiquing Academic Literacy

Some of the assumptions I've been discussing will sound very familiar. Increasingly, our profession has realized the importance of having students write to audiences other than their teachers and of addressing questions that do not allow formulaic, pat answers. But when we examine the literacy practices that are required outside school, we sometimes find literacy practices that are so complex, so challenging that they constitute a powerful critique of the work that often goes on in the academy.

For one thing, the literacy practices that flourish outside school make us realize just how graphocentric academic literacy is—witness the appearance of this essay. But relatively few people write—or actually read—academic essays. Instead, their literacy practices center around things like proposals, instructions, brochures, forms, oral presentations, even multimedia presentations. Granted, all of these practices involve composing with language and comprehending the messages other people convey through language. But they also depend heavily on visual information to help make the language comprehensible and effective. With the increasing availability of computers, desk-top publishing, video, and multimedia, it seems fair to say that we are almost at a point where people in our society will not be considered literate if all they can do is encode and decode written language.

Further, the literacy practices people engage in outside school often show us just how passive we allow—invite? require?—our students to be when they read. For example, Dixie Goswami, Doris Quick, and I (1983) once spent a good bit of time interviewing people who were just two or three years out of college, trying to find out about their reading and writing practices and comparing what they were doing with what students were do-

ing on campus. In one case, we talked with recent college graduates who were employed by a state legislature to write "bill memos." analvses of legislation that was to come before the state house of representatives. As we talked with them, it became apparent that their reading of this legislation was very different from what we found going on in classrooms.

When they "read" pending legislation, these young professionals tended to ask the same questions over and over:

Who wrote this text?

Why did they write it? What were they trying to accomplish?

How does this text relate to others that are currently being discussed? Is it more adequate or less adequate?

Is it likely that this text will accomplish what the writer intends?

Is it going to have some unexpected, perhaps undesired consequences?

What individuals or groups have an interest in this subject? How will they react to it?

In short, when these people read texts associated with their jobs, they were unwilling to take a text at face value; instead, they analyzed, criticized, and drew their own conclusions as to the meaning of a given text. Further, they asked these questions not only of themselves, but also of coworkers, some of whom gave differing answers. In these respects, their reading was radically different from what we found in the work of a group of undergraduate political science majors, many of whom intended to work in state or federal government when they graduated from college. By and large the undergraduates seemed to approach the texts they were reading with just two questions:

What is this text saying?

How can I use what the text is saying in order to support my point (or to figure out what my point is)?

The undergraduates never talked about the context surrounding the texts they were reading—never speculated about the agendas, biases, or purposes of the writer; never tried to locate these texts in relation to other texts; never thought about the possible consquences of what was being said in these texts. They were very uncritical, unanalytical, and passive in their reading.

Is this a fair comparison? Are these students representative

of students at large? Maybe, maybe not. But what Dixie Goswami, Doris Quick, and I saw in the reading and writing of students that we studied parallels more recent work by Cheryl Geisler and by Christina Haas and Linda Flower. Geisler points out that there is a long tradition of seeing texts as autonomous objects that can be understood "without independent knowledge of who was speaking, with what intention, and for what purpose" (5). From this perspective, reading entails recognizing the meaning that exists "in the text" rather than constructing meaning by locating a particular text in a larger context of human actions and intentions. This sort of reading was characteristic of the work of college freshmen that Haas and Flower studied. For these freshmen, reading was simply a matter of "getting information from the text" (175). By contrast, more experienced readers were much more likely to use "rhetorical" reading strategies, "constructing a rhetorical situation for the text, trying to account for [an] author's purpose, context, and effect on the audience" (176). This rhetorical reading enabled the more experienced readers to assess a writer's claims and construct their own meaning from a text rather than expect to find meaning located in a text. In light of all this work, I propose this hypothesis: many academic literacy practices often allow—even invite—students to read passively, trying to extract meaning from a text rather than construct it. The reading and writing students do outside school often requires them to read more assertively and more critically.

Furthermore, the writing that students do outside school can be more complex, more rhetorically challenging, more in line with the best thinking in our profession than is the writing they sometimes do for their classes. For example, here's a situation described to me by a junior-level manager in a bakery that has plants in several states. In addition to the letters, memos, and reports he routinely wrote, he had been asked to write a recommendation/report that would eventually go to a vice president of the firm, the eldest son of the family who owns the bakery. This vice president had come up with a plan that would require several thousand employees to work on Thanksgiving day. This had all the makings of a real nightmare: employees had never before had to work on Thanksgiving day; employee morale was already bad because of recent layoffs; the union was certain to be unhappy. The junior-level manager had been asked by his supervisor (who would ultimately report to his supervisor) to assess the plan and write a recommendation as to whether

it should be implemented.

Consider the basic rhetorical problem this manager faced: the vice president didn't want to hear that his proposal was not a good one. But he also didn't want trouble with the union or a loss of productivity that could come if employee morale got any worse. There was thus no way the manager could just tell the reader what he wanted to hear. So how was the manager to frame his analysis so that he could keep his job and still make it possible for the president to hear something he didn't want to hear? What kinds of arguments were most likely to be consistent with the vice president's values? What sort of language would let him convey the severity of the situation without seeming alarmist or making the vice president look foolish?

It would be nice to think that students are routinely grappling with ill-defined problems and trying to articulate their ideas to audiences who actually expect to be informed (persuaded, moved, assisted) by students' work. But practical experience suggests that students are typically given assignments where there is a single audience (the teacher) that already knows what constitues an acceptable response. One brief example appears in a professor's comment I once saw on a student paper: "I can almost hear myself talking here. It's nice to know someone was listening. A+" A more complicated example comes from a freshman course at my school, a course in which instructors wanted students to reflect upon the ways their educational experiences may have limited their development as writers and thinkers. Students in this course received the following assignment: "Write an essay about ways in which your education has arbitrarily restricted the choices you may make as a student."

In the context of this specific course, there was relatively little uncertainty in this assignment. There was no question about who the audience was or what the audience wanted to hear. Nor was there much question about how students were to develop their ideas; students were told to refer to their own experiences in school and were encouraged to refer to course readings that talked about ways in which education arbitrarily limited students. In their effort to liberate students from the arbitrary constraints of their education, these instructors arbitrarily constrained students to develop a thesis that the instructors had already determined to be, in effect, the "right answer." To the best of my knowledge, none of the students felt free to use this essay assignment as a prime example of the practice

their instructors wanted to criticize. Granted, these may be extreme or isolated cases. But if they are, why do students keep asking us while they are working on their assignments (even assignments for which they have become far more knowledgeable about a particular subject than we are), "Am I on the right track?" "Is this what you want?" They seem to have gotten the notion that what their audience wants is relatively simple and straightforward and that there is someone—us—who can tell them whether they are making correct choices of language, organization, and content. They often assume that there is a single, correct solution to a conceptual or rhetorical problem and that we, if we're at all competent, should know what that solution is, although we may withhold it simply to "make them think."

Where did they ever get such an idea? Maybe the idea is partly related to what William Perry has referred to as their level of intellectual development. Perhaps they are still at a stage where they assume that important questions can have a single, correct answer and that some authoritative source knows what that answer is. But I don't completely buy that explanation. Even very young students can learn to make complex rhetorical judgments. Unfortunately, they can also learn that such judgments are not valued by the academy. By the time they begin postsecondary education, students seem to have learned this all too well. And much of their experience in college may do little to change their point of view.

Rethinking Teaching

So what do we do? How do we restructure our courses so that students begin to develop the kinds of expertise that will allow them to be literate citizens of twenty-first-century society? We can begin by looking outside our classrooms, trying to understand the range of nonacademic literacy practices people engage in for their personal needs (Gere), for their jobs (Agnew; Odell and Goswami), or for community organizations (Ball). Then we can incorporate the best of these practices into the assignments students do for our courses.

One relatively simple way to do this is to work with nontraditional examples of literate practice, introducing these examples to students in ways that help them become experts. For instance, the high school students who revised the Chamber of Commerce document also engage in other kinds of literacy practices, both oral and written: making recommendations, writing

instructions, preparing reports, creating brochures. A key part of each of these efforts is examining what appear to be effective examples that are currently in use. Students understand that their work is not to be a slavish imitation of these models; rather, they look closely at them, asking such questions as: What's helping this document succeed? What are the weak spots, the things that bother me? How clearly does this document treat its subject? How effectively? How honestly?

Out of these discussions there begins to emerge some consensus about how they might proceed with the document they hope to create. As we know, the composing process rarely proceeds in a neat linear fashion. Consensus emerges, falls apart, re-forms; sometimes what seemed to be a model document serves principally to show students what they do not want to do. But in all cases, students' sense of what constitutes effective, literate work comes not from a textbook but rather from careful reflection on what people in our society seem to need to do if they are to make sense of and communicate facts, feelings, experiences, ideas.

All this reflection, of course, presupposes two further points: that students are being assigned to compose the same types of documents (proposals, brochures, instructions, fact sheets) they have been analyzing; and that these documents will actually be read and used in some context outside the classroom and for some purpose other than simply assessing students' writing ability.

One relatively easy, safe way to do this is to set up an assignment, late in the semester, in which students must revise a badly written document that is used in the campus community (i. e., outside our class), a document that other students, for whatever purpose, need to understand. (By the end of the semester, students should know that "badly written" means a document that is unorganized and badly thought out as well as marred by inept usage and sentence structure.) In a recent semester, my students found a range of such documents. One student who worked part-time in Student Health Services found an informational brochure that was almost impossible for anyone other than a doctor to understand; another brought in a campus user's manual for a recently installed computer system; another concentrated on a syllabus for a psychology course that was needlessly inaccessible and confusing. In all these cases, students had to analyze the document in terms of concepts we had studied. Then they had to revise the document and—most

important—test their revision with a reader who would read the document not as part of a class exercise but in an effort to accomplish some important purpose—using the computer system, for example, or understanding a particular health risk. And then, of course, students had to revise the document in light of what they learned by testing it, justifying their choices of language and content not by my expectations as a writing teacher but by the needs of an authentic reader of the document.

The preceding example represents my own rather timid first effort at incorporating community-based writing into my teaching of an undergraduate writing course. Other people, however, are more venturesome. For example, Gary Braudaway, the English teacher whose inner-city students revised the Chamber of Commerce manual menttoned earlier, makes a practice of having his students work directly with business and community organizations, producing materials that these organizations need to have written or revised to get on with their daily business. In this, Braudaway's inner-city students followed an educational practice employed not only in other grade levels in Fort Worth, but in approximately half of the freshman English courses at Stanford University, and in Dixie Goswami's Writing for the Community program at Clemson University. It was Goswami's students who spent an entire semester writing (and rewriting) the health fact sheet for low-income citizens.

On the strength of all this experience, my own school is developing a writing internship program. Graduate students in communication work for a semester as interns in local organizations ranging from Planned Parenthood to a local homeless shelter to a manufacturing plant of a multitnational corporation. The principal requirements for this course are that (1) students must spend 6-8 hours per week on site in a local nonacademic organization, (2) they must produce documents that their supervisors in these organizations can actually use, (3) they must test these documents with the intended readers and use what they learn in revising the documents, and (4) they must assess the final documents they produce, justifying choices of language, content, and organization in terms of their intended audience and in terms of the organizational "culture" in which they write.

After the last two semesters of work on this internship program, it's easy to see both the strengths and the weaknesses of the sort of instruction I've been proposing. Some of the writing

done outside school is routine, almost formulaic. And some of it raises ethical problems: who would want to train students to become effective spokespersons for, say, the tobacco industry? Yet we also know that a lot of composing goes on outside school (see, for example, Anderson or Gere) and that, as Eleanor Agnew has pointed out, even apparently routine work can be quite challenging. At its best, at its most complex and most demanding, this work gives us a way to rethink the definition of literacy underlying instruction at all levels of education. Such a definition lets us raise the stakes for all our students, expecting them to do more complicated, more interesting, more profound work, whether they are basic writers, elementary school students, or graduate students. If we want to base our instruction on a self-fulfilling prophecy, that doesn't sound like such a bad one to start with.

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J. Milton Clark
Carol Peterson Haviland

LANGUAGE AND AUTHORITY: SHIFTING THE PRIVILEGE

ABSTRACT: *Although most basic writing faculty select varied and representative reading and writing topics that draw on the richness of their students' linguistic diversity, they usually conduct classes in which collaboration moves but one way. Most class texts merely nod pleasantly at linguistic diversity rather than embrace it, tolerating rather than engaging difference. The authors describe an assignment that uses Spanish, Chinese, and French texts in addition to the customary English texts, which allows class members to share students' languages, embrace diversity, and shift privilege. They propose that this move foregrounds oppositional discourse for both students and faculty, creating classrooms in which "right thinking is not the possession of one and merely the aspiration of others."*

Immersed in postmodern literary and cultural theory and committed to educational openness and equity, most basic writing faculty are far less elitist than some of their colleagues in other literature and composition fields. These basic writing faculty members tend to select more varied, representative, and relevant reading and writing topics, to incorporate the richness of their students' experiences, and to be quite open to linguistic

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J. Milton Clark and Carol Peterson Haviland are English Department faculty members at California State University, San Bernardino. Dr. Clark teaches composition and American literature. His current interests involve the integration of computers into the fields of composition and literature instruction and large-scale writing assessment programs. Dr. Haviland directs the Writing Center, is active in the campus writing-across-the-curriculum project, and teaches in the graduate program in rhetoric and composition. Her particular interests are in the intersections of theory, research, and pedagogy, and she is currently coediting a book on writing centers and collaboration.

diversity. However, most instructors have continued to insist that language sharing be largely one-way, with faculty members as the purveyors of standard written English, which they hope their students will acquire quickly enough to survive as writers of academic English.

As we considered our philosophical and theoretical commitments to inclusiveness and collaboration, we began to recognize how limited that inclusiveness and collaboration was, particularly with the non-native speakers we have in our fairly typical Southern California basic writing classes: a mix of white, African American, Latino, Asian, and American Indian native speakers as well as Latino and Asian non-native speakers who have scored in the lower half on California State University's English Placement Test and are enrolled for one, two, or three quarters of prefreshman composition instruction. We recognized that while we chose texts that might appeal to a multilinguistic and multicultural group, the texts themselves remained singular—standard academic English—that while we had welcomed linguistic diversity, we had not really embraced it or attempted to see what value that diversity might have for all our basic writers. Even though we agreed with Hannah Arendt's observation that "for excellence...the presence of others is always required," (49) we often allowed ourselves to use others' presence to highlight individual excellence or, more benignly, simply to be content with the others' presence, forgetting how much more we could gain from reciprocal activity. We remained stalled at the level Henry Giroux describes as tolerating differences but not engaging them.

We decided to test the value of using other languages in our teaching, not because we rejected the value a common language might provide or because we advocated bilingual basic writing instruction but because we wanted to work toward creating more truly shared language communities. From our classrooms in San Bernardino, California, this meant including some Spanish, French, and Chinese, or other Asian language texts as part of the readings in our basic writing classes, which were two of the twenty basic writing sections offered each quarter.

Certainly one response to such a choice might be alarm—alarm that in reading Chinese or Spanish texts, we would neglect English and create even slower entrance into the academy for students who already feel behind in some respects. However, this response rests on the assumption that to value one language is to devalue the other. Such an assumption grows out

of the thinking of the traditional order, an order that tends to view sharing as diminishing its own share of privilege or authority.

However, a second response grows out of postmodern and feminist theorists who suggest that sharing power increases power. Thus, rather than worrying that sharing language might involve relinquishing language, we chose to believe that sharing language would generate, would multiply that language facility, so that we could embrace the linguistic richness residing in our classes and gain, while losing nothing.

With these commitments to greater diversity, inclusiveness, and collaboration, along with a desire to use the linguistic variety in our classes as the context, we would like to describe a composite of eighteen basic writing classes in which, in addition to our usual reading of English language essays, poetry, and short stories, students used magazines written in Spanish, French, and Chinese as stimuli for writing. We hope to demonstrate how this choice embraced the classes' linguistic diversity; how it shifted or expanded privilege in the class, giving voice and authority to often silent students; and how it led students to read and write texts more globally and collaboratively.

Our aim was to use texts written in a language other than English to tap the linguistic diversity in our class and to have everyone in the class benefit from that diversity in as many ways as possible. Thus, on the first day of class, we polled students for non-English reading competence. In each of our classes, we had students who reported some level of reading comprehension in Spanish, French, and Chinese as well as in English. Based on these self-reported competencies, we purchased contemporary magazines in the three languages: *Imagen,* published in Spanish in Puerto Rico, *Le Figaro,* published in French in Paris, and *The Observer* and *Commonwealth,* both published in Chinese in Taiwan.

To prepare the class for using these texts, we began by discussing how readers from other countries might gain different information and perspectives about the United States by reading the magazines they might find either at an airport or a typical mall bookstore. For example, we had students put the names of as many different magazines on the board as they could recall. As we grouped those magazines by subject matter, students were readily able to see that readers would get very different impressions of the United States from looking at *Mother*

Earth News, Better Homes and Gardens, Time, GQ, and *Architectural Digest.* If the magazines happened to be *Soldier of Fortune, The National Enquirer,* or *Wrestling USA,* the impression would shift radically again.

Following this exercise, we arranged students in groups of five. In each group, we placed two or more ESL students who had reading competence in the target language. The remainder of each group was a mixture of abilities and languages. We considered writing ability and assertiveness as well as a number of other factors in trying to create a setting for productive work groups. We then gave each group one of the three texts, asking that they designate group leaders and recorders and that they rotate those roles each class meeting.

Their assignment, which occupied three weeks of the ten-week quarter, was to investigate collaboratively what they could learn about the country the magazine represented, creating as rich a communal data base as possible, and then to write papers responding to the question, "What can you know about this country from the magazine we've given you?" In some classes, we had students write individual papers, and in others we had them write group papers.

Following their normal strategies, students wanted to gather information by reading text. Some were annoyed, others embarrassed or inhibited, by their inability to read the text. As the groups turned to those students who could read the text, some students were startled as they realized that students who had appeared to struggle the hardest with their writing and speaking in English (the ESL students) were best equipped for this assignment. The tacit assumption that those students were not as able had to be reevaluated in light of their obvious competence in this new arena. The privilege visibly shifted as the more capable writers of English realized that they needed their peers to do this assignment.

In addition to reading text, they developed a second strategy, approaching and defining reading in a larger sense, and some groups began by "reading" the ads, the cartoons, and the photographs, noting that even the advertisements (BMW, Jaguar, Rolex) revealed socioeconomic information about the French readers of *Le Figaro.* The large number of ads for wedding apparel along with pictures of debutantes, weddings, baptisms, and family reunions in *Imagen* suggested the importance of the family in Puerto Rico. Students could "read" the Chinese-captioned cartoons in *Commonwealth* because they could see how

the caricatures of American, European, and Asian politicians illustrated Taiwan's political concerns.

By the second day of collaboration, most groups began to pull together. This was a pleasant surprise because in many collaborative assignments, students merely size up the tasks, divide them, and then work individually. This assignment, however, required real collaboration, and our students began to recognize that when each of them contributed different observations, together they could write richer, fuller papers than any of them could produce individually. The joining of forces enriched rather than diluted their efforts. For example, we were intrigued as we watched Peggy and Michele, a Taiwanese and an African American, read together, translating Chinese into English, creating language and knowledge about marriage in Taiwan, as they pieced together the story of an elderly tycoon who left his first wife to marry a younger woman. Neither student was patient with the tycoon, and both expanded their thinking about marriage relationships, family, and language as they worked together to understand and explain the story.

We then set students to using their collected observations to create generalizations about the countries represented by their magazines. These generalizations reflected the particular magazines each group used. *Imagen* and *Le Figaro,* both upscale magazines, led students to generalizations about the wealthy in Puerto Rico and France. *The Observer* was largely political, so the students in that group spoke about the Taiwanese as being very sober and male-oriented.

Once the students had collected and shared data, they began to draft their papers. These drafts then moved through a series of usual workshop activities involving peer review and response and finally emerged as finished papers that we reproduced for the entire class to read.

We have observed a variety of outcomes from this assignment for our students, for us as teachers, and for the linguistic community. Among the results for the students, the social implications are of considerable importance. First of all, our ESL students gained stature in the class. They became leaders in their groups because they were the literate ones. Often these were the same students who previously had spoken only when directly called upon. As we watched the groups explore their magazines, we saw native students asking questions of the ESL students about matters outside the scope of the magazines. The ESL students responded very positively to their new roles, and

some of them participated in the class in ways we had not seen before.

Another outcome is that students engaged in real, not pseudo, collaboration. As we noted earlier, this full investment is difficult to generate. Initially, students felt constrained by efficiency, fear of exposure, and individualism. They were wary of trusting their peers—even in a small class. Those writing individual papers worried that if they contributed to the communal data bank, some other writer would "take all their good stuff." However, most came to see working with others as community interaction, not dependence, to see that they were members of a large club who feared others looking at their writing, and to see that, even though they sprang from a shared text, their papers were surprisingly different. Those writing group papers noted that they had fewer problems generating text—that rather than having to pad their papers to fill enough pages, they were able to be selective as they edited. Thus they experienced real collaboration and found it productive.

A third outcome for the students was a greater use of their imagination and resourcefulness. Many of our students had learned to suppress their personalities and ideas in order to survive in writing classes. Urging them to call on other skills to decode the assigned material boosted their beliefs that they could do college level work, even in a writing class. For example, when we watched students solve the puzzles that emerged as they wrote on computers and experimented with different printers, we saw the quality of their imaginations at work. In this assignment, we wanted to invite students to use as many means as they had at their disposal to solve the puzzles we had set out for them. When they widened their repertoires, they "read" texts in a variety of ways.

Fourth, the native students learned things about their ESL peers that they might not otherwise have been interested in learning. We overheard discussions about language and customs. The students talked about the geographical, political, and social differences they saw in other countries. Not all of what they learned was significant, but much of it was eye-opening. For example, one quarter it took most students several minutes to discover that they were looking at the Taiwanese magazine backwards. What they considered the front of the magazine was, of course, the back because, as the Taiwanese students gently told them, the text was printed in the opposite direction from English. This discovery generated a thoughtful explora-

tion of the left to right and top to bottom American print conventions, particularly as they argued about what made text readable and "right." In another class section, students argued vigorously about representations of women, basing their assertions on the clothing women wore in the advertising and other situations in which they were pictured. As students interpreted these drawings and photographs, they examined the differing cultural perspectives they and the text brought to the debate.

A final sensory-rich outcome from one of the classes extended the process of learning from the text to the potluck lunch table. Each student brought food typical of his or her country. We had Jordanian, Thai, Chinese, Mexican, and American food, everything from spring rolls to mole to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. Students were particularly interested in the ingredients common to so many different diets (flour, tomatoes, nuts, cheese, and greens).

Finally, student writing has improved. In the nine quarters that we have used this writing project, the grades for these papers, whether group or individual, uniformly have been among the highest of the term, very often fully one letter grade higher than their earlier assignments. Papers have responded clearly to the writing assignment, have supported generalizations with details, have been visibly organized, and have been carefully edited. And, at no stage have the groups' best writers simply taken charge. Rather, the papers represented the groups' best joint efforts as the students drew on diverse abilities. For example, in the several stages of paper production, we saw students clustered around a single computer, arguing about details, coherence, and verb endings. With few other assignments have we seen students challenge each other about whether a paragraph hangs together or whether a string of words is a sentence or a fragment or, even more surprisingly, whether they have fully and fairly interrogated the text, whether they have explored conflicting viewpoints and been faithful to the observations of all group members. In one class, four group members spent several class sessions arguing about whether their conclusions about Taiwan were drawn from their magazine or from two of the group members' experiences in Taiwan; one member was Taiwanese and another had visited on a band tour. Their exchanges produced important self-discoveries about the difficulty writers experience as they bring existing opinions or data to an assignment or writing group that challenge their ideas and beliefs. The Taiwanese student, particularly, had difficulty

allowing her group to write what she saw as an inaccurate representation of Taiwan because she was offended by the magazine's picture of her country; as a group, however, they were able to write a paper that focused on the magazine's perspective but ended with a well-specified assertion that the magazine presented but one view. At the end of the quarter, the Taiwanese student contributed an additional Taiwanese magazine to our supply, urging us to let the next term's students see a more balanced picture. Her group's willingness to let their ideas clash allowed them to think carefully about assignments, using rather than silencing oppositional discourse. Thus, in addition to meeting traditional grading criteria, our students have shown us what engaged voices can produce: lively prose, full of detail and energy, contextualized within the writers' lives yet generalized to their readers' worlds.

Yet, this assignment did more than benefit our students. At a greater level than ever before, we began to share power and privilege with our students. With most reading assignments, the text is wholly familiar to us. We have read it before, and both we and the students know that any questions we ask about that text are questions more for them than for us. In this assignment, we were not the experts; like most members of the class, we did not read Chinese. Our skills in French and Spanish certainly were weaker than our ESL students' skills in English. We were, therefore, also collaborators with our students in making meaning. The classroom became, for this assignment, a Bakhtinian dialogue, a place where everyone, the teacher included, could learn.

Equally important, this way of teaching writing has begun to change our writing practices as well as our students'. Four years ago as we set out jointly to author a paper, we responded just as our students had to such tasks: we divided the writing and went off to our respective computers to write, hoping the seams wouldn't be too obvious. To compose this text, we, too, hunched together over a single keyboard, arguing, interrupting, amending, despairing, and dancing when our single text began to emerge. And, we believe that our text, as our students', is the richer for this fuller collaboration.

Thus, this assignment takes a step toward the kind of wider inclusiveness composition teachers have long advocated. It acknowledges that all of us belong here and that each of us can contribute in valuable ways to the whole. It models that thinking and provides one enactment of it.

While creating a successful writing experience for our students is important, we are equally concerned with expanding the boundaries of our own terms and assumptions, particularly those cutting-edge terms and assumptions that seduce us with their currency. "Collaboration" and "welcoming diversity" are such terms. Collaboration appears to be widely accepted and practiced, clearly occupying a place in the educational spotlight; indeed, in the last several years' CCCC sessions, nearly one hundred titles refer to collaboration. Equally clear, however, is the dramatic variation in the meaning of collaboration.

Similarly, welcoming diversity was the theme of the 1990 CCCC Annual Convention, and diversity has been included in a large number of subsequent session titles. But, welcoming can be little more than the perfunctory plastic smile and handshake of tolerance that people receive at obligatory social occasions or students receive as they enter classrooms. And, it can remain stalled at toleration rather than growing into engagement.

As we pushed our own definitions of collaboration and welcoming diversity, we saw that both were thin, that collaboration must entail giving and learning and changing as much ourselves as we expected our students to change. We recognized that welcoming diversity was more than smiling warily at it; it meant greeting it expectantly, hoping that it would shape our lives and praxis as well as our students' lives. Nan Johnson, a keynote Young Rhetoricians' Conference speaker, eloquently told how as teachers of writing we change students' lives, buttressing her assertion with powerful illustrations of students' writing. We would like to press that a step farther and suggest that while what we do with our students is critical, our understanding of the theories that underpin these choices is equally important. We begin to understand collaboration, authority, privilege, and diversity not when we direct others in those activities but only as we participate in them ourselves. We begin when we insert ourselves, along with our students, into the rich unknown of Mary Louise Pratt's contact zone, "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power," (34) and when we acknowledge and participate in the struggles that their oppositional discourses produce (Miller, 399). We begin when we recognize the truth of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's definition of situated learning in which students and teachers are at least equally transformed. We begin when, as Shyh-chyi Wey, one of our ESL tutors, puts it, we make our classrooms

and offices "environment[s] where right thinking is not the possession of one and merely the aspiration of others."

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NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

June 20-24, 1995: The 23rd Wyoming Conference on English to be held in Laramie, WY, will have as its theme, "The Politics of English Studies." Following are the invited speakers: Lester Faigley, University of Texas at Austin; Tania Modleski, University of Southern California; Nancy Packer, Stanford University; and John Slatin, University of Texas at Austin. The deadline for papers *was* February 1st. For information, **contact:** Kathy Evertz at (307) 766-6452 or E-mail KEVERTZ@UWYO.EDU.

July 12-15, 1995: The 14th Annual Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, to be held in State College, PA, announces plenary speakers Sharon Crowley, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and James Boyd White, and featured speakers Miriam Brody, John Angus Campbell, Susan Peck MacDonald, and Kurt Spellmeyer. Proposal deadline *was* April 7th. For conference information, **contact:** Don Bialostosky, Dept. of English, Penn State U, University Park, PA 16802 (E-mail: alg5@psuvm.psu.edu).

March 27-30, 1996: The 1996 Research Network Forum to be held at the 1996 Annual CCCC, in Milwaukee, WI at the Hyatt Regency, gives published researchers, new researchers, and graduate students the opportunity to discuss their current research projects and to receive response. Two plenary sessions will be featured, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Each session will last for a little over an hour, allowing each of the four plenary speakers a 10-12-minute presentation followed by a brief question period. At the subsequent roundtable discussions, work-in-progress presenters discuss their current projects with other researchers, including the plenary speaker for their particular interest area. Each work-in-progress roundtable will be led by one of the plenary speakers and a co-leader with expertise in the same area. To be considered for work-in-progress presentation, **send by** the deadline, **May 30, 1995** a title and brief description of your project **to:** Kim Brian Lovejoy, Dept. of English, Indiana-Purdue U. at Indianapolis, 425 University Boulevard, Indianapolis, IN 46202. Fax: 317-274-2347. E-mail: IDRI100@Indycms.bitnet Note: Presenting a proposal at the Forum does NOT preclude a proposal submission to the main CCCC's program.

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