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The *Journal of Basic Writing* publishes articles of theory, research, and teaching practices related to basic writing. Articles are refereed by member of the Editorial Board (see overleaf) and the Editors.

KAREN GREENBERG and **TRUDY SMOKE**
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JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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CALL FOR ARTICLES

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

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require four copies of a manuscript and an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only*. Papers which are accepted will eventually have to supply camera-ready copy for all ancillary material (tables, charts, etc.). One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. We require the MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 4rd ed., 1995*). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our style sheet and for camera-ready specifications.

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

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing, social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory, grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; English as a second language; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. 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. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

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

A "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every two years (four issues). The prize is $500, now courtesy of Lynn Quitman Troyka. The winner, to be selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, is announced in our pages and elsewhere.

EDITORS' COLUMN

We begin this issue of *JBW* with an apology: We are sorry that the journal was so late in arriving. We could offer the usual clichés: delays in author/editor communications, problems in the printing process, and the infamous unforeseen circumstances. The truth is that the lengthy delay in getting this issue to you was caused by CUNY's financial problems which necessitated the retrenching of Ruth Davis, the Associate Editor who has managed the journal for the past decade. And we simply could not get the journal to bed in time without Ruth. As many of you know, Ruth was a critical member of our editorial team. She devoted many unpaid hours to *JBW*, working late into the evenings and almost every weekend. Ruth worked on *JBW* from her bed after a serious accident in last year's blizzard; she even worked on the journal in the hospital at her husband's bedside after his open heart surgery. But you all know Ruth's dedication: She called authors, subscribers, and advertisers to make sure that everyone was okay and getting what they needed from the journal on time. Ruth's generosity of spirit, fierce intelligence, and delightful sense of humor made working with her a joy for us. And on the professional side, Ruth took care of all the subscriptions, advertising, correspondence, and printing. She arranged deadlines with the printer, put the journal on-line (for computer editing), and did all final line-editing. This last activity was probably the most significant: Since *JBW*'s readers consist of scholars across the country, Ruth made sure that each issue was edited to a professional standard. She held *JBW* together through many difficult times. It will never be the same with her.

We are deeply concerned about what the loss of Ruth Davis as *JBW*'s Associate and Managing Editor forebodes for the journal and for our field in general. We believe that a vital journal needs a person like Ruth if is to continue to grow and to serve the needs of its readers. Certainly the need and support for *JBW* is greater than ever, as demonstrated by your subscriptions and by your manuscripts which continue to pour in to our office. We hope that this support will convince CUNY that *JBW*--and all of you--need a strong commitment to the journal and its future.

Again, we apologize for the lateness of this issue, but on a happier note, we are pleased that the issue is such a strong one. It begins with Rebecca Mlynarczyk's account of a case study of the revising processes of one of her basic writing students. Grounded in an analysis of relevant research, Mlynarczyk's study yields insights into the complexi-

ties of revising and suggests possibilities for more productive teacher responses to student writing. One of her conclusions is that too many basic writers are hampered in their efforts to revise by their attempts to follow rigid "rules" internalized from teachers and textbooks. Michael Newman reviews some of these rules in his description of basic writers' conception of "error." He examines the gatekeeping role of error and the message of exclusion that error incarnates. Newman notes that the words and forms used by basic writers exemplify their alienation from academic discourse and academic life and that the task of bridging that cultural and textual gap falls to teachers of basic writing. In the essay that follows, Carol Severino looks at the way a university has tried to bridge this gap. She traces the history and uses of the "urban mission" trope, both nationally and locally, and examines the ways in which this mission has been realized at the University of Illinois at Chicago through its institutional academic support programs.

The next two essays discuss writing evaluation theory and practice. Willa Wolcott describes methods of evaluating basic writing programs using a variety of writing assessments, including impromptu essays, a multiple-choice editing test, a portfolio assessment, and student and instructor questionnaires. She presents data from a series of evaluations at the University of Florida and concludes that comprehensive evaluation is crucial in demonstrating the effectiveness of writing programs and opening up a dialogue among the instructors in the program. In their essay, Kay Harley and Sally I. Cannon look at evaluation from the student's perspective. Their case study of a "failing" basic writer explores the tension between reader response theory and assessment practices. Rooted in an ethnographic research perspective, this case study explains the advantages and flaws of assessing student writing skills through essay tests and portfolios.

This issue concludes with a response by Sharon Crowley to an essay that appeared in the Fall 1995 issue of *JBW*. In that essay, Ed White contended that theorists who argue for the removal of required freshman composition courses represent an elitist attempt to reduce educational opportunities to many students at urban public universities. In her response, Crowley maintains that White misinterpreted her position; she explains her beliefs about the relations among open admissions, affirmative action, and required composition courses.

We are delighted that scholars such as Sharon Crowley take the time to respond to positions articulated in *JBW*, and we encourage all readers to do so. These responses make the journal "interactive"; they also illuminate the controversies in our field. So we look forward to hearing from you. And we hope to get the next issue to you on time. Thank you for your patience and support.

—***Karen L. Greenberg*** and ***Trudy Smoke***

Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk

FINDING GRANDMA'S WORDS: A CASE STUDY IN THE ART OF REVISING

ABSTRACT: *Most basic writers are not adept at revising their work, often limiting revision to surface changes at the word or sentence level. Research on composing suggests that many writers are hampered in their efforts to revise by their inability to re-examine the content of their writing and by misguided attempts to follow rigid "rules" internalized from teachers and textbooks. The author reviews the research on revising as it relates to a case study of the revising processes of one of her basic writing students. The resulting analysis yields insights into the complexities of revising and suggests possibilities for more productive teacher response to student writing.*

With the wide acceptance of the process approach to composition in the 1970s, revising assumed a heightened importance in the teaching of writing. Teachers began offering comments on early drafts of students' essays in the hope that they would substantially revise their writing—reconceptualizing, reorganizing, or expanding their earlier attempts at making meaning. Yet often the results, as evidenced by subsequent drafts, were disappointing. Why, teachers asked in puzzlement and frustration, is true revision so rare in student writing? This question assumed particular poignancy for teachers of developmental students since basic writers—those most in need of improving their writing through revising—appeared to be the least able to do so (Flower et al.; Perl "Composing Processes"; Pianko; Sommers "Strategies"; Wall and Petrosky). And a lack of facility with revising seemed to prevail whether the students were writing in a first or second language (Raimes; Zamel).

Rebecca Mlynarczyk is assistant professor of English at Kingsborough Community College, City University of New York, where she teaches developmental courses in reading and writing. She has conducted numerous workshops on teaching reading and writing and has published in TESOL Journal, College ESL, *and* College English. *She is coauthor with Steven Haber of* In Our Own Words: A Guide with Readings for Student Writers *(St. Martin's Press).*

Nancy Sommers' research has given us some insights into why substantial revision is so rare among inexperienced writers. The student writers interviewed by Sommers, all of whom were college freshmen, didn't even like to use the word "revision." Instead they re-labeled their revision activities as "scratching out and doing over again" (380), "marking out" (381), or "slashing and throwing out" (381). All of these student writers viewed revision as making changes on the sentence level or, even more commonly, the word level. The following quotation from one of the freshman writers is representative: "I read what I have written and I cross out a word and put another word in; a more decent word or a better word. Then if there is somewhere to use a sentence that I have crossed out, I will put it there" (380-381).

The view of revising articulated by the experienced writers in the Sommers study (professors, journalists, and editors) was dramatically different. The experienced writers described an ongoing, global process. As one experienced writer observed, "[Revising] means taking apart what I have written and putting it back together again. I ask major theoretical questions of my ideas, respond to those questions, and think of proportion and structure, and try to find a controlling metaphor. I find out which ideas can be developed and which should be dropped. I am constantly chiseling and changing as I revise" (384).

What explains the drastic differences in how student writers and experienced writers view revising? Ironically, the same teachers who complain that their students are not able to revise their writing substantially may be contributing to the problem. Sommers concludes that inexperienced writers "see their writing altogether passively through the eyes of former teachers or their surrogates, the textbooks, and are bound to the rules which they have been taught" (383). It is probably no accident that students who are able to revise their work most effectively are those who have done the most self-sponsored writing (Wall and Petrosky 115), in other words, writing without teachers.

A study by Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford confirms the hypothesis that most teachers have not yet discovered how to frame their comments on student papers in ways that will encourage thoughtful and thorough revision. In this study of teachers' written responses on 3,000 student essays, Connors and Lunsford coordinated a team of experienced writing teachers who examined the "global comments" on the student papers. The team studied only comments that were "rhetorically oriented and not related to formal or mechanical problems," comments that referred to the rhetoric, structure, or overall success of the piece of writing (206). The majority of teacher responses—77 percent—did deal with these global concerns. However, only 24 percent of the comments were concerned with the content of the paper, and only 17 percent provided generalized reader response, using words such as "like" or "dislike" (207). Most of the comments offered

at the beginning or end of a paper were devoted to justifying a final grade (213). Only 11 percent of these initial or final comments seemed informed by the view that the paper represented part of an ongoing process of becoming a better writer (213). Overall, the researchers who analyzed the teacher commentary "found very little readerly response and very little response to content" (217). The findings of this large-scale study are indisputable: teachers need help in learning to respond to student writing in productive ways. Connors and Lunsford express the need for studies that would make teachers "aware of their separate roles as readers, coaches, and editors" (219) and suggest that one way of doing this would be through "`thick descriptions' of teacher-responders at work, in their full context" (219).

This essay provides such a description through a case study in which I explain how an analysis of my interactions with one of my basic writing students led me to an enhanced understanding of the teacher-responder's role in helping students revise effectively. But first I will review the theoretical foundations underlying my analysis.

Theoretical Perspectives on Revising

Much of the literature on revising has focused on assumptions about audience, and many compositionists have been influenced by the views first articulated by Linda Flower in an article entitled "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing." According to Flower, ineffective writers often fail to communicate adequately with their readers because their prose is writer-based. These writers use a kind of shorthand language "whose meaning is still to an important degree in the writer's head" (30). While Flower recognizes writer-based prose as an important, sometimes essential, stage in the writing process (34), she feels that the key for effective writing instruction is to encourage students to transform their writer-based prose into reader-based prose, translating their inner meanings into language that is more readily accessible to an outside reader (Flower "Revising," "Writer-Based").

Since teachers provide the primary audience for student writers, the tendency to focus most suggestions for revising on the needs of the reader is entirely understandable. Yet this may not be the most productive strategy for encouraging thoughtful and substantive revision. Indeed some have suggested that the most helpful thing teachers can do is to teach students to ignore audience, at least in the early stages of writing and revising (Elbow; Elbow and Clarke; Rankin). I believe that nurturing substantial revision requires teachers to suspend temporarily their needs as readers and focus instead on the writer's needs, encouraging students to return to the meanings that are in their heads but not yet on the page. Two theories of composing have influenced

my thinking on revising: Perl's concepts of retrospective and projective structuring ("Understanding") and Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Steinbach's view of composing as an interaction between the content space and the rhetorical space. While the key concepts of these theories are not identical, they relate to and inform one another.

In "Understanding Composing," Sondra Perl develops a model of composing as a recursive process in which writers return again and again to three elements: first, to certain semantic units—phrases or sentences in their evolving texts; second, to key words or a notion of the topic; and, third, and most important, to a "felt sense" of their intended meaning. This third element, which Perl labels "retrospective structuring," is highly important to skilled writers. As Perl explains, "Once we have worked at shaping, through language, what is there inchoately, we can look at what we have written to see if it adequately captures what we intended" (367).

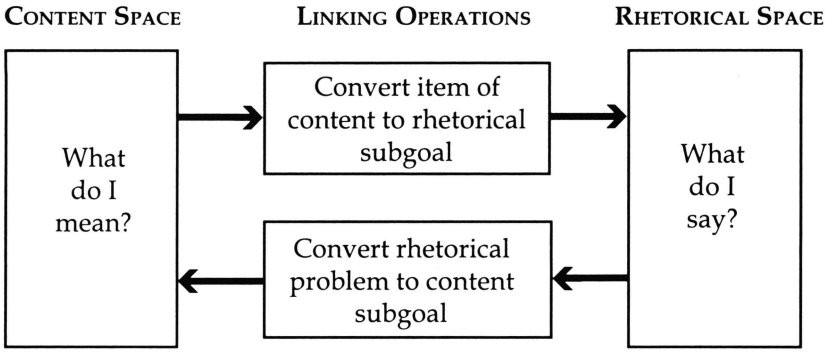
Perl contrasts retrospective structuring with another mental process she terms "projective structuring" (368). This type of structuring involves "the ability to craft what one intends to say so that it is intelligible to others" (368), a process that clearly relates to Flower's concept of reader-based prose. While not denying the great importance of projective structuring for all writers, Perl feels that misguided attempts to meet the needs of readers frequently cause problems for inexperienced writers. These writers often become fixated on what they think others want them to write, neglecting their own felt sense of the topic. In trying to meet the needs of these vaguely defined readers, they often attempt to follow previously learned rules or internalized criteria for assessing completed texts. In Perl's view, this approach represents a diminishing of true projective structuring, in which writers "draw on their capacity to move away from their own words, to decenter from the page, and to project themselves into the role of the reader" (368).

Facility in writing, for Perl, depends on an easy ability to move back and forth between the two mental processes, retrospective and projective structuring. She explains: "We rarely do one without the other entering in; in fact, again in these postures we can see the shuttling back-and-forth movements of the composing process, the move from sense to words and from words to sense, from inner experience to outer judgment and from judgment back to experience" (369). Research indicates, however, that inexperienced writers often engage in a limited form of projective structuring, neglecting the need for retrospective structuring in which they assess how well the evolving text captures their intended meaning.

Another model of composing—one proposed by the cognitive researchers Marlene Scardamalia, Carl Bereiter, and Rosanne Steinbach in an article entitled "Teachability of Reflective Processes in Written

Figure 1

A Dual Problem Space Model
of Reflective Processes in Written Composition



Composition" – helps to explain why this recursive movement tends to be so difficult for inexperienced writers.

This model, which is based on the work of psychologist Allen Newell, views writing as a process of problem solving in which writers need to shuttle between two problem spaces: the content space and the rhetorical space (see Figure 1). The content space is concerned with beliefs. It is here that "one works out opinions, makes moral decisions, generates inferences about matters of fact, formulates causal explanations, and so on" (176). The content space often impinges on daily life and is not just activated when planning a composition. Much of our everyday thinking occurs in the content space. As soon as we commit an idea to paper, however, we have moved into the rhetorical space, which relates only to writing: "The knowledge states to be found in this kind of space are *mental representations of actual or intended text* – representations that may be at various levels of abstraction from verbatim representation to representations of main ideas and global intentions" (176, emphasis in original).

The model proposed by Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Steinbach coincides with many previously developed cognitive descriptions of the composing process. For example, Collins and Gentner state:

> It is important to separate idea production from text production. The processes involved in producing text, whether they operate on the word level, the sentence level, the paragraph level, or the text level, must produce a linear sequence that satisfies certain grammatical rules. In contrast, the result of the process of idea production is a set of ideas with many in-

ternal connections, only a few of which may fit the linear model desirable for text. (53)

That there is a rough congruence between this view of composing and the ideas of Perl seems fairly obvious. Retrospective structuring occurs in the content space while projective structuring is more closely connected with the rhetorical space. Scardamalia, Bereiter, and Steinbach assert that reflection in writing occurs when there is interaction between the two problem spaces, which is roughly analogous to the turn-taking of speakers in a conversation. This view helps to account for the differences in the processes of experienced and inexperienced writers. Whereas skilled writers readily shuttle back and forth from one space to the other, unskilled writers succeed in transferring information from the content space to the rhetorical space but are unable to make "the return trip" (178). This results in "a simple think-say process of composition" and restricts revision to surface changes that remain limited to the rhetorical space (178). Inexperienced writers, when asked to revise, do not plunge back into the content space to explore their ideas more deeply. Rather they limit their revision to such concerns of the rhetorical space as changes in wording or mechanical corrections.

Through their comments, teachers often encourage this premature fixation with rhetorical concerns. Because they do not have access to the students' felt sense of the ideas they are trying to express, teachers often focus instead on matters of structure, form, or correctness, ignoring important questions in the content space, which might encourage students to reexamine their intentions and revise more substantially.

The views of composing summarized here—like all theoretical models—represent a simplified view of highly complex and little understood mental processes. Looking at revising with these theories in mind does, however, help to explain why substantive revision is so difficult for many writers. Let me turn now to the case study to illustrate how these processes came into play for my student and me. This description of my own practice illustrates some of the pitfalls and possibilities inherent in teacher response to student writing. Thus, I offer it not as a model of exemplary teacher response but as a starting point for conversations about how to respond to student writing more effectively.

The Case Study: Revising Observed

This study was focused on the revising processes of a student in a developmental writing course I taught at a large urban college.[1] This student, whom I will call Nadine, had moved to the United States from her native Haiti at the age of ten and was twenty years old at the time

of the study. She was taking this course for the third time because of her difficulty in passing the university-wide essay exam designed to assess "minimal competence" in writing. I hoped that the extra conference time Nadine would receive as a result of participating in the case study might help her finally to succeed on this test, and she did, in fact, pass the exam at the end of the semester. Fortunately for me, Nadine proved to have a keen understanding of her own thinking and writing processes as evidenced by the "metatexts" she wrote reflecting on what had happened in each conference and by the careful way in which she annotated transcripts of the conferences with her subsequent thoughts.[2]

Although Nadine and I held weekly half-hour conferences throughout the semester, the case study focuses on the first two of these meetings, which were audiotaped and transcribed. In the initial conference we discussed Nadine's plans to revise the first draft of an essay in which she had described an experience from her past. The complete essay appears below:

> When I was about six years old my Grandma past away. At that time, I did not know quite what death meant, except for the stories that I have been told by grown ups, which didn't shade [shed] much light on it. They use to say that when someone dies, they just go to sleep for a while and someday they will come back. I use to think if they put the person that's sleeping under the ground how will they come back. I mean, why don't they put them on a bed until they wake up. I use to say to my mom, "Why don't you give Grandma something so, she can dig herself out when she woke up because if she's under the ground she never get up?" Mom use to say that God will provide Grandma with what she needs to come back.
>
> So, day after day I would ask God to provide Grandma with the things that she needs to come back.
>
> Every morning Grandma and I would get up at the crack of dawn to go fishing. In the way, we would play a game of throwing small marked rocks as far as we could and than determine where it fell. It was a nice game between [me] and Grandma. She always let me win. Also, while fishing we would play a game of describing our favorite places.
>
> Grandmas favorite place has always been the river, which we fish in everyday. She used to say that there's no other place in the world were she rather be than right there, where the grass stays greener all year around, where the river stays bluer than blue and never dries, where the bright sun covers the blue sky with it's colorful wings; where the wind blows calmly and gently and where the fish will never go away. In addition, she would say, "that's purity, that's heaven my dear, that's eternity."

> When I miss Grandma to much, I go down the river to listen for all the sounds and all the other things that she saw. I see us there playing and laughing with one another and that gives me confort.[3]

Before the first conference with Nadine, I had read this draft and responded by answering the five questions on a response sheet distributed to all students. Most students had received response from a student partner, but since there had been an odd number of students in class that day, I had served as Nadine's partner. In response to the question about what I liked about the essay, I noted that "I loved the paragraph about the river," but when asked to comment on the opening, I wrote: "Maybe you should start with the part about the river." In answer to what I would like to know more about in the next draft, I wrote: "How you finally came to deal with your feelings about death."

At the beginning of the first conference, rather than encouraging Nadine to return to the content space by asking her whether she felt the first draft adequately expressed her meaning, I instead launched into my own concerns as a reader, matters of the rhetorical space.[4] Prefacing my comments with the brief statement that "I really liked the essay very much," I continued: "We were talking about your paper yesterday in class. And we were saying, I was saying, that maybe it could be better if you worked on reorganizing it a little bit and changing the order of the paragraphs." Subconsciously, I must have felt uncomfortable about being so prescriptive. I shifted from "we" to "I" when I realized that I was really talking about my ideas, not Nadine's, and I kept qualifying my remarks: "I don't have anything specific, you know, exactly in mind," and "I don't know for sure." But I did, in fact, have a specific organizational plan in mind and asked Nadine to read her essay aloud using this new order.

Analyzing the transcript of the conference, I tried to understand why I had been so directive. One possible explanation is that I was trying to use the conference time efficiently. It's quicker to make a direct suggestion than to get the student to figure things out for herself. But in this case, the end result—wresting control of the writing from the writer—clearly did not justify the means. A more valid explanation for my approach derives from the power dynamics of teacher-student relations. As Anne Greenhalgh explains, "In principle, a response to a draft not only delivers a message at the semantic level but also plays out the social relationship between reader and writer, teacher and student" (402). Whether the teacher is responding in talk or in writing, there is a tendency to assume the voice of "the authority" who knows best how the student should go about revising.

Nadine's behavior, too, followed a pattern typical in teacher-student interactions. She did not question my right to appropriate her

text and instead dutifully read the essay aloud in the order I suggested. After she finished reading the essay, we continued to deal with matters of the rhetorical space, but my comments became more honest and less directive as I focused on my confusion as a reader. A brief excerpt from the transcript gives the flavor of this part of the conversation:

Rebecca: I had a question here, because when you say, "I go down to the river," is this a river here in New York?

Nadine: No, in Haiti.

Rebecca: In Haiti. So, how old were you when you would go down to the river and think about this and feel some comfort?

Nadine: Like, oh, seven, between . . .

Rebecca: Mm-hmm. So let's see, she, oh right, so she died when you were six, and a year or maybe two years?

Nadine: Two years.

Rebecca: Later you had finally gotten to the point where you had understood what it meant.[5]

At this point the dynamics of the conference changed dramatically. I seemed to feel that I had "done my job" as teacher-reader by dealing with the confusion of chronology and perhaps had signaled to Nadine by my comment about understanding the meaning of her grandmother's death that it was now safe to talk about the content of the essay. Whatever the reason, our talk was transformed as Nadine began to struggle with the felt sense of her ideas. Immediately after the passage quoted above, she began speaking very quickly and intently:

Nadine: Because this would explain when you're six years old and your mama says she will come back and God's gonna provide her with whatever she needs to come back.

Rebecca: Right.

Nadine: And I was there, there, you know, praying to, you know, you know, give her what she needs to come back because, you know, I miss her.

Rebecca: Right.

Nadine: And so I was, since I was six, you know, still waiting. A year go by.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Nadine: And day after day I would say, you know, "Please," you know, "she's gonna come back."

Rebecca: Uh-huh.

Nadine: And after that, when she's, you know, when I stayed for a year, you know, and she hasn't been back, so . . .

Rebecca: Mm-hmm. Right.

Nadine: I kinda, you know, later on, you know, every morning I wake up at the same time that she usually get up.

Rebecca: Uh-huh.

Nadine: Play the same game—by myself.

Rebecca: Awww.

Nadine: Alway. And then we go and I would sit by the river.

Rebecca: Yeah.

Nadine: Go fishing and listen to, you know. It's like you can't hear it. It's like sitting there.

Rebecca: Uh-huh.

Nadine: But you can't see or hear what's going on.

Rebecca: Right.

Nadine: It's like the things that you used to do.

Rebecca: Right.

Nadine: Everything's comin' back to you. And, you know . . .

Rebecca: Right, right.

Nadine: And, you know, that makes me feel better.

Rebecca: Like a flashback of the old days and like her spirit was there.

Nadine: [overlapping with Rebecca] Back . . . back.

Rebecca: Her. You were comforted by the memories . . .

Nadine: Memories of . . .

Rebecca: Uh-huh.

Nadine: Of her.

Greenhalgh astutely observes that in analyzing teacher responses to student writing, we need to think not only about the teacher's role but also about the teacher's voice (401). In this conference I spoke in two distinct and almost diametrically opposed voices. First there was the voice of authority—the expert who felt free to evaluate, interrupt, and impose prescriptions. The second voice, the one just quoted, was that of an empathic listener. And it was this second voice that was actually more useful in helping Nadine to revise her work. By listening to Nadine and showing interest and support, I encouraged her to move back into the content space to engage in further retrospective structuring of her ideas.

Immediately after the excerpt quoted above, however, I shifted again into the voice of the authoritative evaluator: "Well, good. I think basically that order works pretty well. And if you can add those things when you rewrite it, I think it'll be even better than it was to begin with." In attempting to understand why my voice changed so dramatically at this point, I speculated that perhaps I was made uncomfortable by the emotionally charged nature of the conversation. But as I read further in the transcript, it seemed more likely that I used the authoritative voice to interrupt in order to redirect the conversation and share something of my own childhood experiences with loss and grief. Just after the statement quoted above about rewriting the essay, I said:

Rebecca: Uh. It's really unusual that you remember this so well. My father died when I was nine and my sister was six. And I'm not as aware of my own feelings about death as you are. And it's unusual for a child, but it's good

Nadine: [overlapping with Rebecca] A lot of people have died in my family, though.

Rebecca: Yeah. So, you were, you had experienced it. Yeah. I think you do a really good job of describing how a child views death

Nadine: [overlapping] Especially when . . .

Rebecca: And how the parents try to be kind. They don't want to hurt you, you know. So that's why they say things like, "Oh, she'll come back," and they, some people believe it in a religious sense that, you know, Judgment Day, these people will come back, or we'll all be together in heaven, or whatever. But [pause] that is sometimes very confusing to children 'cause they expect the real person to come back sometime soon.

Nadine: Mm-hmm.

Rebecca: And it's a real confusing thing. So you do a good job of showing how a child reacts to this kind of explanation.

In some ways, this part of the conference is more difficult to explain than the earlier segments. Here I am maintaining control of the discussion, not welcoming Nadine into a dialogue. But I am also not prescribing or directing as I had in my suggestions about reorganizing the essay. It's as if I, too, have now stepped into the content space to do some retrospective structuring.

When I first began to study the transcript, I saw my move away from Nadine's essay to express my own thoughts about children's perceptions of death as a flaw. But as Perl explains, moving away from the actual written text is extremely important in order for retrospective structuring to occur: "... the move is not to any words on the page nor to the topic but to feelings or non-verbalized perceptions that *surround* the words or to what the words already present *evoke* in the writer" ("Understanding" 364-65, emphasis in original). Thus, I came to see that following Nadine into the content space signaled my concern with the ideas of her essay and perhaps helped her in reformulating the concluding paragraph of her second draft, the most heavily revised and expanded part of the essay. Here is Nadine's revised essay:

"Memory of Grandma"

> In Haiti, every morning Grandma and I would get up at the crack of dawn to go fishing. In the way, we would play a game of throwing small marked rocks as far as we could and than try to determine where they fell. It was a nice game between Grandma and I because she usually lets me win. Also while fishing, we would play a game of describing our favorite places. But I had so many, I would ask Grandma to go first.
>
> Grandma's favorite place has always been the river, where we would fish everyday. She used to say that, there's no other place in the world where she would rather be than right here "where the grass gets greener year around, where the river stays bluer than blue and never dries, where the splash of soft colors from the sun covers the blue sky like a Robin spreading its colorful wings, where the calm and gentle wind blows among the trees that stand higher than a mountain top, where the creatures of nature take turn in playing their tune, which at times shifts the early morning mood, where there's always purity, eternity and that is where heaven lies my dear." I miss Grandma so much.

When I was six years old my Grandma passed away. At that time, I did not quite [know] what death meant, except for the stories that I have been told by grown ups, which did not shed much light on it. They used to say that when someone dies, the person just goes to sleep for awhile and someday that person will come back. I used to think if that person that's sleeping under the ground wants to come back, How will that person come back. I mean, why don't they put them on a bed until he/she wakes up? I used to say to my Mom, "Why don't you give Grandma something so she can dig herself out when she wakes up because if she's under the ground she will never get up?" Mom used to say that God will provide Grandma with what she needs to come back. So day after day I would beg God to provide Grandma with what she needs to come back but Grandma never came back.

Finally, I realized that she would not be back. I did the only thing that I could at the time, I cried and cried. When that didn't help me deal with the fact that Grandma was gone, I would wonder down the river. I sat in the same spot Grandma and I used to sit and I started to play our favorite game. Before I would leave the river, I would use Grandma's words, "that's purity, eternity and that is where heaven lies . . ." That was the only thing that help me to accept the fact that Grandma was gone in reality but not gone from my heart and mind.

Not all readers will find the second draft superior to the first. What the essay gains in clarity and focus is offset for some readers by a loss of emotional immediacy, the kind of loss that led Peter Elbow to claim that sometimes writer-based prose is actually better than reader-based prose ("Closing" 51). This kind of emotional intensity is often especially evident in the writing of children: "The arresting power in some writing by small children comes from their obliviousness to audience. . . . After all, why should we settle for a writer's entering our point of view, if we can have the more powerful experience of being sucked out of our point of view and into her world?" ("Closing" 54). But it's not just in children's work that we value writing that ignores audience. According to Elbow, teachers sometimes complain about a student's writer-based prose when they would admire a similar "odd but resonant voice if they found it in a published writer" ("Closing" 55).

Other readers of Nadine's second draft will undoubtedly see it as an improvement; many will see the need for further revision. (It was, in fact, the final draft she wrote for my course.) For my purposes here, however, the important thing is to note how the work of the conference led to specific changes in the revised essay. These changes fall

into five categories: 1) surface changes in grammar and wording; 2) addition of a title; 3) reorganization of the essay into chronological order; 4) expansion of "the river scene" in an attempt to capture the grandmother's words more accurately; and 5) expansion of the concluding paragraph about coming to terms with the grandmother's death. Because I am concerned with the global aspects of revising, I won't discuss the surface changes Nadine made, though with very little help from me, she did make several grammatical corrections and refinements in wording.

Although her first draft was untitled, Nadine attached a title ("Memory of Grandma") to her revised essay. While this might at first appear to be a minor addition, it does suggest that Nadine has processed her thoughts more fully and is now more conscious of the meaning and focus of the essay.

In reorganizing the essay, Nadine succeeded in producing a second draft that is more reader-based than the first. She took my advice in restructuring her essay in chronological order, using the paragraph sequence I had suggested. Nadine seemed to appreciate the way in which my confusion about chronology gave her a view of the essay through the eyes of an outside reader. In a metatext reflecting on what she gained from the first conference, she wrote, "I get to talk about my paper and look at it from a different view—much like the reader not the author."

In her own mind, however, Nadine was more concerned with another type of chronology, a chronology of emotion. At the end of the second conference, she explained:

> The questions that you asked me made me think of it. And then it was fresh in my memory, . . . and after that when I went home I tried to change the paragraphs into many different ways. And then, this one seemed better to me, the one that I have right now sounded better to start with the river. Then state that, you know, how much I miss her. And then go to when I was six years old. . . . I didn't want to start with the sad part. I wanted to start with the happy part. Then wait till later and then end with the happiest part. . . . It made me feel better when I wrote it like that because it's so sad to write something and then it makes you feel bad. So, you know, when I ended—I started happy and I ended happy.

What seems significant here is that although I consider myself a perceptive reader of student writing, I had been completely oblivious of Nadine's concern with the chronology of emotion. Yet, to her, this was much more important than the exact time sequence of events.

The issue of the teacher's limited understanding of a student's in-

tentions also arose in connection with the core of Nadine's essay, the river scene where she conjures up the image of her grandmother through the magic of her words. To me as reader, this part of the essay, as developed in the first draft, was fine. I was impressed by the parallel phrasing and poetic language, but Nadine was not satisfied. Next to this section of the essay on the transcript of the first conference, she wrote: "My Grandma like to give life to things that weren't really alive. I did not do a good job here." In explaining how she revised this part, Nadine said, "I looked at the first draft. I tend to add more. I remembered and my memories come back." She annotated this part of the transcript, "That's true. It's almost like see it all again made me feel happy and sad at the same time." Although Nadine was not familiar with Perl's concept of retrospective structuring, she was certainly engaging in this process as she went back into her experience in an attempt to express her inner meaning.

In trying to capture her grandmother's words, Nadine not only contended with the vagaries of memory but also the mysteries of translation. Although the grandmother did not know how to read or write, she was a gifted storyteller whose stories are still treasured by her family and passed down orally in Creole. For Nadine, it was very important to get the words "right." In the second draft, with no help from me, she polished and embellished her grandmother's words—for example, changing "where the bright sun covers the blue sky with it's colorful wings" to "where the splash of soft colors from the sun covers the blue sky like a Robin spreading its colorful wings."

Finally, in trying to explain how she came to terms with her grandmother's death, Nadine seemed to be dealing with her own need for retrospective structuring of the experience and my initial response as a reader wanting to know "how you finally came to deal with your feelings about death." And this, perhaps, is where the conference was most helpful as both Nadine and I got away from the words on the page to explore our thoughts about children's views of death.

It seems significant that in her analysis of the second draft, Nadine referred indirectly to the value of both retrospective and projective structuring. In annotating the transcript of the second conference, she wrote: "I like [the second draft] better because it made what I wanted to say about my Grandmother clear and helps to let the reader know how important both my grandmother and things I used to do with her really are."

Coda: Revising Revisited

Doing the analysis for this case study has caused me to do some serious rethinking about the way in which I respond to student writing. I have learned not to assume that I know more about what my

students are trying to say than they do. As a reader, I would never have guessed that Nadine felt she had not adequately captured the poetry of her grandmother's words or that she was more concerned with establishing a chronology of emotion than with the actual sequence of events in time. If I had begun our conference with an open-ended question, I could have encouraged her to return to the content space of her essay to engage in these important issues accessible through retrospective structuring, issues that were known only to her. I might have asked, "Does this paper express everything you were trying to say about your grandmother?" or "Are there any parts of the paper where you feel something important has been left out?"

Instead, at the beginning of this first conference I focused on the paper's structure—a matter of projective structuring—essentially mandating a new organization and at the same time robbing Nadine of control over her own writing. According to Donald Murray, editors as well as teachers are often guilty of responding to writing in a preemptive way:

> They pounce on first draft writing and make corrections. Since most writers have not discovered their meaning in their first draft, the corrections editors make must come from the editors' own preconception of what the writing should mean. . . . They work in ignorance of the writer's intentions and take the writing away from the writer. When editors or teachers kidnap the first draft, they also remove the responsibility for making meaning from the writer. Writing becomes trivialized, unchallenging, unauthoritative, impersonal, unimportant. (34)

Fortunately, Nadine and I did eventually get to a point in our conference where she was free to return to the content space, but in hindsight I realize that this was the place where we should have begun.

Interestingly, it was when we both moved our focus away from the draft and stopped looking at the actual words on the page that this significant retrospective structuring occurred. In the past, I had always felt vaguely guilty when a conference with a student "degenerated" into "mere talk" not directly focused on a text. The case study has taught me that this kind of seemingly amorphous exploration of ideas may be extremely important in getting writers, especially inexperienced writers, to relax enough to temporarily suspend their anxiety over matters of the rhetorical space and return to the content space, where they can explore the felt sense of their ideas.

In attempting to respond to student writing in more productive ways, I now try to resist the urge to comment on structure or mechanics if I feel the student needs to think more deeply about content. This is not an easy thing for me to do, and I confess to a certain amount of

backsliding, especially toward the end of a semester. As exam and portfolio pressures mount, I am often tempted to try to "do it all" on one draft—responding to structure and grammar as well as content. Yet this case study has convinced me that such all-purpose response sends a confusing message to student writers, who often opt to stay put in the rhetorical space, ignoring the more cognitively challenging issues of the content space.

Broad questions, which can be offered in conference or in written comments, are effective in facilitating the return trip to the content space. I'm thinking of such responses as "When you revise, add one important thing that wasn't included in the first draft" or "Try writing a different ending and see which one you prefer." If a paper seems undeveloped, a useful response can be framed in quantitative terms: "When you revise, make this paper at least two (or three or four) pages longer." In responding to specific content issues, I now make an effort to use questions rather than statements: "Why do you think you feel this way?" or "Can you explain more about . . . .?"

Of course, there comes a time when students need to engage in projective structuring, and helping students see their writing from a reader's point of view remains an important part of my job as a teacher-responder. For example, in the first conference with Nadine when I asked her where the river was located and how old she was when she went there, these straightforward questions gave her a sense of my confusion as a reader, which helped her in revising. In her annotations on this part of the transcript, Nadine wrote that these comments helped her "to make my river scene seem clear" and to "give more direction to where I'm taking the story." Offering honest and open-ended reader response rather than prescriptions about how to "fix" a perceived problem keeps the control of revision where it should be—with the student. Marginal notations such as "I get confused here" or "I don't quite understand this part" help students see their writing through a reader's eyes and leaves them free to devise their own solutions.

If I were asked to sum up what I have learned from this case study, I would say, "It's all about listening." I can't help students move on to somewhere else in their writing unless I've heard them telling me where they came from and where they are now. It sounds so simple. It should be so effortless. And yet for me—and I suspect for many other teacher-responders—learning to listen is the hardest thing of all. Since completing this case study, I often catch myself interrupting a student who is trying to tell me something important or not pausing long enough to let a student enter the conversation or going off on a tangent about one of my pet theories. Sometimes I think I should keep the tape recorder running all the time to keep me honest, to remind me that the writing

belongs to the student, not to me. Despite these occasional lapses, however, this case study has made a qualitative difference in how I respond to student writing. I am less prescriptive in my written comments and more open in the way I conduct conferences.

I now suspect that some of my talkativeness in previous conferences resulted from a misguided effort to protect my students—many of them struggling to master a second language—from the embarrassment of not having anything to say or the proper words in which to say it. Through the case study of Nadine, I have come to believe that each of my students has a great deal to say and will find the words if I can only learn to listen.

Notes

[1]This case study was conducted for a seminar in the English Education program of New York University. I would like to thank Professor Barbara Danish for suggesting the framework for the study and providing insightful commentary. I am also indebted to Ruth McGonigle, a fellow student in the seminar, for her perceptive reading of the transcripts. Two *JBW* reviewers (in particular, Peter Adams) helped me greatly by encouraging me to follow my own advice and return once again to the content space as I completed the final revision of this article. Finally, I extend my deepest thanks to Nadine for giving generously of her time and energy as we worked on this project.

[2]While this case study is particularly relevant for teachers of basic writing, it provides useful insights for teachers and students at more advanced levels as well for according to Flower ("Writer-Based" 30) we can sometimes learn more about composing processes by observing inexperienced writers, whose initial impulses may be closer to the surface and hence easier to assess than those of more practiced writers who continually revise as they write .

[3]I have reproduced both versions of Nadine's essay exactly as they were written. Although there are some surface problems with grammar and mechanics, it is important for readers to understand that these papers were written at the beginning of the semester, and that I had made a conscious decision not to supply Nadine with grammatical corrections.

[4]In conferences with developmental writing students, I make it a point always to discuss the content of an essay *before* dealing with grammar and mechanics. Thus, even though Nadine mentioned at the beginning of the conference that she was concerned about her grammatical errors, we did not discuss these problems until the last five or ten minutes.

[5]The transcript excerpts reproduced in this article make up only a small percentage of the complete transcripts of the conversations I had with Nadine.

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Michael Newman

CORRECTNESS AND ITS CONCEPTIONS: THE MEANING OF LANGUAGE FORM FOR BASIC WRITERS

ABSTRACT: *Over the past twenty years, we have come to see that errors are not simply flaws in a text. However, the need for correctness remains undiminished if only because of societal and institutional demands. Yet there is little consensus about correctness or even whether language can be described as correct or incorrect in the first place. This essay suggests a way out of this bind by looking at correctness in a sociolinguistic sense. In this way writers' different formal choices provide information about their identity and the identity of the text they are creating. Correct usage sends the sociolinguistic message the author desires; incorrect forms send undesired ones. The problem basic writers face is that their errors send the message that they are not college students and their writing is not academic. Correctness thus has a sociolinguistic role crucial to the field of basic writing and which helps differentiate that field from other types of writing instruction.*

Errors and Correctness

From the inauguration of the field of basic writing during the 1970s, "correctness" has been an awkward and enigmatic issue facing students, instructors, and researchers. At that time, several convergent factors, recounted in Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, began to undermine the time-worn consensus surrounding fundamental questions such as: 'What makes language correct or lacking in correctness?' 'How do writers achieve it?' 'Why does it matter so much to so many people?' Now, nearly two decades later, although we still evaluate students' writing in terms of correctness every day, we do so without having reformulated a consensus about what this concept means.

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Part of our confusion about correctness was created by the circumstances that surrounded the development of the field. The arrival in the academy of large numbers of nontraditional students whose essays contained what seemed to be massive numbers of incorrect forms coincided with radical changes in writing instruction. Traditional behaviorist approaches had considered errors as bad habits to be stamped out. This relatively simple understanding jived well with popular intuitive views that devalued the worth of any text which contained more than a minimal number of incorrect forms. Moreover, this view also was reflected in the marginal status of basic-writers in the academy and in educated society at large. Error and its importance seemed clear. However, the writing-process oriented approaches that were beginning to emerge at that time pointed out the misconceptions that lay behind that seemingly common-sense approach (see Shaughnessy and Bartholomae). Inspired by Chomskyan views of language acquisition as driven from within the learner, writing process theorists showed how and why errors are developmentally necessary. Slowly, errors came to be seen as the result of strategies and hypotheses about target patterns and so an integral part of language development (Elliot; Lindfors). As David Bartholomae put it: "Failed sentences, then, could be taken as stages of learning rather than the failure to learn, but also as evidence these writers are using writing as an occasion to learn" (254). Further, it became increasingly apparent that "correct" grammar was only a single component of the larger construct of "good writing" (see Atwell and Calkins, among many others).

These insights changed the emphasis of writing instruction from direct attention to mechanics to work on more global processes. While correctness never ceased to be a goal, it was evicted from center stage. In fact, emphasis on correctness began to be seen as potentially counter productive because, among other reasons, it made the students less likely to write. Yet outside the classroom—and at times in it—this more theoretically sound and pedagogically appropriate approach has not had much impact on people's views on the seriousness of error and the importance of avoiding it. Academic institutions, for example, still continue to classify basic writers as such, in whole or at least in large part, by their errors. The number and type of errors on placement, certifying, and program-exit exams remain, even today, the predominant criteria in the gatekeeping process (Janopoulis; Sweedler-Brown). From an institutional perspective the marginality of basic writing and basic writers has hardly changed at all. Moreover, a cursory glance at the content of language columns which advise readers about correct and incorrect usage (such as William Safire's or James Kirkpatrick's) shows how pervasive the belief in the importance of correct language still is. For their part, and in their own way, basic writers frequently appear to concur with the institutional and societal

view of the importance of correctness. In fact, as Shaughnessy pointed out, basic writers often become obsessed with error, sometimes to the point of believing that the entire object of writing is to do so correctly. Then, like a dancer who at all times worries about the position of their feet and so destroys the dance, they become so focused on words and syntax that their writing collapses into conceptual incoherence and communicative vacuousness.

Ironically, although basic writers may become obsessed with the formal side of language, error itself is not best understood as a grammatical notion. Linguists for many years have deliberately avoided the terms *correctness* and *error* in their scientific descriptions of language. Sentences that do not conform to the grammatical rules of a language are thus referred to as ungrammatical rather than *erroneous, incorrect, mistaken* or *wrong*. For linguists, the concept of error is too tied into value judgments to be of any use in language analysis. As Shaughnessy's title suggests, errors are better understood as matters of opinion—a product of differing expectations of what language users believe sentences should look like. So, for example, in the previous paragraph, if you, the reader, expect that pronouns should formally agree with their antecedents, you will see an error in my usage. I evidently do not think any such thing; through our divergent conceptions of acceptability we have created the error together.[1] The notion of error then depends more on discrepancy than on syntax.[2]

Investigations of Correctness

One issue that arises from this view of error is the question of applying the term "correctness" to language in any useful way even in the classroom. The essential problem is that if correctness is only definable in terms of conformity or divergence of expectations, are we not unjustifiably imposing our expectations on others by fiat when we use that term? Quite apart from the ethical considerations involved, there also arises a problem of intellectual coherence. If our use comes down to dictum: "This is correct because I say so!" then the application of the word correct to language seems a rather strained metaphor at best. The problem lies in the notion of correctness itself as it is used generally. It seems to require reference to some more solid criterion than simple expectations regarding language forms. The need for some outside anchor can perhaps be most succinctly seen in the dictionary definitions of the word. For example, the third edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* gives two definitions for the adjective form of correct. The first is "*Free from error or fault; true or accurate.*" This definition gives an understanding of correctness as conformity to reality; it is supported by that most transcendental and enigmatic of concepts: truth.[3] It may be significant to note that on a mundane level we apply

this sense of *correct* to what a person says or writes not via the idea of *correct language* but *correct statement*. We use *correct*, in this sense, to evaluate the content not the form of a message. In fact, it is hard to see how, it would be possible to apply this understanding of the term *correct* at all to form as opposed to meaning.

The second definition given in the *American Heritage*, "conforming to standards; proper: *correct behavior*," seems more promising. By putting it in second place the lexicographers may have meant to imply that this definition is derived from the first, and it is easy to see why it should be so considered. The grounding in this definition is made by reference to *standards*, which could be seen in some sense as a surrogate for the truth mentioned in the first sense because they are so much less absolute. This definition seems more promising for the purpose of judging texts because of the conventional nature of language. Furthermore, as Wittgenstein said, "language is an instrument," and instruments are not portrayals of reality, but they can be measured against standards. It may be significant, on this point, that the adjective, *standard* is so intimately associated with correctness in language. Correct language, then, could be seen as language which is judged to have fulfilled standards of some kind or another.

Yet the appeal to standards does not, in the end, solve the problem but only postpones it. Measuring in relation to standards implies an evaluation in terms of quality, and the notion of quality is very difficult to uphold with regard to language, at least when it is done without regard to meaning. There seems to be at least a tacit understanding of that fact in English composition. Many instructors, after all, go to considerable effort to try to extricate the notion of 'good,' or even 'effective' writing from 'correct' writing.

One way around the awkwardness involved with *correctness* is to eliminate it by substituting the more relativistic notion of *appropriateness* Some teachers of basic writing take essentially this approach with language features. They tell students that they respect their native dialects of English and that these dialects are fine for use outside class, but that features of the dialects are not *appropriate* for academic prose. This tactic has considerable appeal. Consider, for example, how it becomes possible to discuss the third person singular -s, a morpheme sometimes omitted in nonstandard varieties. Whereas traditionalists are hard pressed to come up with any coherent reason why "*she thinks*" should be more correct than "*she think*," composition teachers who use the notion of appropriateness sidestep the need to make any explanation whatsoever. They can respond much as they might to advisees who complain about some annoying and purposeless registration procedure. They can say, in effect, "Hey, I didn't make the rules. This is just the way things are. If you want to play the game, this is what you have to do." In fairness, that may be enough for many. Yet there is the

uncomfortable fact that if we take this approach, the appropriateness we ascribe to a usage seems to hang there with no justification like the registration procedure, awaiting the inevitable day in which it will be eliminated to everyone's relief. Such abolition furthermore seems improbable in the case of language prescription. Thus, there have been attempts to justify correctness in language by tying it to descriptions of actual usage. This approach seems to make intuitive sense, and certainly statements such as, 'the vast majority of native speakers use this form' might supply the necessary criteria for canonization of a usage as correct. Certainly this easily handles second language errors.

Unfortunately, however, basing correctness on usage has its difficulties too. First, traditionalists would decry this approach because it challenges prescriptive rules such as 'no split infinitives,' '*between* for only two,' and 'pronoun-antecedent agreement' since they are so rarely used in spontaneous discourse. The dumping of prescriptive rules has not always been seen as a drawback, however. In fact, during the first half of the century Charles C. Fries in the U.S. and Daniel Jones and Henry Wyld in England, proposed 'descriptive standards,' as they might be called, for just this purpose (see Crowley). Yet the apparent advance that came from the elimination of a number of illogical and widely flouted rules ran into a second problem: differences in usage (such as with third person singular verbs). To deal with variation, proponents of descriptive standards needed to use the language of a specific population as a model. The group chosen had to be quite small because language variation increases proportionally with the size of the population. As Fries noted, "the educated," the candidate group that immediately suggests itself as the model, was simply too large and difficult to define to function practically in that role. This fact, combined with questions of social status, led the proponents to select small elite groups. The most extreme case was Wyld, who, according to Crowley, actually began his career quite open to acceptance of various dialects. As time went on, however, he steadily narrowed his model population impelled by the inexorable logic of looking for an ever more consistent standard. The end result, as described in the following quote, would be more frightening were it less quaint:

> If I were asked among what class the 'best' English is most consistently heard at its best, I think, on the whole, I should say among officers of the British Regular Army. The utterance of these men is at once clear-cut and precise, yet free from affectation; at once downright and manly, yet in the highest degree refined and urbane. (Henry Wyld qtd. in Crowley 204)

The conclusion appears to be inescapable; we are in a double bind: On the one hand, it is impossible to apply the notion of 'correctness' to language form because there are no coherent grounds for doing so. Yet, on the other, it has proven quite hard to eliminate or replace.

Additional Reasons for Confusion

Two issues need to be clarified in order to begin to come to an understanding of correctness in language, and not incidentally why it matters so much to basic writers and those who work with them. The first concerns what we mean by language, since the word can have two distinct senses in casual usage. For example, when we say 'Griselda knows several languages,' we are alluding to her possession of a set of productive and receptive capacities. Chomsky refers to language in this sense as "I-language" or internal language. On the other hand, when we talk about Griselda's having used 'offensive language,' we are referring to something quite different: actual text.[4] Chomsky referred to language in this sense as "E-language" or external language. It is probably helpful to see I-language as a form of mental software—composed of grammar and lexicon—that translates thought into communicable form. E-language, by contrast, consists of the documents that this software produces. The characteristics of the software certainly constrain the ultimate form of the document—Spanish software produces Spanish documents—but a lot more goes into the creation of the document than the software alone.

Now, when we look at an essay, we are clearly seeing E-language, and one way we might think of characterizing features of that essay as correct or incorrect is whether they match up with expected results of the I-language that created them. If the form under consideration is the result of some glitch in production—a slip of the pen—there is little doubt that the form is in some easily defensible way, incorrect. However, the term *incorrect* has traditionally not been limited to this sense, which is in fact more like how linguists use the term *ungrammatical*. The use of the notion of *correctness*, by contrast, is complicated by factors that relate to the second issue: language variation. People do not all have the same I-language in their heads, and, moreover, these different varieties are sometimes evaluated differently. For one thing, I-languages are not so much learned in the traditional sense as reinvented in stages by learners through a long developmental process (see Pinker). The intermediate stages of this mental software are not as stable nor as complete as the final one. This phenomenon is well known in second language acquisition, of course, where the transitional varieties are known as "interlanguages" (see Bartholmae for an extension of this notion to basic writing). Again, it would not be terribly problematic to find the output of these interlanguages lacking in some way because they are idiosyncratic, unstable, and differ in basic ways from the target language. For that reason, perhaps, the use of *correctness* is less problematic in L2 contexts than for native speakers. Still, these sorts of judgments are not limited to developmental forms. After all, a writing exam written in rigorously grammatical Black English Vernacular is likely to result in a placement in a basic writing section.

The problem is that the value judgments placed on samples of text then carry with them, intentionally or not, implicit evaluations of I-languages. These I-languages, in turn, are associated with the communities that use them, or are perceived of as using them (as for example, Black English Vernacular is associated with African Americans). In the United States, the issue is further complicated by the fact that the disrespected varieties suspiciously match up with disenfranchised groups. This last fact has, for obvious reasons, been of concern to investigators of the sociolinguistics of composition. For example, James Sledd, Dennis Baron, and Sharon Zuber and Ann Reed have all argued that the lack of acceptance accorded these varieties is essentially a method for keeping the groups who use them in a subordinated position. Although these critics do not come out and say as much—and might very well wish to reject this corollary—it is difficult to avoid the negative implications concerning the field of basic writing that arise from their arguments. For if what they say is true, it seems inescapable that teachers of basic writing are intimately involved in a repugnant social process to the extent that they enforce or perpetuate standard language norms and their system of support.

However, I believe that the conclusions of these researchers are based on a substantial oversimplification of the basic principles of the sociolinguistics of language variation. They are built upon the false premise that the concept *dialect* is more or less interchangeable with that of *language variety*. Since dialect is generally understood as pertaining to social groups, every group is seen as possessing its own. From there it is easy to conclude that a speaker of the disrespected variety is forced to make the effort to learn the variety of an oppressor every time they are required not to use their own vernacular. Thus, the adoption of non-vernacular varieties is equated with not only extra effort but with the betrayal of their own group. The reality, however, is considerably more complicated. Some sociolinguists have observed that variation by social group—dialect—is only one dimension of language variation (Hudson; Halliday & Hasan). The other dimension is variation by situation or text type—register variation. Dialect and register interact in complex ways, and in practice can be hard to tease apart completely, which is why the distinction is easy to miss. A dialect contains various registers because people use it for different purposes. Register, on the other hand, sometimes becomes more closely aligned with specific dialectal varieties, in part, because people from different groups can become associated with different uses of language. The end result is that an individual typically controls various varieties of their native language for uses with different people and different situations. In other words, they will have a panoply of often closely related software in their heads, for use in a number of situations and with different individuals.

The application of *correctness* to the formal characteristics of one variety is still, no doubt, problematic. To say that the various features of, say, casual Suburban Los Angeles English are correct while those of, say Black English Vernacular, are wrong is both unjustifiable and a sign of more or less covert prejudice. The same can be said of similar arguments exalting a register such as standard written English. Judgments such as these are damaging because they put a person's capacity to produce language into question. Perhaps because our ability to produce language is so closely tied up with our humanity, the results of the linguistic insecurity these beliefs can produce can be devastating to a person's self esteem. What is wrong, however, is the picture of a nation composed of different identifiable ethnic or cultural groups all with their own varieties, which they would speak and write all the time if only left in peace to do so. As teachers and examiners required to make appraisals of language in the form of grades and comments, we are faced with an enormously complicated sociolinguistic situation. Oversimplifications based on ideological principles are not terribly helpful.

The Hidden Truth of Language Myths

However problematic it may be to describe some forms of language as correct and others as incorrect, the application of these notions is the predominant mode of metalinguistic discourse and has been arguably for ever. The earliest linguistic analyses we have, the work of ancient Indian grammarians such as Panini (5th century BCE), are attempts to do just that (Smith). Far less sophisticated efforts to prescribe the correct forms of language continue today in the newspaper columns by language 'mavens' such as Safire and Kirkpatrick and in classrooms. Whether modern or ancient, more or less knowledgeable about language, prescribers face similar problems; they must provide reasons why certain forms are to be preferred. Because, as we have seen, there are no a priori reasons to do so—there are indeed excellent reasons to not do so—they have had to manufacture the criteria for deciding correctness themselves.

This process of manufacturing is called prescriptive grammar, and it consists largely of two alternative strategies:[5] In the first, the patterns of one extant variety are established as 'more correct' than those of others, perhaps because 'better' people employ them. For example, the patterns of the English spoken in the triangle between London, Cambridge, and Oxford became the model for all written English during the Early Modern English period.[6] Currently the spoken patterns used by the mostly suburban middle classes are commonly thought to be more correct than those used by poor rural or urban classes in America. Linguists such as Jones, Wyld, and Fries proposed making

usage the only criterion for establishing correctness, but it has not traditionally been so. Prescriptive grammarians have also often used the second method which is to establish specific rules belonging to no variety, and then castigate speakers of whatever origin for not following them. Sundry high-minded, but linguistically incoherent justifications are given in support of the rules proposed. This strategy is the source of the typical prescriptive bugaboos, a few of which are collected in following list, along with the apparent basis for their invention:

The mandate that pronouns are supposed to agree in number with antecedents	based on the overgeneralization of language patterns.
The use of irregular plurals (and singulars) for borrowings, such as "criteria," "corpora," and "graffito"	based on the morphological patterns of the language of origin[7]
The prohibition of split infinitives	based on Latin grammar
The dictum that double negatives equal an affirmative	based on the application of notions of logic to grammar.
The notion that "between" is only valid for two objects	based on the reconstruction of etymology, "tween," in this case, being related to two.
The idea that whom should be used in verbal objects	based on resistance to linguistic change

What is important to keep in mind is that in every case, the rules are without basis, and the rationales given in their support are red herrings. There is *never* any rational justification for either, and as Crowley argued, they are usually stand-ins for other social issues. The dictums make so little sense, the arguments put forward in support are so spectacularly wrong-headed, and the supporters so blindly zealous in their belief, that linguists, as serious investigators of language, tend to be driven nearly to apoplexy by them. Pinker sums up many linguists' attitudes in the following two quotes:

> Most of the prescriptive rules of the language mavens make no sense on any level. They are bits of folklore that originated for screwball reasons several hundred years ago and have

> perpetuated themselves ever since. For as long as they have existed, speakers have flouted them, spawning identical plaints about the imminent decline of the language century after century. . . (373)
>
> One can choose to obsess over prescriptive rules, but they have no more to do with human language than the criteria for judging cats at a cat show have to do with mammalian biology (372)

What linguists such as Pinker may not realize, however, is that criticisms based on its irrationality have only limited potential in undermining prescriptive grammar because prescription is not a science but a myth. As long as prescriptive approaches to language reflect a certain social need, they will be preserved as is any myth. The point of prescriptive grammar is that it is a way of rationalizing and responding to the meaning inherent in language variation, meaning which is not readily apparent but is nonetheless there. Like other myths, prescription is a way of making sense of what we have not been able to put our fingers on clearly.

However, myths develop not for all areas of human life that are difficult to understand, but only for those that are significant in our lives, and language variation gives information of tremendous functional import. Dialect does not vary passively by social group as some sort of inherent characteristic; it is part of the communicative load of any message. It tells us information about the speaker's identity. As the following Biblical excerpt suggests, mythological treatments of this issue are nothing new:

> **JUDGES 12:4** Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead, and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said, Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.
> **12:5** And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;
> **12:6** Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.

The story in Judges expresses an understanding of the existence and dangers of the information derived from dialect variation as well as the inability of individuals to control it. The myths of prescription serve, in a more sophisticated way, as mechanisms for dealing with

the linguistic insecurity that arises out of this bind. They codify a series of usages which are then considered correct and incorrect and so provide grounds for arbitrating acceptability. The need for such arbitration explains the paradox of why the acceptance of 'authority in language,' as Milroy and Milroy put it, is still so unquestioned in societies whose dominant ideology is steeped in the notion of individual freedom. People feel safe in employing a particular word or grammatical structure if it is recommended by some authority: a handbook, teacher, or maven. Similarly, they feel justified in coming to negative conclusions about others if they can label their speech or writing as incorrect with reference to the criteria put forward by an authority, however spurious the criteria or unqualified the authority. Prescription provides mythological grounds for assertions of correctness in the absence of any more solid ones.

Just as dialectal variation provides important insights into correctness, so does register variation. Register variation has not been as closely examined as dialectal variation, but for teachers of writing it is arguably more important because register gives information relating to text-type. Specifically, formal differences between registers indicate the genre to which that text belongs. We know when we are reading an academic text, listening to a formal conversation, reading a friendly or business letter, in large part through a series of formal features that we do not normally think of as meaningful. It is not just that certain features are appropriate, then, in some abstract and arbitrary way for certain genres of discourse because 'that's the way it is.' It is that these features supply us with the information we need to categorize one text in relation to others; they supply a form of intertextual meaning. Note, however, that intertextual relations are not just indicated by grammatical features; they can be expressed by any type of similarity or difference, including rhyme schemes, meter, number of feet per line in poetry, and similar phrasing and shared vocabulary in prose. For example, the alliteration, semantics, and formal character of the title of this article were intended as a reference to Shaughnessy's earlier work. The similarity indicates that I would like this work to be seen as a continuation in the line of thought about basic writing which Shaughnessy inaugurated. By my very title, I remind potential readers of that precedent and ask them to keep it in mind if they choose to read this article. More generally, my choice of words, spelling, and grammar are intended to place my text into the web of texts that make up the academic genre. My use of singular they and split infinitives, on the other hand, distance my piece from the more conservative lines of that tradition. This role of form may not usually be consciously noticed, but it is of the utmost importance to writers and readers; for, of such stylistic matter are constellations of texts formed in the universe of discourse.

This perspective leads to a coherent understanding of the notions of error and correctness in language, in particular why they matter. To sum up, the reference is not to *language as a system* (I-language) but to *a specific text* (E-language)—particularly to the relation between that text and others and to the social identity of the person who produces the text. The problem with applying *correctness* to language is caused by the attempt to refer to form alone, and form is beyond evaluation. Moreover, it is ethically and scientifically wrong to place value judgments on an individual's fully developed ability to produce language. To do this is to devalue that person's humanity and to judge the entire community which shares those abilities.

Looking at the meaning which the form expresses, however, solves both problems because meanings can be judged—barring the objections of certain relativistic philosophers and literary critics—as correct or incorrect. In this sense, correctness in language, may validly refer to the assessment of felicity of the information provided in a text about its genre and its writer's or speaker's social identity. Specifically, correct use of form is one that tells readers or listeners the information the writer or speaker wishes to convey regarding social and intertextual relations. Error, on the other hand, sends the wrong message, in terms of genre and identity about the text and its author. This definition is not precisely how correctness has been used traditionally in reference to language, nor does it precisely match either of the definitions given in the *American Heritage*. Correctness is based upon accuracy; it is an assertion that the information given by the formal features of the text truthfully portrays the identity of the author and the genre of the text.

The Meaning of Basic Writing

In this way, we can begin to understand the source of the expectations that so afflict basic writers. Errors tell us something we do not want to hear about people and texts; they force us to examine the text, the person who created it or both, rather than simply apprehending the communication that the person meant the text to impart. Correct language is felt to be transparent because it matches expectations; an error, on the other hand, is distracting because it challenges them. Note, however, one more point that affects basic writers: Societies use expectations of regularities in behavior, including language, to facilitate interactions. When these expectations become important they can also come to be enforced with moral pressure, and as such are norms (Bartsch). As Renate Bartsch argues, norms define a culture, and so they are highly valued by that culture. Flouting is taken as a threat to that culture, and violations are used to read people out, so to speak, of that culture. Basic writers' errors are understood by the academic community, by the larger society, and by many basic writers themselves as

a message of alienation from academic culture: thus that familiar refrain, 'I can't believe the person who wrote this is in college!' Basic writers' sometimes wild guessing at the nature and the forms of academic discourse is a reflection of students' cultural and the intellectual distance from the world of academe. At the same time, the guesses indicate the efforts they are making to move toward that world. Whether or not they vocalize the issue, or whatever the ambivalence they may have in this regard, for nontraditional students, coming to university implies a decision to make a cultural transformation. However, repeated failures on exams indicate to some students that they are not getting closer, producing the frustration, the magical thinking, and the sometimes desperate responses they have to their errors—the manifestation of their distance. If basic writers appear to be obsessed with getting the grammar right, it is in many ways a reasonable response; they are trying to send the message that they belong to the academic world they have come to join. They are desperately trying to say they are college students.

Basic writers and administrators are thus right in their belief that errors matter more than some teachers of writing have been prepared to admit—though in both cases their response to that understanding may be inappropriate to say the least. Basic writers' errors matter more than children's developmental errors or foreign-language errors to the extent they manifest the difference between being able to produce academic discourse or not being able to. The less the texts produced by writers look like previous texts in a genre, the less their texts are included in that genre. Since being able to produce recognizable academic texts is necessary for membership in the academic community, students' errors together with other stylistic infelicities mark the distinction between being accepted as members and being excluded from that community. Although in one way, the difference between proficient undergraduates and basic writers might be seen as a continuum in the relative number of errors, the notion of a cline is in some essential ways misleading. The question is crucially acceptance or rejection whether it is indicated by proficiency tests, grades in courses, portfolios, or any other means. The passing grade serves as the admissions committee.

The gatekeeping role of error and other stylistic demands is what makes basic writing a legitimate discipline, different from other forms of writing instruction. Error is a product of our expectations, but it is not entirely a vacuous one, nor is it simply based on prejudice. The message of exclusion that error carries with it is the issue basic writers and those who work with them confront. The issue is serious, particularly in a world where a college education may the only reasonable method for escape from the underclass for many. It will not go away, however, by attempts to abolish the category of basic writer by, say,

doing away with remedial programs in colleges and mainstreaming the students. The category remains because the words and forms used by basic writers will continue to tell the story of their alienation from academic discourse and academic life, and so frequently from their own dreams. In many cases this alienation, as Courtney Cazden points out, goes back to early grades. It is formed, often enough, from a clash between teachers' and students' cultures and literacy practices. The task of bridging that cultural and textual gap falls to teachers of basic writing, a task that we all know goes far beyond correcting, beyond teaching rhetorical principles. A basic writing class is, at its best, a form of acculturation into novel forms of literacy; even more than having as its object changing grammar and improving style and organization, it is focused on acquiring a new way of meaning.

Notes

[1]On this particular issue of usage, see Newman (1992, 1993) for a rationale for my usage.

[2]Of course any ungrammatical form will be understood as an error, but error is a catch-all category that is used for many linguistic and quasi-linguistic phenomena, including ungrammatical sequences, infractions of some pragmatic rules, violations of arcane prescriptions, interlanguage features, misspellings, and idiosyncratic uses of punctuation. This is no less the case despite attempts within the field of composition and ESL to oppose *error* to *mistake* by using *error* for what might be called motivated deviations from normative forms and *mistake* to apply to unsystematic slips (see, for example, Bartholomae, 1980).

[3]This interpretation of the definition should be understood lexicographically not philosophically; it is meant only to describe how the word is used in everyday life, and I make no claims about the nature or truth and reality. As, the editors of *JBW* pointed out in their response to a draft of this article, discussions of truth and language are inherently problematic, which in fact should be amply clear from this article.

[4]I use *text* following Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989) as referring to spoken as well as written language.

[5]I will disregard here the issue of ideologically based prescriptions, such as, those dealing with sexist language, and language deemed offensive to ethnic and other social groups. This is clearly a prescriptive movement, but its criteria are much different from those of the tradition.

[6]Although both literary English and spoken West Midlands dialects have evolved in their own ways since then.

[7]This criterion has now given rise to a curious phenomenon regarding sex reference. While on one hand, English has steadily elimi-

nated nouns that only refer to one sex, such as *hostess, poetess, Jewess,* and now even *waitress,* the idea of maintaining morphological integrity has brought in *Latina* to refer to a woman of Latin origin, preserving the gender of the Spanish word.

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Carol Severino

AN URBAN UNIVERSITY AND ITS ACADEMIC SUPPORT PROGRAM: TEACHING BASIC WRITING IN THE CONTEXT OF AN "URBAN MISSION"

ABSTRACT: The author traces the uses of the "urban mission" trope both nationally and locally as it pertains to the history of the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Educational Assistance Program. Such institutional and support programs histories are important to basic writing teachers because these programs have served tens of thousands of basic writers in the last twenty-five years. The political dynamics described in this Chicago "story" often determine which and how many students deemed "basic writers" appear in our classrooms, or even whether we teach basic writing courses at all.

> When we lost and they began building the university there, it was such a devastating thing for us to watch it and to walk around day after day.
>
> Florence Scala, Director,
> Halsted-Harrison Community Group

An urban university and its academic support program are related to one another through its "urban mission," a useful trope for examining political dynamics and cultural conflicts in American urban higher education. This essay traces the uses of the "urban mission" trope both nationally and locally, as I relate the history of University of Illi-

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nois at Chicago (UIC) and the Educational Assistance Program (EAP). For the course of its twenty-five years (1968-1993), EAP was the largest support program on campus, serving approximately 10,000 students. For twelve of those years (1978-1990), I taught basic writing for EAP and witnessed a drama of political conflict, social change, and ultimate loss revolving around differing definitions of the "urban mission."

The history of institutions and their academic support programs is important for basic writing teachers for several reasons. First, academic support programs have served tens of thousands of basic writers in the last twenty-five years. Secondly, growing xenophobia and "metrophobia" climate threaten the survival not only of support programs but of urban institutions themselves. The political dynamics I describe here often determine which and how many students deemed "basic writers" appear in our classrooms or even whether we teach basic writing courses at all.

Definitions of "Urban Mission"

An "urban mission" is commonly defined as a university's social and moral responsibility or obligation to serve the city in teaching, research, and service. However, many variations of the urban mission theme exist; definitions vary according to the politics of particular interest groups and individuals on and off campus. To real estate developers, HUD officials, and university and municipal administrators, an urban mission can mean urban renewal in the area surrounding the university to remove the blight of ghetto neighborhoods. To community and student activists, however, it can mean exactly the opposite: organizing against those very same efforts at urban renewal, or "urban removal" as it is often called, referring to the removal of African Americans and other minorities and the poor and working class. Particular policy implementations of a college's urban mission are tied to whichever component of the triad— teaching, research, or service—is emphasized in the institution's strategic plan or mission statement (Waetjen and Muffo; Cafferty; Richardson and Bender). Such implementations include urban and ethnic studies programs; use of the city as a research laboratory or observatory; and, most importantly (because it acts as a bridge between campus and community) academic support programs for students who graduated from nearby urban high schools. Operating under affirmative action and multicultural agendas, academic support programs serve students historically underrepresented in four-year institutions, often first-generation college students who might not attend or graduate from the institution were it not for the special program. Since the late sixties, when support programs developed as a response to the demands of civil rights

campaigns on campuses, support program students have been given various labels by educators and administrators: "underprivileged," "disprivileged," "marginal," "high-risk," "at-risk," "underprepared," "underserved," and most recently "underrepresented." These students are often the "basic writers" served by composition programs.

The particular phrase "urban mission" originates from an analogy based on the rural research and service mission of the land-grant colleges established by the 1862 Morrill Act (Kerr; Carnegie Commission; Richardson and Bender; Grobman). Land-grant universities had extension services to help farmers solve problems such as eliminating hog cholera and increasing corn production. Similarly, an urban mission reaches out to the urban community to help citizens solve problems such as crime and illiteracy. However, the rural/urban mission analogy does not always hold up. Agricultural problems are more easily researched than urban human problems; also, extension agents and farmers solved these problems collaboratively, whereas the Ford Foundation urban mission projects of the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by "profs in the 'hood" who often did not view expertise as shared by them and their clients (see Szanton) — the same missionary mentality that we argue against in composition studies in favor of students and teachers reciprocally learning about one another's cultures and literacies (Bizzell; DiPardo; Severino).

Historical roots of a university's urban mission were also established in the Progressive Era at the University of Chicago (UC), UIC's neighbor to the south. At the turn of the century, one quarter of the University of Chicago faculty was involved in efforts to change laws and policies to help the victims of urbanization, poverty, and child labor. UC's Sociology faculty systematically studied the conditions of urban victimization with the aim of reform. They believed that "scholarship should be freed from medievalism and dialectics and come to mean social service" (Diner 29). What we now call "social action research" is another enactment of an urban mission, which like the academic support program, can integrate teaching, research, and service for the benefit of disenfranchized communities in the city.

Regarding good community service as both good politics and good public relations, the University of Chicago's Extension services were intimately involved in the Settlement House movement led by reformer Jane Addams. By 1908, Jane Addams' Hull House taught and served up to 9000 neighborhood residents a week on Chicago's Near West Side, the future site of the University of Illinois at Chicago. Hull House was a network of cultural and educational programs: a lecture- discussion series, courses in music, drama, sports, and cooking, an art gallery, day care center, medical center, legal aid clinic, gymnasium, and theatre. Addams did not direct these programs from a missionary or charitable stance, but from a stance she called "neighborliness"

(Addams; Belsito). She advocated a reciprocal relationship for Hull House's teacher-residents and students, similar to the stance recommended by composition studies for basic writing teachers and students: "...Residents must always come in the attitude of students..." (Addams 24). She advocated doing good *with* others, not *to* them. Torn down in the early sixties to build UIC, Hull House and its urban mission has always had the potential to influence UIC's process of self- definition and the community orientedness of its educational programs.

The Birth of UIC: An Urban Mission Deal?

The University of Illinois at Chicago opened in 1965 to replace an overcrowded, two-year temporary branch built in 1946 at Navy Pier for returning World War II veterans. UIC had a violent and controversial birth because two "urban missions" – Hull House and the brand new Holy Guardian Angels parish – as well as several neighborhoods, were demolished to make room for it. It was a tragedy for 10,000 Near West Side residents who, despite an active, multiracial community protest movement, lost their homes to the 118-acre campus. Many Chicagoans inside and outside UIC believe the Near West Side communities were directly promised services and access to education at UIC as compensation for the destruction of their neighborhoods and 11 of Hull House's 13 buildings. It was commonly believed "an urban mission deal" had been struck between the Little Italy, the largest of the destroyed ethnic communities, and late Mayor Richard J. Daley, who needed visible evidence of a UIC campus to win his 1963 mayoral election campaign. For example, sociologist Gary Orfield wrote that "UIC obtained its site in return for a commitment to an urban mission" (55). According to Finley Campbell, one of the basic writing teachers for the Educational Assistance Program, "UIC justified the destruction of this urban community by saying that it would have as its mission sensitivity to and recruitment of urban constituents." He attributed the "urban mission" term to Florence Scala, director of the Halsted-Harrison Community Group Inc. and leader of the movement to stop the destruction of Hull House and the Near West Side to build the university (personal interview).

However, according to Scala, in the late fifties and early sixties, when plans were being finalized to locate UIC on the Near West Side, neither officials nor community members used the term "urban mission." No city, state, or university official ever explicitly promised education and service specifically to the urban-renewed Italian, Greek, Mexican, and Black communities. Scala said that city and university administrators promised only economic compensation – money that students would spend on rents and on food in the restaurants and grocery stores of what was left of the Little Italy neighborhood. She never

heard the words "urban mission" at any meeting. There were only two appeals, she said: "the pocketbook argument to the local community and the needs argument to the public...The urban mission argument was an afterthought." Although flattered that the "urban mission" is attributed to her, she denies that she invented or used it in her speeches (personal interview). Hence, the association of the urban mission with the community movement to resist UIC is founded on a myth, although it later became rhetorically effective in constructing arguments for UIC's support programs and against more stringent admissions policies.

Although Mayor Daley had promised a university for the sons and daughters of the working class (Rosen 63), a very broad definition of the urban mission, very few of the working class Italian, Greek, Mexican, or Black youth from the Halsted-Harrison neighborhood actually attended UIC when it opened. Community/university connections were very weak at this time. Neighborhood residents and ex-residents referred to UIC's new concrete buildings as "the Tombs—the gravemarkers of our homes" (Chabala 3). UIC discouraged students from tutoring underprivileged neighborhood youth because of the perceived legal problems of safety and liability. The new university's attitude toward its urban community was symbolized by a brick wall separating it from the neighborhood. In a response to the student newspaper's question, "What does the new campus mean to you?" Scala bitterly responded:

> It means that a high brick wall isolates the campus from the people who live on the near west side. It means that the power for urban renewal is the most divisive political weapon that can be used against our communities to gain political ends...

Some UIC students also complained about the wall. An editorial in the *Chicago Illini* guiltily asserted: "If we treat our neighbors as equals rather than as lower class animals, we can hope some day to be accepted as friends rather than unwelcome intruders" ("Our New Neighbors" 4).

The comments of the head of the Philosophy Department at a 1969 UIC Conference on Long-range Planning help explain the presence of the brick wall and the attitude of many faculty about the university's location: "An urban university is not a different kind of university. It is rather where an excellent university needs to be." He explicitly denied an urban mission obligating the university to its neighbors, saying that the city provides unique "vitality and facilities, not unique responsibilities" (Buhse et al.)

As will become even more clear, UIC has always been ambivalent about embracing the urban mission to be *in and of* the city. For thirty

years, it has wavered between wanting to be *in and of*, and wanting to be *in, but not of* the city. In fact, the *Chicago Tribune* once commented accusingly that the initials UIC should stand for "University Isolated from Chicago" (Stukel "Parting Thoughts" 10). According to the 1972 Scope and Mission Statement for the University of Illinois, "No issue related to the mission of the University of Illinois and its basic planning assumptions has been so mired in uncertainty and controversy as the future of the Chicago Circle Campus" (5).

The Birth of EAP

It was not until the peak of the national civil rights movements in the sixties, when the Black communities of the nearby West Side and a few UIC faculty felt the need for a program to recruit neighborhood students, that the term "urban mission" was used as a social conscience reminder of the university's obligation to compensate for destruction of the surrounding neighborhoods. Later, in the seventies and eighties, "urban mission" was a rallying cry and organizing tool when the support program and the education of the Black and Latino students it served were threatened. As many of the remaining Italians and Greeks moved to the suburbs, weakening their influence in UIC/community politics, the urban mission came to mean the ways in which Blacks and Latinos would get compensated, not only for the local displacement of their people in Chicago, but also for their exclusion by the larger society (Leonard Ramirez, personal interview).

Several UIC professors from education, math, and physics thought it was socially unconscionable for the university to be located among inner city neighborhoods that it had partially destroyed without educating its residents in the Jane Addams tradition of neighborliness. According to Julius Menacker, one of the founders of the academic support program, these few professors became very unpopular with the majority of the faculty, who felt that helping surrounding neighborhoods would interfere with UIC's becoming a traditional research university. In particular, these faculty thought that recruiting underprepared urban youth and serving as their ladder out of the ghetto would undermine efforts to eliminate the image of UIC as pastoral Urbana-Champaign's poor ugly urban stepsister. The opinion of the head of the German Department cited in a self-study document was typical of many faculty.

> The immediate danger facing UIC as an institution is that its urban location will increase the pressure felt nationally to admit insufficiently prepared students to such an extent that lower standards of performance and instruction will begin to prevail and the current effort to achieve excellence will falter and be reversed. (Buhse et al.)

External political pressures contributed to the founding of EAP as well. Black community organizations on the West Side, especially the West Side Organization, wanted more representation than the approximately 100 Blacks then attending UIC, many of whom were experiencing racism on campus. John Long, a UIC student in the late sixties, now director of UIC's Upward Bound Program, recalls how Black students met weekly in the Pier Room Cafeteria to compare the ways they had been insulted by their professors (personal interview).

Menacker, who is White, said he was motivated to start the program by his belief in an urban mission, by national and local civil rights pressure, and by the educational literature on developmental learning (personal interview). He and two African Americans, George Giles and Robert Carter, modeled EAP on the City University of New York's SEEK program (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge), the prototype for postsecondary academic support programs in the United States. SEEK's components worked together holistically to benefit the student: recruitment, admissions, counseling, classroom instruction, and tutoring. The fact that SEEK was considered "the City University of New York's instrument for looking at itself" (Robert Young quoted in Marshak 26) emphasizes the role of the support program as the social conscience of the university. Like most support programs, EAP offered personalized, "family-style" attention to counteract the alienation and anonymity of a large urban commuter campus. When students were in academic trouble, their EAP counselors would go to the Pier Room to find and advise them—a kind of intrusive "tough love" counseling. As one UIC dean remarked, "Why wouldn't students prefer to get academic advice from someone who knows their name?"

After the Chicago riots following the death of Martin Luther King in 1968, the small, improvised recruitment and tutoring program was formalized and enlarged. Nationwide, similar support programs were either started or expanded because of the riots (Ballard; Peterson)—"cheap fire insurance," as one academic support program administrator called the hastily assembled and/or expanded support programs. Strong Black leadership was needed as part of the protection plan. Jacob Jennings came from Champaign- Urbana to be a community liaison to the Chancellor, and James Griggs, designer of War on Poverty programs, was brought in from Chicago's Department of Human Services to direct EAP; he stayed until he became President of Malcolm X College of the City Colleges of Chicago in 1977.

Griggs is called "the architect of EAP" because he brought together under one roof pieces and personnel of the program that were scattered in different university units; he obtained a budget for EAP and helped design instructional components in basic writing and math. Under his administration, the number of EAP students rose from 300 to 2,300 and the number of staff from 10 to 50 (Winter 1). He acquired

two floors of office space and made the name "Educational Assistance Program" stick. According to Griggs, "The university knew that the urban mission had something to do with the community but they didn't know what to *do* in the community" (personal interview). The university/community connection was strengthened because prospective EAP students were referred by neighborhood organizations and churches, not only by Chicago high schools, many of whose teachers and guidance counselors regarded UIC as unfriendly to Black, Latino, and working class and poor students. Recruiters were called "community liaisons"; they passed out applications where they found prospective students—at Burger King and McDonald's as well as at high schools.

Griggs' vision of the urban mission was not limited to the program, simultaneously a strength and a weakness of his leadership style. He believed EAP was an instrument of reform and political training for students and staff that would have spin-off and ripple effects in both the community and at UIC. "The program was meant to be like a bullet," he said (personal interview). The weakness of his approach was that some staff felt neglected in their day-to-day operations and dealings with students.

Under Griggs, EAP recruited hundreds more minority students for EAP because EAP community liaisons flooded the admissions system with Blacks and Latinos. Later, EAP's enrollment increased again when the university temporarily needed more student bodies and tuition for survival and to generate Full Time Equivalents (FTE's). These factors created a revolving door when high school course requirements were reduced in 1975; although EAP's budget was increased to almost a million dollars and new teachers and counselors were added, EAP instruction, tutoring, and advising were not expanded enough to accommodate these greater numbers of much less prepared students. For example, only 600 of the 1500 Black freshmen entering in 1976 returned for the sophomore year. Some faculty were frustrated teaching introductory college courses to students who did not have strong academic reading and writing skills. Rumors circulated to the press that some UIC students were reading at a fourth grade level. With its limited instructional resources and its strong community orientation, EAP under Griggs was more effective at recruiting than retaining underrepresented students. The political strategy was to use large numbers of admitted students to argue for more resources, a "we'll worry about retention later" stance which eventually backfired. According to Juan Guerra, first a community liaison and an EAP basic writing teacher, EAP's plan was to integrate UIC with Blacks and Latinos, "thereby democratizing academic culture and changing the complexion of the university." However, this plan was not met by equal efforts by the university and the program to plan in detail for

students' educational progress (personal interview). The implementation of this demographic and democratic urban mission lacked enough resources and follow-through to be successful.

Although EAP staff and students were multiracial, Blacks were the largest ethnic group; many units and departments on campus referred to EAP as "the Black Program," especially when Native Americans and a group of Latinos split off and formed their own separate programs—the Native American Support Program (NAP) and the Latin American Recruitment Program (LARP), later Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES).

Status of EAP as Urban Mission Gauge

In the seventies and eighties, "urban mission" was invoked by community representatives, student activists, and EAP staff whenever EAP was threatened by or actually experienced firings, cuts, or mainstreaming actions. Mirroring the national retrenchment trends caused in part by a recession, downsizing happened so often that the staff developed a siege mentality, doomsaying that the program would finally be totally dismantled. Every summer, basic writing teachers wondered whether they would have jobs in the fall. EAP staff, community organizations, and activist student organizations—the Black Student Organization for Communication, Frente Estudiantil, the Confederation of Latin American Students, and the Union of Mexicano and Chicano students—believed that UIC's commitment to an urban mission could be gauged by how it treated EAP and the smaller support programs. When EAP was mistreated by administration, UIC's commitment to the urban mission would be pronounced, at best, on the wane, at worst, completely forgotten. For example, Morris Brown, then head of the Near North Minority Recruitment Office, listed seven specific incidents of administrative discrimination against EAP between 1975 and 1978, especially (1) a commissioned report which unfairly blamed EAP and Griggs for poor retention of students who were "differently qualified" in the first place—inadmissible by university standards; (2) a new EAP director, Andrew Goodrich, chosen by the UIC administration even though he had been found "unacceptable" by the search committee for "losing too many programs" in his previous job; and (3) the raising of admissions requirements (Hart). All of these moves were seen as signalling the immanent demise of the program.

In the late seventies, UIC might have added instructional resources to stop the revolving door for the underrepresented and the underprepared or simply reinstituted high school core course requirements so that the students EAP recruited would have had a better chance. Instead, in a move aimed at changing UIC's image to that of a first-rank research institution, the administration decided to raise ad-

mission requirements and implement higher ACT's and high school ranks, a formula called the Selection Index. How and why did this happen?

The Council on Student Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention (CSRAR), composed largely of administrators handpicked by the Chancellor, voted for the change, saying, "We probably cannot continue to enroll such a large number of academically underprepared students as we have attempted to deal with in the past" ("CSRAR..."). EAP and other support programs refused to participate on the committee, viewing it as a rubber-stamp for the administration. At the same time, the committee proposed an Honors Program—considered an additional slap in the face by community activists and advocates for urban high school graduates.

"Urban Mission" was invoked as the rallying cry by the student and community movement against the Selection Index, a long and bitter battle. According to an editorial in the student newspaper, "Students here realize that if UIC was committed to its *urban mission*, Circle would be the nation's leading multilingual, multicultural institution of higher learning" [emphasis added] ("CSRAR"). The Alliance for Black Collegiate Women evoked the urban mission as compensation for urban renewal in a letter to the editor opposing the CSRAR report: "It is our belief that Chicago Circle has a definite political obligation to the community of Chicago. It was after all, our community that was demolished to erect the UIC" ("Black Women's Organization" 8). The Student Coalition Against the Selection Index also believed in the myth of "an urban mission deal" by public officials:

> The concept of Circle's "*Urban Mission*" (as the major public university in Chicago) was promised to the people of Chicago from public officials and University administrators in the 1960's. This "*Urban Mission*" was intended to orient Circle to serving the educational needs of the people of Chicago and provide the minorities and the poor from the diverse communities the opportunity to obtain a higher education. This "*Urban Mission*" which is explicitly repudiated in the CSRAR Report...must be protected. Circle must be opened up to the low-income and minority people of the city of Chicago [emphasis added] (8).

However, despite a series of demonstrations by students, community people, a few faculty members, and many EAP staff, the Selection Index was gradually implemented at all the UIC colleges. The Index became a barrier shutting out many Black, Latino, and White working class students.

The Down-sizing of EAP

To emphasize the university's new set of priorities, the raising of admission standards was followed a few years later by the gutting of EAP; 60% of the basic writing staff, all Blacks except one, several advisors, two math teachers, and a reading teacher were fired in two waves in 1982. The fired basic writing teachers had been vocal advocates for Black students. In all, fifteen teachers, more than a third of the entire EAP staff at that time, were eliminated. With firings, resignations, and non-replacements, EAP of the eighties was whittled down to one third the size of the program of the seventies—about twenty-five compared to the previous 80 recruiters, counselors, teachers, community liaisons, and administrators when EAP was at its peak. The program went from offering 36 sections per year of basic writing to only 12 sections. Because of raised admissions requirements and the multicultural orientation of Jean Lightfoot, the EAP director hired in 1983 after the purges, the new student population that the severely downsized EAP admitted was more international and more Caucasian. Families of EAP students were from all over the world, especially Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Korea, India, and the Philippines, making the basic writing classes more culturally and linguistically diverse. Fewer African Americans were recruited and admitted, although they were still the most numerous ethnic group in the program. Black students with a high enough selection index went out of state to more prestigious colleges. Latin American Recruitment and Educational Services (LARES) recruited more Latino students, but the total number of Blacks attending UIC during the eighties declined, following the national drop in Black college attendance, further contributing to the view that UIC's urban mission had been watered down.

Basic writing teacher Finley Campbell, fired in the first wave, explained that he lost his job and then his appeal for reinstatement because, like many support program teachers and composition teachers in general, he did not have regular faculty status, but more importantly because, as he said, he was part of the "urban mission group." (Moneys that were earmarked for a special summer bridge program that Campbell organized were called "the urban mission fund.") Campbell was also a threat to the administration as an open member of an organization that advocated multiracial unity, also a feature of Florence Scala's earlier community movement against the building of UIC.

By the mid-eighties, UIC had developed graduate and professional programs and attracted talented faculty with national reputations, but community groups continued to question its commitment to students from nearby neighborhoods. Aida Sanchez, former head of the ASPIRA of Illinois (an organization that promotes educational opportunities

for Latinos), now a member of the Illinois Board of Trustees, contrasted the urban mission with a research mission:

> We're concerned that the university has been moving away from its *urban mission* to a research mission, bringing in a lot of Ph.D.'s and ignoring minority students. We have no problem with the university wanting to be Harvard on Halsted Street, but we want our kids to get a piece of the action [emphasis added] (Camper 16).

The Urban Mission in the Nineties and the Death of EAP

What has happened to urban mission discourse at UIC in the nineties? Recently a faculty committee in charge of reconstructing and urbanizing UIC's strategic planning document deliberately decided to omit the term "urban mission" because it evoked the community and student activist era of the sixties and seventies. They agreed that the term "urban mission" had too many sixties storefront or community college connotations. According to James Stukel, former UIC Chancellor and now President of the University of Illinois system, "urban mission" is "a dirty word," reminding faculty of the revolving door for the underprepared (personal interview). The committee even discussed at length eliminating the term "urban university" despite the fact that UIC, composed largely of concrete, steel, and asphalt, is located between the towering skyscrapers of the downtown and sprawling west side slums, a site that could not appear more urban. The compromise was that "urban mission" was omitted and replaced by "urban university in a land-grant tradition," evoking the land-grant analogy.

In the new mission statement, "Preparing UIC for the 21st Century," the new urban vision is national and international, not just local. The "urban mission" is deemed "narrow" and dismissed; UIC is now more oriented to *the world* than to *its neighborhood*:

> The conception of UIC as a leading urban university is not a narrow one, the kind that has too often in the past characterized campus discussions of "the urban mission." Rather, the vision of this "leading urban university"... is one in which a first-rate university takes maximum advantage of its setting and devotes major attention and resources to issues confronting contemporary urban life. This attention is not confined to Chicago and its immediate environs. It has national and international dimensions (2).

The same mission statement announced an outreach program called "Great Cities" to serve Chicago, specifically to improve busi-

ness conditions, K-12 education, health care, and to educate the underrepresented, indicatively last on the list. As if to emphasize that the "underrepresented" were the lowest priority, a recommendation was made in the document to review support services and to raise (once again) the required ACT score by 1996-97 (5), a plan supported by the new Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences (Arden 2). In 1993, in a move parallel to the gutting of the program eleven years earlier, what remained of EAP's instructional component was transferred to Student Counseling's Academic Center for Excellence (ACE), its multiracial character was erased, and an all-Black recruitment and support program, the African American Academic Network (AAAN), was established in its place. The university hopes AAAN will be as successful in recruiting and retaining Blacks as LARES has been for Latinos.

The rationale for making EAP an all-Black program was to unify recruitment and support services for African Americans, the least numerous and most at-risk of the four major ethnic groups on campus—Caucasians, Asians, Hispanics, and African Americans. However, a distinct disadvantage, emphasized by Diane Hodges and Cathleen Collins, respectively the former and current AAAN directors, is that AAAN is a support program focused on advising, not an academic program providing educational assistance (personal interview). In removing the instructional component, the teeth and the guts of a support program are gone. The move to turn EAP into an all-Black program was opposed not only by Jean Lightfoot, its last director, but by the Chancellor's Committee on the Status of Blacks, composed of Black UIC staff and faculty, which listed the negative effects of racial segregation and cited Brown vs. the Board of Education as a precedent for racial integration that was being violated. A recent evaluation of both EAP and LARES points out three disadvantages of ethnically based support programs: (1) duplication and overlap of services; (2) divisiveness and competition for scarce resources—the divide-and-conquer trap of ethnically based politics and education; and (3) denial by other campus programs of the need to deal with Black and Latino student issues because they are ostensibly the responsibility of the support programs.

The older Chicago-style model of segregated support services can be contrasted with a newer discipline-based or professionally based support program in which each academic program has its own set of support services to help at-risk students develop the particular skills and strategies of the profession. For example, the Urban Health Program, the Minority Engineering Recruitment and Retention Program, and the Minority Access Program in the College of Business Administration were all started or strengthened when EAP was being downsized between 1981-1983. Students may participate in both a professional and an ethnic support program, although sometimes they

receive conflicting advice perhaps indicative of the conflicting goals of the two types of programs. It is worth noting though that the majority of both the EAP/AAAN and LARES populations are in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, not Health Sciences, Business, or Engineering. Juan Guerra observes that professionally based support programs assimilated into the university system and power structure are perceived as threats, diffusing minority power bases and undermining the autonomy and control of programs like EAP (personal interview).

Removing the multiracial character and the instructional component from the support program is disappointing for another reason. Academic support programs, especially those that are community-based and politically edged, have historically provided fertile ground for the development of innovative literacy pedagogies. It was through SEEK at City College that Adrienne Rich and others designed a curriculum that combined classical texts with African American literature and grammar with creative writing. It was through SEEK that Mina Shaughnessy developed the original concept of basic writers, their logic of error, and assignment sequences that addressed both. It was through the Academic Advancement Program that Chip Anderson and Mike Rose developed the linked course approach to teaching college reading and writing. These approaches, first developed in support programs for basic writers, were eventually absorbed by mainstream reading and writing courses and spread to other institutions.

The EAP basic writing staff also developed teaching models that were tested and refined in its composition classrooms and then eventually adopted in remedial and mainstream composition classes, including (1) a round-robin workshop method based on Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen's *Beat Not the Poor Desk*. Students read aloud their own stories and essays based on Ponsot and Deen's seed sentence patterns to obtain suggestions for revision; many of these seed patterns result in the students' own "ethnic literature" that they present "live" to an audience of peers; (2) a more traditional ethnic studies approach, with students reading fiction and non-fiction works by authors of their own backgrounds—Black, Latino, Greek, Italian, Eastern European, and Asian essayists and fiction writers; (3) a literacy background approach, in which students read essays about the acts of reading and writing and are encouraged to probe their own literacy histories and examine their own reading and writing processes; (4) an approach based on the generative words of Paulo Freire and themes of Ira Shor, in which students select themes that are emotionally and politically loaded, for example, "neighborhood," "family," "power," and explore them by reading, writing, and talking about them; and (5) an oratorical approach based on transferring to writing the strong speaking skills and rich rhetorical traditions of Black students from religious backgrounds. This approach builds writing skills on speaking skills such

as signifying and rapping. These five literacy pedagogies are now part of mainstream courses. Clearly, support programs teachers with adequate resources produce innovative curriculum development.

The Urban Mission and the Academic Support Program

Launching the Great Cities programs has made UIC vulnerable to charges of hypocrisy for simultaneously taking over the land occupied by the 120-year old Maxwell Street market, which is now regulated by the Department of Consumer Affairs. Clearly UIC sees its expansion to the South and the removal and regulation of Maxwell Street as part of its urban mission (Stukel "New Location" 31), despite the fact that these moves have generated angry community protests reminiscent of Florence Scala's resistance movement 33 years ago when the Near West Side community was destroyed in 1963 to make room for UIC. At that time, Jesse Binford, the director of Hull House, and known as "the conscience of Chicago" (Burd 1), wrote a letter to the Chancellor requesting that the university assume some of the teaching and social service urban missions of Hull House, which was about to be bulldozed. Today, the programs under Great Cities, especially those that produce successful social action research and policy agendas in the Progressivist tradition, partially undertake some of those service, research, and teaching tasks of the Hull House urban mission. As Dick Simpson, former Chicago alderman and UIC Professor of Political Science remarked, "Great Cities is not really the urban mission we had in mind, but it's better than no urban mission at all" (personal conversation). UIC now educates more Latinos and Blacks, now respectively 16% and 11% of the student body (Stukel "New Location" 31). However, the urban mission tasks of educating underrepresented urban students are best accomplished, not through Great Cities projects or ethnically segregated advising programs, but through strong, racially integrated, community based, politically edged support programs with instructional components that emphasize reading and writing to ensure success in students' course work. This is the potential that EAP, because of overwhelming external and internal political factors, never did realize.

Academic support programs like EAP and its prototype SEEK have functioned as bridges between neighborhoods and the university and as the conscience of the university. They represent the urban mission to educate and serve students underrepresented in four-year institutions. In a kind of urban renewal palimpsest, EAP basic writing teachers taught according to the legacies of reciprocal neighborliness, multiracialism, and the urban mission they inherited from the Settlement House, Halsted-Harrison Community Group, and Civil Rights Movements.

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EVALUATING A BASIC WRITING PROGRAM

ABSTRACT: *The evaluation of a basic writing program can be beneficial in demonstrating the effectiveness of the program and useful in opening up a dialogue among the instructors in the program. This article describes an evaluation program that combines a variety of writing assessments – including pre-post impromptu essays, a multiple-choice editing test, and a portfolio assessment – with student and instructor questionnaires and with indirect measures to provide a comprehensive examination of a basic writing program.*

Many writing instructors view writing assessment with ambivalence. We do not believe that impromptu writing exams can measure students' progress, and we react with similar unease when portfolios are used for external assessment rather than for internal classroom instruction. When administrators mandate assessment plans at our colleges, we often feel "helpless and angry" (Haswell and Wyche-Smith, 220).

However, while we dislike assessment, we fear that it is linked to continued funding for our programs, despite the fact that program evaluations are rarely proposed as a potential means of increasing funding for basic writing programs. Mary Jo Berger has stressed the need for basic writing teachers to publicize what we do and to engage in more "talk," so that others can gain a better understanding of basic writers. Ann Berthoff answered her own question of "What Works? How Do We Know?" by stressing the importance of a lively response on the part of students whose imagination is engaged with their readings and their interpretation. Such engagement is, without question, essential, as is publicizing our work. But more important than public-

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ity, more important that the engagement of the imagination, is writing assessment. Writing assessment can ensure the success of our writing programs by indicating their effectiveness. Karen Greenberg has appropriately cautioned that "the resistance of basic writing teachers to designing and implementing effective assessment procedures and instruments creates a vacuum for university administrators or state legislators to fill" (65). In addition to providing evidence for greater financial support, writing assessment that is used for program evaluation can also indicate what has been successful, what has not, and where further change is necessary. For basic writing teachers, program evaluation opens up a dialogue and provides an opportunity for self-reflection.

Background of the Program

When a former colleague and I founded our basic writing program nearly two decades ago, we were advised to incorporate both direct and indirect writing assessment measures into an overall writing program evaluation in order to determine the effectiveness of our program. Hence, we developed an annual program evaluation that includes questionnaires from students and instructors, students' scores on the external, state-mandated College Level Academic Skills Test [CLAST], students' writing portfolio scores, and their improvement as measured on two pre-post writing assessments (an editing test and a holistically scored writing sample). Together, these instruments have provided a comprehensive evaluation that encompasses both products and processes, students' and instructors' attitudes, and the direct and indirect effects of instruction. Through these means, we have overcome some of the limitations of most evaluations of college writing programs (see Witte and Faigley for an analysis of these limitations).

Our annual evaluations, together with the fact that our "specially admitted "students graduate at a rate quite comparable to that of regularly admitted students, have helped us to obtain the necessary funding for our program from the provost even during severe financial retrenchments. But even more important than the external ramifications of the evaluation are their internal implications: the discussions, reflective teaching strategies, curriculum changes, and program-wide commitment they have encouraged in the participants.

Background of the Students and the Instructional Program

The developmental writing program, one of several services of the Reading and Writing Center, was initiated as a means of helping those students who have been specially admitted to the university under affirmative action. Begun in the late 1970's, this program includes a developmental reading and writing program, a math program, and tutorial and support services. Each year it has recruited approximately

275 students who have been identified as potentially successful college students despite having re-centered SAT scores below the 1010 minimum required for our competitive state university (where admissions scores for the cohort group typically average 1230). Approximately half the students are African-Americans, nearly half are Hispanic, and a few are Asian-American. For some, English is a second language. The goals of the writing program are (1) to enable students to improve their writing skills so that they can be successful in their college courses and (2) to enable students to pass the essay and English Language Skills sub-tests of the state-mandated CLAST. The primary goal is the *retention* of high-risk students, retention which depends largely on the improvement of their basic literacy skills.

The Instructional Program

The developmental writing program consists of small writing classes, capped at 12 students . The instructors, all of whom are highly experienced teachers, share a similar curriculum and assign letter grades. Instructors include both adjuncts with terminal degrees and graduate students pursuing their doctorates either in English or in related fields. A graduate manual on teaching in the developmental program is provided new instructors; in addition, all are observed and evaluated during the fall term. Ongoing staff training occurs at biweekly meetings when instructors share views on the curriculum, teaching strategies, and ways to handle individual student problems.

The program includes a preparatory-level course and a developmental course that span two terms. The preparatory course is for students whose grammar and sentence structure are so weak that written communication is severely impeded. The summer course is non-credit, but university credit is given for the autumn class. The course is taught as a workshop: Students write and revise numerous paragraphs based on personal experience and on selected readings, and work on grammar, usage, mechanics, and sentence structure.

The developmental writing course emphasizes thesis statement and essay development, and organization. This course meets for two periods a week during both terms for one credit each term. The curriculum for the course is based on the cognitive process work of Flower and Hayes and the social construction work of Bruffee. The writing assignments are expository and argumentative and are based on multicultural readings, field observations, interviews and personal experiences; collaborative work with peer editing is encouraged. Students practice prewriting, drafting, and revising strategies after conferencing with each other and with the instructor. During the fall term, students prepare a working portfolio from which they derive the "showcase" portfolio that determines their composition grade. Because the

preparatory and the developmental levels both emphasize the frequent writing of short compositions, the two levels of the developmental program are treated *as a single entity* for the purpose of program evaluation; no differentiation was made between the two levels.

The Writing Assessments

In addition to questionnaires, the writing program evaluation includes three writing assessments—a pre-post essay, a pre-post multiple-choice test, and externally scored portfolios. The pre-essay and the pre-multiple choice test are also used for placement purposes to determine whether students need to take the developmental course. At the end of the autumn, students' performance on the post-tests is compared to their performance on the pre-tests. This serves as one of the means by which the overall writing program is subsequently evaluated. Students clearly have some stakes in each of the writing assessments, although these are not high stakes .

The multiple-choice "Test of Writing Choices," developed by our Center, consists of 40 thematically linked questions that form a five-paragraph essay on the informal ways people continue their education beyond graduation. In much the same way students learn to edit and revise their own writings, students choose the best thesis sentence for the proposed introduction, alter material in body paragraphs, identify an appropriate conclusion, and edit two sample paragraphs for sentence structure, word choice, grammar, and mechanics. Not only has students' performance on the multiple-choice test proved to be a good indicator of their probable performance on the English Language Skills sub-test of the CLAST, but the test has also been administered to high school senior English classes and to college classes as part of a validation process. Although multiple-choice tests are viewed unfavorably today as an assessment tool, our test serves several valuable functions. It can be more quickly scored than any of our other tests, and the computerized "Summary of Errors" provides a diagnostic breakdown of students' recognition of rhetorical elements and selected grammatical principles. To those who suggest alternatives, such as scoring the initial essays analytically or using portfolios as a placement measure, the answer is always one of time constraints. Many students do not commit themselves to attending the university until shortly before the summer classes start. Thus, the multiple-choice test provides an initial measure of diagnostic feedback. Students' performance on the same test six months later becomes one means to gauge any change.

Students also write a 50-minute essay during the pre-testing session, and they take a comparable post-essay six months later. Each time, two different expository topics are given; the topics follow the

paradigm developed by Hoetker and Brossell for the state-mandated college-level writing course. Although the timed essay appears antithetical to the writing process, it enhances the accuracy of our placement approach. It requires students to think about the topic, generate ideas, write, and do limited proofreading. Used in combination with the editing test, the essay gives an early sense of where students are most likely to succeed in their college writing courses. If a student is misplaced through testing results, then that student can, by teacher recommendation, be placed in a different course during the first week of class.

The value of the essay test is limited not only by the time constraints that prevent revision but also by students' lack of access to resources. Garth Boomer, for example, has attacked such essay tests for the flawed, "stimulus-response model" of writing instruction they convey in their disregard for students' ownership of the task. Edward White also has acknowledged that writing under test conditions "represents a severely limited kind of reality" (1993, 91). Nevertheless, the timed essay provides a control factor of comparability for seeing how well students are able to write without assistance. This question is not incidental for our purposes inasmuch as these students also need to write a timed essay for the CLAST just a few terms into their college careers.

Holistic scoring is used to evaluate the timed essays and the portfolios as well. Not only is it more efficient than analytic scoring, but its theoretical principles reflect the philosophy of our writing program: Thus, the basic writers focus on composing short essays, and their study of grammar and mechanics is a corollary of a larger emphasis on writing as a means of communication and self-discovery. The raters have all had extensive scoring and teaching experience; one or two teach within the developmental program itself. Prior to the scoring, a training session is held with rangefinders and sample essays. The anonymity of the students is preserved, and each score is covered. Although holistic scoring has been criticized for its arbitrariness of standards (Charney, 1984; Elbow, 1991; Belanoff, 1991), Brian Huot found that "there is no evidence to conclude that holistic scoring practices impede the ability of raters to read and assess the quality of student writing" (227). And in her study of holistic scorers' reader logs and taped protocols, Willa Wolcott found additional evidence to support Huot's conclusion and Ed White's analysis of the "interpretive communities" that arise in a holistic scoring (1985). That communities of scorers can achieve consensus about standards was shown in the 1994 scoring of our developmental program in which non-adjacent scores or "splits" between two readers occurred less than 2% of the time; an alpha showed the interrater reliability to be .75 on a 4-point scale. Thus, despite its inherent limitations, the impromptu essay provides a valuable glimpse

into student's writing ability that helps not only for initial placement but also for program evaluation purposes.

Portfolios comprise the third writing assessment used for the program evaluation, although unlike the other two, they do not double as a placement tool. Rather, the writing portfolios students create in the autumn are evaluated by their instructors for the final composition course grade. A sample of these portfolios is then group-scored by all the program instructors to serve as part of the overall evaluation. Such portfolio assessment has proved effective in overcoming the limitations of the timed essays used in the direct writing assessment, for the portfolios reflect students' participation in all stages of the writing process and their painstaking efforts to improve through multiple revisions.

The portfolios typically contain six pieces of writing—four revisions of papers written outside class, one impromptu writing, and a reflective letter in which students review their progress as writers. Although students choose which selections they want for their "showcase" portfolios, they must complete every assignment as part of their ongoing "working" portfolio. Such a requirement may, as Irwin Weiser has suggested, make basic writers realize the extent to which their frequent writings can help them to improve (91). Moreover, during the preceding year we learned that without such a condition, some students would simply opt not to do an assignment at all, thereby negating altogether the value of having choice in the entries they wished to include in their portfolios. Notwithstanding the general requirements, each portfolio is distinctive. For example, papers written last year in response to a major inquiry paper, which required students to "go into the field" and, in a setting of their own choosing, observe the various ways that people responded, ranged tremendously in terms both of subject matter and of approaches taken. At the beginning of the semester, students are given copies of the criteria by which their portfolios will be scored, and they are also given reflective guides and asked to reflect upon their writing progress midway through the term. This guided exercise serves to provide the practice in self-reflection that such portfolio advocates as Roberta Camp and Kathryn Howard (1990) have deemed essential for students to improve their evaluative skills. The "showcase" portfolio includes a reflective letter.

At the end of the term a random sample of portfolios is generally collected from each classroom, and after instructors have met for a brief training and discussion period, the sample is holistically scored by the group as part of the program evaluation. During the scoring conducted for the 1994 evaluation, instructors occasionally exchanged information and anecdotes about their students, recounting how hard one student had worked, how much progress another had shown, or how difficult a particular assignment had been for someone. In this respect,

the informality of the portfolio scoring allowed readers, when appropriate or necessary, to construct a fuller context for certain portfolios and, consequently, a more complete portrait of those student writers.

Significantly, such discussions at the portfolio scoring also revealed where likely changes needed to be made in the curriculum. For example, instructors found that virtually all the students demonstrated difficulty both in writing summaries and in responding to essays. This common experience underscored the need for providing additional work in writing about readings. Similarly, instructors also determined from the scoring that the problems their own students had encountered in conducting their field observations for the inquiry project were typical of the group as a whole. Thus, everyone acknowledged that this assignment needed to be given later in the second semester. More than the other assessment forms, then, the portfolio assessment has been directly linked to the curriculum.

Portfolios have enhanced both the instructional program and the evaluation itself, but they have created new problems. Because portfolios take much longer to score than the timed essays of the direct writing assessment, only 24 portfolios randomly selected from the 54 portfolios scored once received a second, blind scoring in the 1994 evaluation; because of the time involved, the training procedures were also restricted to one portfolio. More training would surely have been preferable and might have resulted in closer agreement among the readers. That is, even though 24 portfolios (54%) received identical scores, 5 portfolios (or 21% of the portfolios scored twice) received scores 2 points apart, denoting "splits." Disagreement in the assigning of scores to portfolios is inevitable and differences among the interpretive community of readers should be valued. Peter Elbow has commented, in fact, that "given the tension between validity and reliability—the tradeoff between getting good pictures of what we are trying to test and good agreement among interpreters of those pictures—it makes most sense to put our chips on validity and allow reliability to suffer" (1991, xiii).

Hamp-Lyons and Condon have also emphasized the complexity of portfolio scoring with its "multiple texts. . . .that force readers to consider one text in the light of another, to weigh one against the other, and to make a decision that, while representing a judgment about the whole portfolio, is grounded in the weighing of the parts, rather than in a dominant impression of the whole" (180). Similarly, Sommers, Black, Daiker, and Stygall have stressed the importance of scorers' reading a portfolio completely to avoid being influenced by the "roller coaster" effect that comes from uneven pieces in a portfolio or by the "glow" effect left by a particularly strong piece (19). And the importance of context has been acknowledged in Despain and Hilgers' observation that "teacher-readers find assessment problematic when they

do not know the contexts of individual essays' production" (27). Such concern was readily apparent when two of our raters commented on the difficulty of evaluating the entries with their unfamiliar contexts in the pre-developmental writers' portfolios.

In addition to illustrating its complexity, the portfolio scoring revealed another potential source of difficulty—that of authenticating authorship of papers. As Belanoff has suggested, the amount of help a student receives in preparing a portfolio is not always an easy issue to resolve, especially in a writing workshop context in which collaboration is valued (1991, 31). Nor is the extent or the meaning of collaboration always clear. At our portfolio grading we discovered by chance that two students had submitted the same out-of-class entry with slightly different drafts. As a similar instance occurred the previous year, the problem underscored the potential difficulty of authenticating authorship especially when portfolios are used as an assessment tool. The issue of authorship, which the timed essay circumvents, remains somewhat problematic in portfolio assessment. Thus, we have found what research has suggested—namely, that each type of writing assessment contains its own strengths and limitations. Used together for a program evaluation, the different assessments provide a comprehensive portrait of each student's writing and reveal where the program has succeeded and where improvements need to be made.

Evaluation of the 1994 Program

The evaluation can be illustrated with the fairly typical results of the 1994 program. When the pre-post results of the 161 students who took all four tests—pre-post essays and pre-post multiple choice tests—are compared, the results show a statistically significant increase ($p>.0001$). That is, the average raw score on the 40-point multiple-choice test increased from 21.71 to 24.77; the average summer essay score (with two readers scoring on a 4-point scale) increased from 4.6 to 5.11. Several cautionary notes must be sounded before any interpretations of growth are made. The sample of students—161—was smaller than the actual enrollment, since the other students lacked one or more test scores for a variety of reasons. The 4-point scoring scale for the essay--retained in order not to alter placement procedures from previous years—is rather broad and does not allow for fine discriminations to be made. Further, as with all pre-post writing designs, limitations are inherent. Witte and Faigley have argued, for example, that improvement in writing development may occur slowly, may not appear in the written *product*, and may include multiple variables not considered in the evaluation (36).

The portfolios were scored on a scale of 6 points to enable finer discriminations to be drawn. For the sample of 54 portfolios randomly

chosen to receive one scoring, 36 received upper-half scores. Twenty were given a score of 4, reflecting overall work that was "usually solid in quality,"; 10 were assigned a score of 5, work "generally high in quality"; and 6 were rated a 6, indicating work "consistently high in quality." Of the 18 portfolios receiving lower-half scores, 17 received scores of 3, denoting "work that is uneven in quality" and 1 was given a score of 2, denoting "generally weak" work. None received the lowest scores. The portfolios conveyed the value of the emphasis given to revision in the developmental courses.

In addition to test scores, results were also obtained from the two sets of closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires that students answered anonymously. The responses to the summer program were very positive, with 80% of the students responding both that the course had helped them to improve their writing and that they felt better prepared to undertake the next writing course; additionally, most students liked the small size of the classes and appreciated the support of their teachers. Typical of the positive comments was one student's optional note that "I really liked this class and I feel I have learned so much to prepare me for my other clases [sic]." Other comments were—not surprisingly, given the mandatory placement of students in the classes—negative. Typical of this response was one student's comment, "The teacher was good, but I felt I don't need the course despite my test score." And one student wrote in a sadly ironic comment, "The class did not look a many writing problem; especially grammar. Felt very bady [sic] by this class need to go next level. over all I give it a C+."

On the portfolio questionnaires given in the autumn, 74% of the students responded that they liked—either "very much" or "to some extent"—the idea that a single portfolio grade served as their composition grade for their course. One student wrote, "Portfolio procedure is great allowed to feel confident in writings. Put more effort because grade was a composition grade." In particular, an overwhelming 98% liked the element of choice they had in deciding what to include in their portfolios. One student observed, "I would rather have a choice about my grade and feel good about it than having barriers around what we have to do. The choices of having which papers to put in my folder was helpful. Thanks." An equally large number of students believed the emphasis on revision had helped them improve as writers, and 72% found the idea of a reflective letter useful in making them evaluate their own progress as writers.

What bothered *half* the students, however, was the lack of letter grades assigned to individual essays throughout the term—even though instructors provided extensive feedback in a variety of forms, as well as an interim portfolio grade in midterm. Clearly, some basic writers still felt the need for traditional grading as one student even observed, "A single portfolio grade is not good because I couldn't

monitor my progress throughout the semester based only on the teacher's comment." In contrast to the students, the instructors liked the de-emphasis on grades that the portfolios encouraged. Not only did students generally need to read the comments before trying their revisions, but the portfolio approach also reduced the grade inflation that, as Weiser has noted, can sometimes occur with basic writers when instructors seek to reward their students' efforts.

The instructors, too, responded favorably on their optional questionnaires to portfolios, noting that the portfolios encouraged developmental writers to revise their work and compare their "growing competence" to earlier writings. One instructor noted, "Many students wrote more than the required number of drafts in order to perfect their work. I have never (or only very seldom) seen this happen without the portfolio requirement." Although some instructors expressed concern about the logistical issues of managing portfolios, they agreed that handling the multiple drafts was not much more time consuming than grading the individual papers would have been. One instructor noted that some of the end-of-semester crunch was eased by her familiarity with the students' entries. Another commented in a similar vein, "Though a teacher may actually look at more pages of work in portfolios, the familiarity the teacher develops with papers over the multiple revision process increases grading speed. It becomes easier to define exactly what you're looking for—both for yourself and for the student." Questionnaire responses from students and instructors are useful in providing personal perspectives about the program and serving as a springboard for serious staff discussions about probable changes.

External Effects of the Program

Witte and Faigley have called attention to the effects that writing programs always have--effects that may or may not be intended and may or may not be positive (41). In evaluating our program, we consider two external effects: One is our students' performance on the minimum competency test known as CLAST. Because passing this test has—until just recently when major statewide policy changes have occurred—been necessary for college students to graduate, one of our goals has been to help our students gain the necessary skills to pass this exam. That 71% (or 109) of the 151 students who opted to take the CLAST in the autumn of 1994 passed the essay sub-test was, in our view, a good sign; that only 51% of the same 151 passed the multiple-choice language skills portion corroborated the weak grasp of mechanics and grammar that some of our students have.

A second *indirect* effect we consider is the retention of the specially admitted students at the university. Because our second major goal is to help the students gain the skills they need to succeed at the institu-

tion, we view retention as indicative of how well we—together with many other aspects of university life—are succeeding in helping students. (As of late 1994, between 60 and 71% of the students specially admitted in 1992 and 1993 respectively were still at the university, underscoring perhaps the value of the early instructional programs they received.)

Conclusion

Although our evaluation approaches are not distinctive, our use of multiple sources of data is preferable to a single data source. Not only does the evaluation provide comprehensive information, but the information is also obtained without interfering with the ongoing curriculum. The key to our evaluation is *balance*—a balance of quantitative assessment measures with qualitative indicators of students' and instructors' attitudes toward the program. The limitations of the direct writing assessments are balanced by the comprehensive picture of students' work reflected in their portfolios, while the writing products are balanced by the draft evidence of the processes students used in preparing their entries. The scorings themselves reflect balance, with the external, experienced holistic scorers who rate the timed essays being balanced by the internal teacher-scorers who rate the portfolios. Therefore, the balance that derives from the triangulated perspective of the three assessment approaches, together with the questionnaire results and the indirect effects, makes the comprehensive nature of our evaluation—despite the time, effort, scoring expertise, and expense entailed—worthwhile.

Certainly, our evaluation is not without the flaws typical of many pre-post designs; using a control group would, if feasible, strengthen the results. But notwithstanding these limitations, the evaluation remains a critical part of our program. In an era of tight budgets and increased calls for accountability, we can, if necessary, through this comprehensive evaluation justify the worth of our developmental program by pointing to increased assessment scores, to the overall support reflected through the questionnaires, and to the positive results students achieve on indirect measures. Even more important than the benefits of *external* accountability, the results provide us with an *internal* impetus for reflection, as we use student performance and responses in a formative manner to discuss where curriculum changes need to be made. The evaluation helps to make our program a macrocosm of the writing process it entails—dynamic and recursive, as we seek through thoughtful dialogue to evaluate our goals and revise approaches, assignments, and materials to meet the changing needs of our students. Far more than a tool of external or summative accountability, the program evaluation impels us to be accountable to our-

selves, other instructors in the program, and ultimately, the developmental writing students themselves.

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FAILURE: THE STUDENT'S OR THE ASSESSMENT'S?

Abstract: *This study of an African American female who participated in a pilot project for underprepared college writers reveals the ways in which current assessment models fail to evaluate adequately the performance of socially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students. The analysis demonstrates the mismatch between the portfolio assessment practices in place and the texts the student produced. Assessment criteria are unable to acknowledge the blurring of genres that is evident in much writing today, and the controversies over the role of personal voice and the privileging of linear forms of organization in academic writing.*

> The issue, then, is not who misses the mark but whose misses matter and why.
>
> Bartholomae (Margins 68)

> Being in an college english class I felt I was final going to learn something about this word call english....I knew I was going to learn everything I always want to learn it made me feel good.
>
> Mica

Overview

In some ways, Mica was like other underprepared, basic writers who enrolled in the pilot program for developmental writers at our midwestern state university. Acknowledging her checkered academic

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past and resolved to start afresh, Mica was attracted to our pilot program. Instead of taking the traditional sequence of a three- hour, noncredit, basic writing course followed by a two-semester freshman writing course, students like Mica, whose placement essay exam indicated the need for developmental work in writing, could enroll in our program, which combined the developmental and the first semester freshman English courses. The pilot provided intensive support through increased contact time with faculty, collaboration with peers, and tutoring from upper class students who focused on improving students' writing and on assisting the freshmen in negotiating their ways into the university community. We used Mike Rose's ***Lives on the Boundary*** as a focal text to foreground issues of language and learning, access and denial, power and education, supplemented by brief articles from local and national sources.

The pilot program gave another option to students like Mica, a young African American, nineteen years old, and a single mother of a young child. Her high school performance garnered a 2.7 GPA but was interrupted by the emotional and physical demands of a pregnancy during her junior year. She scored in the fourth percentile on the Nelson-Denny reading test (equivalent to an upper elementary student) which placed her in the university's developmental reading course. She felt unsure about herself and her writing, and, in her own words, went through high school worried that "someone knew my secret and they were calling me dumb behind my back." She was a student "at risk" whose success at the university was a gamble. In addition, Mica found herself at a preponderantly white university, where 300 African American students often feel isolated in a university population of about 7,000. The university's demographics were mirrored in our pilot population; Mica was one of three African Americans out of a total of 45 enrolled in the Fall 1992 pilot.

However, Mica stood apart from her peers because she was a student whom our best teaching and assessment strategies did not serve. She forced us to rethink just about everything we did. Her writing continually challenged our expectations and ways of reading. Mica was also often vocal and forthright, letting us know what she was thinking, and not afraid of challenging us: "Why are you teaching us this?"; "What do you mean?"; "You said this yesterday and today you're telling us this!" Then, increasingly as the semester wore on, she became sullen and silent, defensive about our response to her writing. We had often praised her writing for its strong content and lively voice. At the same time, however, we would note the structural and grammatical problems that plagued every draft. She seemed confused about what she perceived as our ambivalence toward her writing.[1]

At the end of the semester, Mica failed the pilot program. We, however, asked ourselves how we had failed Mica, specifically in our as-

sessment of her work. With over 80% of the students passing the combined course with a "C" or better, it became particularly important to analyze reasons for Mica's failure.

The assessment practice we used is widely considered one of the best to date in the discipline: a holistically scored portfolio, judged pass/fail by English faculty both within and external to the pilot. Nonetheless, as we've reflected upon our assessment of Mica, we have come to believe that a mismatch exists between our portfolio criteria and the texts Mica produced, even texts that had been revised over the semester with our criteria in mind. We now doubt that current assessment criteria and practices can "read" Mica's work adequately, or the work of other culturally diverse students whom our institutions are publicly committed to educating. Jay Robinson and Patti Stock in "The Politics of Literacy" have written, "if we would be literate, and help others to become so, it is time for thoughtful listening to those voices that come from the margins; it is time for reflective reading of texts that inscribe those voices as centrally human ones" (313). While many of us have made progress in learning to listen to others' voices, this progress is not embodied adequately in our assessments.

While the profession discusses writing as embedded in a context, we represent writing in our assessments as uniform and monolithic. We may call for multiple samples by which to evaluate performance, but during the portfolio evaluation itself, we read each paper largely as an isolated text, not contextually or intertextually. And while we may specify different genres, the criteria we use for evaluation fail to acknowledge the blurring of genres that is evident in much writing both within and outside the academy today. Further, our criteria fail to recognize the current controversies over the role of personal voice in academic writing and argument. They also privilege of linear forms of organization. In short, our assessments penalize students for "missing the mark" in ways that may be incompatible with our profession's evolving notions of the socially contextualized nature of writing and discourse.

This paper, then, explores what we now see as our failure in assessing Mica's work and speculates on how we might reconceptualize the assessment of writing, particularly the writing of culturally diverse students.

Assessment and the Pilot Program

Briefly, our assessment required the students to submit a portfolio of four pieces selected from writing they had done during the course. While we urged students to incorporate ideas or examples from early papers in later ones or revise versions of early ones as their thinking on issues was deepened by the reading, writing, and discussions in

the course, the requirements for the portfolio didn't describe or reflect this. Rather they read quite conventionally:

a. Personal Reflective piece: This essay should demonstrate your ability to use details effectively to narrate/describe; it should have a focus, a point.

b. Expository piece: This essay should demonstrate your ability to create a thesis and support it with evidence—personal examples, examples of others, material from the coursepack or Rose.

c. Synthesis paper: This essay should demonstrate your ability to synthesize (make connections between) ideas from the coursepack, Rose, and your own thinking about education and work, to focus them in a thesis, and to present them in an organized and coherent fashion.

d. In-class/Impromptu paper: This essay should demonstrate your ability to write a clear and organized essay under timed conditions and without the opportunity to revise.

The criteria we shared with students and used as a department in the pass/fail evaluations of student portfolios also reflected traditional rubrics.

A Pass portfolio should demonstrate the ability to:

a. write fluently

b. grapple with a topic; develop and explore the implications of ideas and insights

c. provide a focus, generally through an explicit thesis statement

d. support ideas with reasons and/or examples from personal experience and/or outside sources

e. organize ideas into clear paragraphs

f. avoid multiple grammatical mistakes, particularly sentence boundary problems.

Challenges of Reading and Assessing Mica's Writing

The following essay, Mica's first of the semester, illustrates the difficulty we had in assessing her writing. The assignment asked the students to describe an experience or moment in their lives in which they learned something. By establishing a clear focus and drawing upon sensory details, they were to narrate the experience so that their readers could relive the moment with them and reflect upon what that experience taught them. Mica decided to write about the birth of her child. The first two paragraphs of her essay, entitled "Ready or Not," are reprinted below:

Waking up saying good-bye to everyone "Bye Mama, Beebee, and Chris". Oh well I'm left here in this empty house again no one to talk to. Don't anybody care that I'm 9 1/2 months pregnant and my stomach is as big as a beach ball, and that I wobble like a weeble when I walk.

I remember whimpering as if I was a two years old. Mica get a whole to yourself stop whimpering for your eyes get puffy. Baby, why don't you come out. All my friend have had their babies. What are you waiting on to come out of there; sweetie your mama is tired of being pregnant. I can remember being so angry that if anybody would have came over here I would have chewed them up alive. Oh! I got to get out of here before I go crazy. Running up and down the stairs, I figure if I jiggle you up then maybe you will come out. Doing this for five minutes and nothing happen. Just huffing and puffing like a dog sitting in the hot summer sun. Well, I guess I'll take me a shower. Getting undress and guess what the telephone rang, Oh, Oh, somebody cares about me. The Mrs. Know-it-all-mother-in-law, the bat. Hello, "Mica what are you doing?" "I replied, "nothing, I was about to get into the shower, can you call me back?" Yeah, bye bye. Wicked witch I never thought she cared. Oh well back to the shower. In the shower the water running on my stomach I can feel you in there come out of there my stomach began making the gesture like the baby was trying to really come out.

For most readers of freshman English essays, this paper misses the mark. It isn't "correct." Yet, we want to argue, these notions of "correctness" — correctness not only in terms of surface features but also of acceptable styles, genres and organization — though deeply embedded in our thinking and assessment criteria are often unstated and not fully examined. Mica's paper jars and challenges, yet it handles language in complex ways. It shifts from direct to indirect discourse; from Mica as narrator, to Mica as a character thinking aloud, to Mica speaking directly to other characters or her unborn child. But we dismiss this complexity and judge through the lens of "error." The direct discourse is often unmarked. Sentences are sometimes fragmented or fused. Tense shifts occur seemingly at random. The missing tense markers, particularly "d" or "ed," and copula ("to be") deletions reflect Black English Vernacular (BEV). Further, her organization contains nothing explicit.

Mica's writing did not include any of the distancing and reflecting that were part of our expectations for a personal reflective essay. In "Reflections on Academic Discourse: How It Relates to Freshmen and Colleagues," Peter Elbow explores how academic discourse assumes

"that we can separate the ideas and reasons and arguments from the person who holds them" (140).[2] Mica was unable or refused to squelch the personal—to separate the message from the messenger—to adopt a disinterested, objective stance. Her preference for situating her ideas in personal terms is seen in several other essays discussed later in this paper.

Rather than reading Mica's text for what it doesn't do, it can be read for what it is achieving. Robert Yagelski, for example, suggested in his 1994 CCCC presentation that we might evaluate a student text like this as personal testimony. Mica's writing does render the immediacy of her experience of labor with her first child. It is filled with strong details. The storying patterns, oral resonances, and rich rhythm give the piece its poignancy and power. These reflect a mode of discourse prevalent in Black English that Geneva Smitherman in ***Talkin and Testifyin: The Language of Black America*** defines as tonal semantics. One feature of tonal semantics, Smitherman notes, is the use of repetition, alliterative word play, and a striking and sustained use of metaphor, something seen throughout Mica's work (134). Mica writes about a jumbled, chaotic, and intensely personal time that demands a strong emotive voice. That Mica has achieved such a voice is a mark, not of a basic writer, but of an accomplished one.

Features similar to those in Mica's personal essay appeared in all of her subsequent writing in the course, including her summaries and explanatory essays. More clearly in those papers did we see how personal anecdotes are acceptable in academic discourse only when framed by generalizations. It is the framing that appears indispensable, for if a student like Mica offers a personal example without a corresponding generalization, the personal doesn't qualify as support.

David Bartholomaehas noted that all errors are not created equal.

> The errors that count in the work of basic writers have no clear and absolute value but gain value only in the ways that they put pressure on what we take to be correct, in the ways that these errors are different from acceptable errors. The work that remains for the profession is to determine the place of those unacceptable styles within an institutional setting, within an institution with its own styles of being right, its own habitual ways of thinking and writing (Margins 68–69).

Mica's paper challenged our habitual ways of assessing writing and left us questioning whether the "unacceptable" in Mica's writing might have a rightful place in a freshman writing course and in academic discourse more generally. Can the boundaries of academic discourse be broadened so that "personal testimony" or an "emotive voice" or "tonal semantics" might find a place? In suggesting this, we are not

suggesting that a student like Mica cannot or should not learn the dominant academic discourse, including what some describe as the "superficial features" of grammar, style, and mechanics. Nor are we suggesting that our job as teachers is not to help all students to do so, giving them access to many voices and styles. Nonetheless, we are suggesting that the writing of students like Mica may also call us to transform academic discourse and the assessment practices which support it.

Unpacking Metaphors of Exclusion: Deficiency, Foreignness, and Monogeneric Papers

Bartholomae demonstrates that we sort out and label "on the assumption that basic writers are defined by what they don't do (rather than by what they do), by the absence of whatever is present in literate discourse: cognitive maturity, reason, orderliness, conscious strategy, correctness" ("Margins" 67). While we immediately recognized a power and immediacy in Mica's writing, our early diagnoses of her work focused on deficits—the lack of reason, orderliness, conscious strategy, and correctness that Bartholomae (and our assessment guides) enumerate. These quick notes made for ourselves, for example, focus on what Mica failed to do in an expository essay exploring the distinction between child abuse and discipline, a paper that drew upon a time when she was accused of abusing a toddler at a day care center at which she worked:

> —problems framing the experience and/or moving between her frames/generalizations and her examples—movement is a key problem, transitions—abruptly inserts dictionary definitions of discipline and child abuse—moves directly into 1st person narrative example with no lead in and a complete shift in style—ends with question posed to reader rather than restatement (or even direct statement) of main point of paper—multiple tense marker errors and other BEV features—

While these notes exemplify error analysis and try to move beyond a simple recording of errors ("her moves show an awareness of what is needed"), they nonetheless show that we read Mica's essay primarily in terms of its deficits: it lacks conventional features of academic prose.

Here is the opening of the essay:

> Ten years ago if you told your child "don't do that," and they did it any way you would spank them for not listening to you. Back then the way you discipline your child was your business. Now days its everybodys business the way you discipline your child.

Child Abuse vs. Discipline

When do you know its child abuse? And when do you know it simply discipline.

DISCIPLINE is defined as training especially training of the mind.

CHILD ABUSE is defined as mistreatment of a child by parents or guardians.

It's Thursday, I said to myself, I have one more day before I can rest, rest, rest. Dealing with 20-5 kids a day really takes a lot out of you....

It was 10:05 and all the kids had arrived. We sang good morning to each other then split up in groups. We had a full load and that was about 25 kids so that made us have five kids a piece. As the day went along it was time for coloring. I caught one of my kids putting crayons in his mouth. "David get the crayons out of your mouth. They're not to eat, but to color," I said. He didn't have anything to say back. But as soon as I turned my head he had them back in his mouth. We went through this about four times. The fourth time I got up and tapped him on his hand—Not hit, or smack but tapped him on his hand. He didn't cry, he just took the crayons out of his mouth and continued coloring.

If, instead of assessing Mica's essay in terms of its deficits, we set it alongside some of the reading we were doing and asked students to do, Mica's style does not look so foreign or lacking. Her abrupt shifts and lack of transitions are not altogether dissimilar to those of Mike Rose in his opening of ***Lives on the Boundary***, the book used in our course.

Rose moves from description of students and of the university campus, to a carefully recorded observation of a teacher drawing out students' knowledge about the renaissance, to a pictorial image of the medieval goddess Grammatica which then functions metaphorically, to statistics about changing enrollment patterns in American universities—all of which create a rich and multifaceted collage. No explicit transitions mark the movements, only white space on the page.

Rose's style is quite different from directly stated thesis and support pattern that guides much of our instruction and assessment of basic writers. He interweaves precise objective description, vivid image, significant anecdote, personal experience, quotes from official documents, general statement, and reflection. Mica's child abuse paper parallels Rose in significant ways. Her essay is full of ideas and

passion as she explores the damaging consequences of mistaking discipline for child abuse and the difficulties of clearing your name, particularly if you are a single mother from a minority group, when charges of abuse have been leveled. She offers personal testimony, clearly conveys the events/examples, includes detail and dialogue to place the reader in the scene, and writes with a strong sense of conviction. While not using many of the devices of academic argument, she is nonetheless making a claim: that discipline should not be mistaken for child abuse. She elaborates upon her points and shows the harm that mistaking discipline for child abuse can cause. She writes to effect change.[3]

To take another example, David Bartholomae has demonstrated how a careful look at the writing of Patricia Williams, an African American legal scholar and author of ***The Alchemy of Race and Rights***, can cause us to question the way we read the prose of basic writers. Williams, like Rose, upsets our conventional expectations of academic prose. "Williams' writing is disunified: it mixes genres; it willfully forgets the distinctions between formal and colloquial, public and private; it makes unseemly comparisons. In many ways, her prose has the features we associate with basic writing, although here those features mark her achievement as a writer, not her failure" ("Tidy House" 11). We do not, Bartholomae suggests,

> read 'basic writing' the way we read Patricia Williams' prose, where the surprising texture of the prose stands as evidence of an attempt to negotiate the problems of language...She is trying to do something that can't be conventionally done. To say that our basic writers are less intentional, less skilled, is to say the obvious...It is possible...that when we define Williams-like student writing as less developed or less finished..., we are letting metaphors of development or process hide value-laden assumptions about thought, form, the writer, and the social world. ("Tidy House" 19)

Errors in Our Expectations

Two papers Mica wrote later in the course again show her defying our expectations about the appropriate form and content. In one, we had asked students to select an article, summarize it, and respond. Mica chose a collection of brief interviews concerning women and work entitled "Is Success Dangerous To Your Health?" She opens as follows:

> In reading the interview article, "**Is Success Dangerous to your Health**," none of the three interviewees in their interview explain or answer the question ask in the title of the interview, Is

> Success Dangerous to your Health? I couldn't grasp what the author was try to do however, what I did find in the article is "RESPECT". All of the three interviewees felt they were not respect. The title of the article pull me right into the paper. However, I was very disapointed not to find what I was looking for. Will my career affect my health in anyway.

Mica had written guidelines, model opening sentences, and class assistance on how to write a summary and response. However, she sets these aside (perhaps largely unconsciously) to pursue her own frustration with the title, a point she returns to in her conclusion where she unabashedly makes suggestions to the author about how to answer the question the title posed. Her "back talk" to the author is a significant rhetorical move, yet it and her use of first person belie the expectations for an objective summary. Again, our immediate response to Mica's summary/ response is to dismiss it as not meeting the terms of the assignment. And, indeed, it does not. However, her gutsy move in challenging the author surely demonstrates critical thinking as well as a critical engagement with the text, something our assessment practices sometimes overlook in favor of acceptable genre features. Consider, for example, the "safe" and predictable but totally unengaged five paragraph theme that passes without question. The paper passes, no doubt, because it can demonstrate the surface features and stylistic conventions of academic discourse: the clear structure, the explicit signposting, etc. But content—which we continually maintain is the most important feature when assessing any kind of prose—is often overlooked. Is this a "fair" and accurate assessment of either writer?

The last assignment of the semester was a synthesis paper which asked students to bring together their thinking about education or work, the two themes of the class. Students were to create a fresh look at the topic by making connections among the different readings from the course and integrating those with their views, experience, and writing done in earlier papers and in their journal.

Mica chose to write about education, specifically her experience in the pilot project. Our initial assessment of Mica's paper was that it failed to do what was expected. In our minds it did not "read" as a synthesis. The paper never established a focus in the form of a thesis statement, it failed to smoothly link specific examples and personal experience to generalizations, and it made little use of quotations from the reading as support. Instead, Mica recounted her experience from the beginning of the semester to the end with no immediately apparent synthesis or reflection, as these first two paragraphs suggest:

> It's first day in college, and I'm excited I drove around the hold campus to find a policeman so, I can get direction to my

class. Finally I found one he and looked like he was hiding behind the trees waiting to give someone a ticket. I drove over to him, and rolled down my window. "Can I help you?," He said, Yes you can I need help trying to find my class the room number z204. "O.K. young lady you keep straight on this street we one and turn right, Then you see this building a lot of people will be coming in and out of it." Thank you very much sir. I seen this big building about as half big as a major hotel like the Marriot Hotel. I entered the building, Everyone was walking so fast like they were in a marathon.

Finally, I found room z204 I walk in; it was pretty full. I sat by the window so I could look out of it since no one was talking. Being in a college English class I felt I was final going to learn something about this word call english. All through high school I felt so insure about writing, I always felt someone knew my secret and they were calling me dumb behind my back. I felt a little dumb but, I knew someday I will learn were to put a period, comma, and a semicolon without feel unsure about it. So, in college I felt this is when every thing is going to change. I knew I was going to learn everything I always want to learn it made me feel good.

The paper adopts a narrative stance from which it never departs, thus defying our expectations for a synthesis paper. However, if we temporarily put aside those expectations to read differently, the paper does synthesize Mica's experience in the pilot course. She captures the confusion and anxiety of a new student coming to a college campus for the first time, likening the campus buildings and the policeman's behavior to the closest thing she knows: the city. She compares our modern buildings to a Marriot hotel. That comparison, coupled with her admission of her "secret" about feeling "dumb," suggests how much strength it actually took to walk in the doors of our institution.

The paper shows Mica as a beginning writer, new to the university and its expectations, negotiating her way into academic discourse, just as she seeks to find her way physically into the academic campus. She explores issues of anxiety about writing, the pitfalls of peer response groups, and power relations in the classroom. This reading acknowledges a focus, which our initial reading could not because, limited by predetermined portfolio requirements and paper features, it linked focus with thesis. Now we realize that the focus was there: it was Mica's—her story of her first semester college English experience. The narrative mode was her way of shaping her experience, of telling her story.

Carolyn Heilbrun in ***Writing a Woman's Life*** discusses the ways female literary figures write to organize and make sense of their lives.

While Heilbrun is discussing works of fiction, not academic discourse, Jane Tompkins and other scholars writing academic discourse do directly call upon their personal experience to enrich and organize their understanding of professional concepts. If Tompkins, why not Mica? Certainly the profession is expanding its notion of what is acceptable in its own academic discourse. And while Mica's writing is far from model prose, and she does not have conscious control over the strategies she uses, her writing has made us realize that the time is ripe for a reconsideration of what is "acceptable" in student discourse as well.

Locating Oneself in the Privileged Discourse of the Academic World

Clearly, Mica is a student whose style betrays her and sets her apart from the mainstream at our—and most—college campuses. Perhaps, then, we need to assess Mica's work as her attempt to locate herself in the privileged discourse of the academic community. This would lead us to view her writing problems not as internal or cognitive, but rather as ones of appropriation. Mica's work throughout the course was marked by styles that clashed with our deeply embedded notions of academic discourse represented in our assignment and evaluation constructs. In assessing her, we judged these as deficits. Consistently rich in details, we said, but she could not control them. Our assignments called for the person, the details, yet our assessments demanded that these be "controlled," that specifics be framed, that thesis and generalization be tied to example. If her status in coming to the university is deeply divided, fragmentary, how can we expect a central point, a main idea?

David Bartholomae suggests

> if we take the problem of writing to be the problem of appropriating the power and authority of a particular way of speaking, then the relationship of the writer to the institutions within which he writes becomes central (the key feature in the stylistic struggle on the page) rather than peripheral (a social or political problem external to writing and therefore something to be politely ignored). ("Margins" 70)

Our assessment criteria didn't allow us to read Mica's prose as an attempt to negotiate the problems of language. Rather, the assessment criteria were presented as objective and uniform. Such criteria may protect us and the university community at large from looking critically at the mismatch between the rhetoric of our policies and programs for ethnically under-represented and academically underprepared students and the realities of their struggles to make sense of an unfamiliar social dialectic.[4]

Grammar Is Not Neutral

Mica describes quite poignantly her purpose in voluntarily enrolling in our pilot program: "I was final going to learn something about this word call english." She suggests an academic history fraught with insecurity, afraid that someone would find out her "secret." Interestingly, Mica views that secret and the solution to her problem as a mechanical one: "I knew someday I will learn were to put a period, comma, and a semicolon." This characterization of writing in terms of grammar, of course, is not unusual. Many writers (and teachers) conflate the two. (Consider the numbers of people who, when told that you are an English teacher, respond with a comment about "watching their grammar.") As we continued to study Mica's writing and reflect upon our work with her long after the semester ended, we began to understand how strongly Mica held to her belief in the power of punctuation. We realized that learning correct grammar *was* Mica's agenda. As Mina Shaughnessy noted, "grammar still symbolizes for some students one last chance to understand what is going on with written language so that they can control it rather than be controlled by it" (11).

Carolyn Hill discusses how grammar is a political issue to basic writers: "Grammar is not a neutral `thing' to them, rather a completely socialized representative of those authorities who **seem** to students to be outside themselves" (250). Later in her synthesis paper, Mica constructs her instructors' point of view and appears suspicious of our motives in not focusing dominantly upon grammatical issues. She writes:

> I enjoy every bit of writing I did in the class but, I felt disappoint cause I didn't learn what I want to learn in the class....I really felt that we should have discuss more of what I believe she saw going on in the class. Since, she mentioned it herself that she was having a problem with gammer, fused sentence, tense sentences, and fragments. We did work on this for a couple of days but i felt it wasn't enough.

In saying "we should have discuss more of what *I believe she saw going on in the class*" Mica seems to feel that we were unjustly withholding information that she believes could solve her writing problems and eliminate her "secret." That intensive one-on-one tutoring from peers and instructors, diagnostic analyses of her patterns of error, comparisons of her own patterns to typical nonstandard patterns of Black English Vernacular, and extensive opportunities for revision did not help Mica gain greater power over spelling, punctuation, and syntax remains one of our greatest puzzles.

Mica's sentence points to power relations in the classroom. Mica frames the teacher/student relationship as a struggle between two

people with two competing solutions to her writing problems. She is indignant (perhaps rightfully so) that her solution, more grammar instruction, is being ignored. In retrospect, we suspect that our actions are well described by Hill: "Ostensibly I wanted to give up authority, help students to be self-starters. Covertly, the institution and I collaborated to see to it that students be quickly notified if that start did not place them in the proper arms of Standard English, focused and controlled" (78).

Mica wanted to gain control over her writing and her errors; she wanted access to the social power identified with academic discourse. Yet neither she nor her instructors confronted this agenda centrally. Her relationship to the institution within which she wrote, her very placement in a basic writing course, the value placed by the university and those exercising influence in the society on copy editing, correctness and conventional styles were peripheral concerns. Correctness was thought of as context-free. That is something the English profession can no longer afford to assume. Perhaps that is why we saw such little change in these areas of Mica's writing.

Rethinking Assessment

Reexamining and questioning our assessment of Mica's portfolio has left us with more questions than answers. As we now critique our portfolio assessment we see that we inadvertently worked to keep intact the boundaries and borders by which basic writing is institutionally defined, ironically the very boundaries our pilot project meant to collapse.

Thus, while we endorse and encourage more courses like ours, courses which collapse borders and work to eliminate notions of basic writers as "foreigners,"[5] we realize that our assessment practices must evolve significantly as well.

First, we need to understand that assessment is complexly situated, and different audiences may require different evaluations. In reviewing our guidelines for a passing portfolio we would now ask, "For whom are we evaluating Mica's work?" During the portfolio reading, who is the primary audience? Is it Mica? Is our purpose to reveal to her where she has succeeded or failed in meeting the standards set for an introductory university writing course? Is the primary audience her future college instructors? If so, what do they need to learn about writing as a deeply embedded cultural and social act, about the time needed to acquire new discourse practices, and about current challenges to hierarchical patterns of organization if they are to determine what should constitute "passing" work in an introductory writing course which enrolls culturally diverse students? Or is the audience the local, state, or national community? The needs and interests of these groups differ; our assessments need to reflect this.

In addition, we need to devise ways to read student texts contextually and intertextually not only in the classroom setting but in evaluation sessions. Our prespecified portfolio requirements pressured us into reading each paper as an individual entity. What we now want to strive for is a more intertextual reading of the portfolios, an assessment practice that views the essays in a portfolio as interrelated and recursive. Read as a whole, Mica's papers have a surprising unity, both in content and approach. We wonder what would happen if during the portfolio evaluation we actively read Mica's work as her ongoing exploration of the issues that were central to her views of education, work, and mastery of written English. All of them contain strong narrative elements; all have a directness in confronting the issues she's chosen as her topics; all fail to clearly and explicitly link example to generalization, provide direct transitions, or follow a linear order; and all demonstrate a lack of control of surface features including spelling, word ending, person and tense inflections, and punctuation.

We need to resist (or read against) our unconscious notions of academic discourse as monolithic and standard. It's a myth that all synthesis papers will look like some imagined prototype of a synthesis paper. Yet, when evaluating portfolios holistically, we often operate under this myth. Papers that contain the expected features of a particular assignment pass without question, while quirky papers that don't easily correspond to a genre or mode—even if particularly rich in content—are often failed. Narrative strategies are undervalued, even when they are deeply reflective. In professional conferences and articles, we repeatedly remind ourselves to avoid false dichotomies, yet too often we fall back into simplistic either/or formulations in evaluation. Our assessment criteria suggest an essay is either personal reflection or exposition, either narrative or argument. The language is either academic discourse or not. The thesis/generalization is either directly stated or it cannot be credited. We need to immerse students in a variety of discourses, being careful not to limit students like Mica to only one voice. We do well to remember the frustration of feminist writer, bell hooks, with teachers who "did not recognize the need for African American students to have access to many voices" (qtd. in Delpit 291).

Finally, we need to understand errors, not as deficits, but as attempts at appropriating the discourses of other communities. This shift would allow us to recognize and extend rather than automatically penalize these attempts at appropriation. Matters of syntax and usage are not neutral as our portfolio criteria imply. We need to become sensitive to the power relationships implicit in all language use and to the political implications of judgements of error as "nonstandard," particularly as higher education opens itself to an increasingly diverse student body.

We have no clear answer to the question raised in our title. Was the failure Mica's or that of our assessment procedures? We suspect the failure rests on both sides. We did fail Mica: we failed to read her texts contextually; we failed to assess her portfolio in light of her attempts to appropriate a new discourse; we failed by oversimplifying the nature of academic discourse; we failed by setting her work against some constructed "mythical" portfolio demonstrating competence; we failed by not seeing the power relations involved in any attempts to work on nonstandard usages. The answer, however, is also complex—as complex, perhaps, as Mica's writing and as Mica herself. At times she appeared evasive and angry; at times bewildered; at times fiercely proud and determined.

Would we pass Mica's portfolio today? No. However, Mica's writing has challenged our notions of what is good and acceptable written discourse in introductory academic settings, and we think it should challenge others in the English profession, the university, and society.

Mica did not meet our expectations. Her writing continues to intrigue and frustrate us. Yet it may be the Mica's—those students who do not meet our expectations—who shed the strongest light on our practices.

Notes

[1]Some ambivalence was undoubtedly present, both on our part and on Mica's. In working with Mica, we probably at times exemplified "a certain sense of powerlessness and paralysis" that Lisa Delpit has described "among many sensitive and well-meaning literacy educators who appear to be caught in the throes of a dilemma. Although their job is to teach literate discourse styles to all of their students, they question whether that is a task they can actually accomplish for poor students and students of color. Furthermore, they question whether they are acting as agents of oppression by insisting that students who are not already a part of the 'mainstream' learn that discourse" (285). Mica also may have been deeply ambivalent, caught in the conflicts between her home discourses and the discourses of the university, and feeling torn between institutions and value systems in ways that Keith Gilyard documents. Thus, she may have been choosing to resist or "not learn" as Herb Kohl describes it, rather than learn that which she perceived as denying her a sense of who she was. While issues such as these are important to our thinking, this paper looks more specifically to the implications of current assessment practices.

[2]Elbow makes the good point that "it's crazy to talk about academic discourse as one thing" (140). However, we often teach and

assess academic discourse as if it were. We believe that many teachers of writing (perhaps unconsciously) hold a collective, monolithic view of academic discourse, which poses problems to assessment, particularly the assessment of students at risk. This monolithic view of academic discourse is defined primarily by its stylistic and mechanical surface features, features such as mapping or signposting, explicitness, objectivity, and formal language (Elbow 144–46).

[3]Smitherman discusses a characteristic use of narrative as a persuasive tool in Black English: "The relating of events (real or hypothetical) becomes a black rhetorical strategy to explain a point, to persuade holders of opposing views to one's own point of view, and in general, to `win friends and influence people'" (147–8).

[4]Anne DiPardo explores this issue in ***A Kind of Passport*** when she examines the "patterns of tension" in an institution's commitment to educational equity, looking particularly at the "good intentions and enduring ambivalence" embedded in the language of the basic writing curricula.

[5]See Bruce Horner for a recent discussion of this and other metaphors used to characterize basic writers.

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Sharon Crowley

RESPONSE TO EDWARD M. WHITE

The Fall 1995 issue of *JBW* contains an article by Edward M. White entitled "The Importance of Placement and Basic Studies: Helping Students Succeed Under the New Elitism." White began the article by arguing that a "motif" he calls "the new elitism" has begun to affect decisions made about admissions in American colleges and universities. He described the "new elitism" as "the restriction of opportunities to the most deserving—which often means to those from a relatively privileged home" (75). He contrasted the "new elitism" with "egalitarianism, the argument that everyone should have opportunities for success," and suggested that the motif of egalitarianism is currently in retreat among members of legislatures and governing boards of universities (75-76).

I heartily agree with White's analysis of the current state of affairs in American institutions of higher learning, although I prefer to use more openly ideological terminology to describe the cultural pressure that is being brought to bear against open admissions and affirmative action policies. What is happening is that neoconservatives have managed to gain enough rhetorical, legislative and judicial power to begin disassembling the egalitarian policies put in place by the social revolutions of the nineteen-sixties and seventies—namely, the civil rights, women's liberation, and students' movements. The growing power of neoconservatism can be seen with particular clarity in White's home state of California, where the regents of the California State University system recently voted to abandon admissions policies that included consideration of cultural and ethnic diversity.

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I also agree with White that composition teachers and scholars have an important role to play in the recruitment and retention of persons he calls "new students" to colleges and universities. Those of us who teach and think about composition can be proud of the efforts we have made toward helping first-generation college students adjust to and succeed in higher education. However, as White warns us, we cannot relax our efforts in this regard and we must be especially alert at this moment to insure that "new students" are not shut out of college educations by the neoconservative will to stop history and to preserve the place of the traditionally privileged. This responsibility is increasingly important in an economy that has systematically denied good-paying jobs to persons without college educations and where hard-won workers' rights are increasingly threatened by recent hiring practices.

Despite these areas of agreement, there is an important point of difference between White and me. In his article White acknowledged my argument that teachers and scholars of composition studies ought to consider abolishing the universal requirement in introductory composition. He read my position as complicit with the new elitism when he suggested that compositionists who advocate abolition of the requirement are the "theorists" of the new elitism (78). From where I sit, there are two serious difficulties with White's analysis.

First, my proposal to abolish the universal requirement was made with the interests of "new students" very much in mind. Despite White's attempt to marshal evidence in favor of testing as an instrument of retention for such students, I do not think that the universal requirement serves them or any students very well. The universal requirement began at Harvard-an elite university then as now—as an attempt to certify that students who enrolled under the new elective system were suitable "Harvard men. " In other words, the universal requirement began life as an instrument of exclusion. It was openly used in this way until the late sixties. During the nineteen-fifties, for example, Freshman English served overcrowded universities as a second level of admissions. Teachers of the course were regularly ordered to fail half of the students who took the course; those were the days in which five grammatical or mechanical errors in an essay earned its author an "F." That Freshman English is a repressive institution was not lost on students who participated in the social movements of the sixties. Because of their resistance, the requirement was lifted briefly during the seventies at some universities, although it was rapidly reinstated during the manufactured "literacy crisis" of the late seventies and has remained firmly in place at non-elite colleges and universities ever since (Connors 1996).

I doubt whether the exclusionary institutional function of the universal requirement can be radically altered at this late date in its history. But I have already made these arguments in the work that White

kindly cited in his article. In this context I will add one argument to those I have already expressed: In the current mean-spirited political climate, I doubt whether we serve "new students" well by using mass examinations to segregate them into classrooms that can be readily identified as remedial or special.

Which brings me to my second difficulty with White's analysis. I am a little startled to find myself aligned with neoconservatism since my position on the requirement has also been taken to task in *Academic Questions*, the magazine published by the conservative National Association of Scholars. This group truly is the academic arm of the "new elitism," and they have gone on record as opposing the egalitarian gains made in universities during the nineteen-sixties and seventies. In their manifesto, the NAS argues that "the admission of seriously underprepared students creates the realistic expectations and frequently leads to frustration and resentment.... Disadvantaged students deserve ample assistance, yet disadvantage need not coincide with race or ethnicity" (8). The NAS "urges" universities to admit "inadequately prepared students only when realistic provision can be made for remediation" (9). They are a bit more frank about their agenda in an editorial recently published in newspapers across the country, where they lament universities' shortening the school year, eliminating comprehensive exams and theses, and easing requirements and prerequisites over the last thirty years. The authors of the editorial, Stephen Balch and Rita Zurcher—respectively president and research director of the NAS—also note with alarm the "dramatic increase in the number of schools offering what best can be described as 'remedial' composition courses (though the word is avoided) frequently for credit" (4a). They also remark that in 1993 "required courses in English composition . . . slipped" to "just 36 percent of 'America's best' colleges." These are the folks who engineered the rejection of an innovative syllabus for freshman writing at the University of Texas/Austin by arguing that such courses ought to teach grammar and formal fluency; these are the folks who want to reinstate the sort of nonelective liberal arts education—complete with hefty prerequisites and requirements in composition, math, and foreign language—that was typical of the nineteenth-century classical colleges which admitted only white men from "good" families.

My dismay at being associated with the politics of the NAS has, I hope, a political edge. If Professor White can convince the readers of *JBW* that my proposal to abolish the universal requirement is conservative, they may dismiss it from consideration insofar as their sentiments lie with the liberal impulse to provide higher education to all who want it. There is an ideological confusion here that bears examination, I think. It is perhaps analogous to the difficulty faced by radical feminists who campaign against pornography. Liberals accuse such

feminists of censorship, of attempting to deny the free speech of pornographers. Sometimes liberals characterize anti-porn feminists as prudish and narrow-minded, too. In this case the ideological confusion arises because radical feminists have created a truly radical definition of pornography: while liberals still classify pornography as free speech, radical feminists define it as violence against women. This redefinition renders the liberal complaint about feminist prudery literally beside the point. Nonetheless, since the redefinition goes against the grain of liberalism (which is unfortunately masculinist), it just doesn't mesh very readily with liberal thought. Perhaps something like this is happening in White's reading of my position. Persons who define the universal requirement as an instrument of students' liberation and potential success, as White seems to do, will of course be alarmed by any proposal to lift it (particularly in the current ideological climate, which is certainly not liberationist). I hope that my position on the requirement is neither liberal nor conservative but radical, not because it is chic to be radical but because it strikes at the root of our institutional difficulties as writing teachers. These difficulties stem, in my opinion, not from our curricula or politics or from our ineptitude or that of our students, but from our institutional obligation, imposed on us from elsewhere, to coerce everyone in the university into studying composition.

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October 23-26, 1996: Conference on Research in Developmental Education to be held at the Adam's Mark Hotel in Charlotte, North Carolina will have as its purpose integrating research with practice in the field of developmental education and learning assistance. Invited speakers are: Alfredo G. de los Santos, Jr., Maricopa Community College; Hunter R. Boylan, Appalachian State University; and James A. Anderson, North Carolina State University. For information contact: National Center for Developmental Education, Reich College of Education, Appalachian State University, Boone, North Carolina 28608, 704-262-3057.

October 25, 1996: The 20th Annual CAWS-CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors Conference will be held at Borough of Manhattan Community College, 30 West Broadway (at Park Place), New York will have as its theme Language and Identity in the Classroom. Presenters include: Sondra Perl, Lehman College; Bonne August, Kingsborough Community College; Ann Raimes, Hunter College; Rebecca Mlynarczyk, Kingsborough Community College; and Deborah Mutnick, Long Island University. Keynote speaker is Keith Gilyard, Syracuse University. For information contact George Otte, English Department, Baruch College, 17 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10010, 212-387-1772.

November 21-26, 1996: The 1996 Annual Convention—National Council of Teachers of English to be held at the Chicago Hilton Hotel, Chicago, Illinois will have as its theme: Honoring All Our Stories. Following are some of the invited speakers: Al Pacino, Luci Tapahonso, Eloise Greenfield, Deborah Britzman, Frederic Marx, Li-Young Lee, and Haki Madhubuti. For information contact: NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096, 1-800-369-NCTE.

December 27-30, 1996: The annual MLA Convention will be held in Washington, D.C. Following are the some of the Forum Speakers: Lee Edelman, Sandra M. Gilbert, Garrett Hongo, Andrea Lunsford, and Robert Pinsky. The deadline for receipt of preregistration fees and materials is December 6, 1996. For information contact: Modern Language Associaton Cooper Station, PO Box 788, New York, NY 10276-0788, 212-614-6359.

April 21-23, 1997: The RELC Seminar on Learners and Language Learning to be held at Convention City, Singapore will have as its theme: Learners and Language Learning. Registration must be received by March 22, 1997. Some of the keynote speakers include: Kathi Bailey, Monterrey Institute of International Studies; H. Douglas Brown, San Francisco State University; Andrew Cohen, University of Minnesota; Rod Ellis, Temple University; Diane Larsen-Freeman, Experiment in International Living; and Jay Lemke, City University of New York. Papers are invited in the following topic areas: learner autonomy and student-student interaction; individual differences: styles, strategies, ages; the role of the teacher in learner-centered instruction; new ways of assessing learners; and current theory and established classroom practices in Southeast Asia. Lecture presentations are forty-five minutes, plus fifteen minutes question time. Workshops are ninety minutes long and interactive with little lecturing by the leaders. A 150-250-word abstract with a title not exceeding 12 words and a 50-word bio should be sent by **November 15, 1996 to**: The Director (Attention Seminar Secretariat) SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 30 Orange Grove Road, Singapore 258352, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE, telephone (65)737 9044, FAX (65)734 2753, email tkhng@singnet.com.sg

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July 6-9, 1997: The 15th Annual Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition to be held at State College, Pa. will have as its theme: Rhetorical Bodies: Toward a Material Rhetoric. Some of the featured speakers include: Lester Faigley, Cheryl Glenn, Christina Haas, and Victor Villanueva. The program committee invites proposals for papers by **December 2, 1996**. Send your name, paper title, professional affiliation, mailing address, and email address along with a 250-word abstract with the paper title but without the author's name to: Sharon Crowley, Dept. of English, The Pennsylvania State University, 117 Burrowes Building, University Park, PA 16802-6200, FAX 814-863-7285. For information contact Professor Crowley at 814-863-3066 or email ALA2@PSU.EDU or AXG5@psu.edu. The WWW address for the conference is http://www.cde.psu.edu/rhet&comp/

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