

EDITORS' COLUMN

Our field is perhaps too given to proclaiming “turning points” (to say nothing of “paradigm shifts”), but it was clear, to us at least, that some significant change was in the works by the time of the Conference on College Composition and Communication convention in Phoenix this past March. The number of sessions devoted to basic writing was more than triple what it had been (a mere 8 in '94 and '95, up to 12 in '96, suddenly 26 in '97). Further heightening this heightened interest, this increased recognition of basic writing, was an escalation in declarations that it should disappear. Nothing brought these developments into focus like the Conference on Basic Writing all-day workshop on Race, Class, and Culture in the Basic Writing Classroom.

“Workshop” is a bit of a misnomer. Oh, there were workshop-like activities, and some account of them is given here, but those within CBW at least realize that the “workshop” is the closest thing basic writing has to a national conference—and has had since the 4th National Conference on Basic Writing back in 1992, a conference that gave rise to another special issue of *JBW* (Spring 1993). Preparing the cumulative index we include in this issue, we were especially aware of that special issue—an awareness that no doubt had something to do with our contacting Jeanne Gunner and Gerri McNenny, the CBW workshop organizers, about the possibility of our doing a special issue based on the workshop. (At least we think *we* contacted *them*. It may have been the other way around. This issue has involved so much back and forth on e-mail that we despair of ever disentangling all the “threads.”)

Once in Phoenix, it was impossible to miss the sense of change and significance in the air. The CBW workshop came to seem like the nexus of apparently fortuitous events (and chains of events) of real import: the impressive emergence of class as an issue (something Gary Tate reported on at the outset, Ira Shor drove home at the end), the recent publication of Jane Maher's book on Mina Shaughnessy, Victor Villanueva's already intense activity as the future program chair of 4Cs, the culmination of Barbara Gleason's and Mary Soliday's multi-year, FIPSE-funded project on mainstreaming, and, by no means least, the way Jackie Jones Royster, like Gary Tate, showcased collaboration with a new generation hard at work in basic writing, so that this issue also includes relatively new voices: Becky Taylor, John McMillan, Elizabeth Woodworth. This seems especially important for the way that teachers' voices, especially of the sort too often silenced or muted, developed a special clarity and prominence at the workshop, a centering of attention we believe is actually enhanced here.

In developing this issue, we have asked the contributors to give print variants on what they presented. In some cases, the workshop experience is closely replicated. In others, this less interactive medium of print has required a different sort of presentation, and we have a little bit to say about that in introducing each piece. But we are struck, now that it has come together, by how the offerings have much in common that transcends style or format—above all, a focus, often explicit, on the stories we in basic writing have to tell. We seem more interested in narrating than classifying, more interested in examples than generalizations, more attuned to cases than trends or patterns—though, as Ira Shor reminds us at the end, these stories are situated within larger stories, histories: narratives of a field—and a society—and not just work within it.

Of course, stories have various ways of getting told. Some require more participation from the audience to fill in the gaps, make the connections. One such, included in this issue, is the first full cumulative index of *JBW*. It is not too much to say that it is the story of our field—or at least *a* story of it—and a highly suggestive, richly nuanced one at that, something a mere glance over the names and titles will convey. Brood over it as we have, and you will see that it bespeaks the tensions and paradoxes of a field characterized by exhaustion and enormous energy, continuities and discontinuities, brilliant insights from within and stubborn misunderstandings from without. With this issue, we add new names and titles—particularly impressive and suggestive ones—to this roster, this story, as we begin with the next 15 volumes and step further into the third decade of *JBW*.

—*George Otte and Trudy Smoke*