Jacqueline Jones Royster and
Rebecca Greenberg Taylor

CONSTRUCTING TEACHER IDENTITY IN THE BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM

A high moment in the workshop occurred when Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Greenberg Taylor directed participants to focus on ourselves and colleagues as basic writing teachers. After Royster explained how they had come to believe that too much attention had been concentrated on defining and categorizing our students, she led us in an informal survey to help us examine our own institutions for racial, gender, and class differences. We then wrote about our self-perceptions and aspirations and shared some of these. Next, Taylor powerfully presented a paper on a year in her life as a graduate student in the Rhetoric and Composition Program in the English Department at the Ohio State University and as a basic writing teacher during 1996-1997 in the OSU Basic Writing Program. Her teaching directly related to her interests in authority, identity, genre, and the teaching of writing. Jacqueline Jones Royster, the Vice Chair for Rhetoric and Composition in the English Department, is Taylor's dissertation advisor and has complementary interests in issues of identity, classroom culture, and the development of literacy.

Our focus is on the implications of identity in the construction of classroom culture. Our imperative was to emphasize that "identity" in the classroom is a person-driven enterprise, i.e., that such a term becomes most salient by referencing the unique characteristics of the actual people in the room and not through definitions that abstract general traits and push teacher/researchers toward the construction of identities in generic terms. All too often teacher/researchers in our discipline have centered attention on only one set of the people in the room, the students, with only peripheral attention being directed toward the other set, the teacher.

While articles such as Lu (1994), Johnson (1994), Gunner (1993), and Dean (1989) have raised awareness of the extent to which as professionals, we are all racialized, gendered, and political subjects in classroom space, the interrogative gaze in both theory and practice has generally been unifocally determined (i.e., defined by the negotiations of students) rather than multifocally determined (i.e., defined by the negotiations of both students and the teacher).

In being multifocal in our gaze, we shift attention from the students to the teacher and then examine the implications of this viewpoint, not only for the students, but for the creation of the classroom culture to which students are adjusting. Discounting the teacher as an

active agent in the classroom wrongly positions students as subjectable primarily to disembodied systems and overly constrained by outcomes rather than converging processes. By focusing on teacher identity, we re-shuffle these relationships and re-make the balances in order to make recognizable the notion that the negotiation of classroom identity involves an interaction of all parties, sometimes with competing agendas.

General Background

The project that became the springboard for this way of thinking emerged from interactions between Royster and Taylor that came about through a set of graduate courses that Taylor took and two quarters of basic writing courses in the Ohio State University Basic Writing Program that Taylor taught. These experiences enabled Taylor and Royster, her graduate advisor, to have sustained conversation about a collective of issues. Working together, we realized that there are advantages in shifting both the location from which we were envisioning our mutual concerns and the analytical paradigm by which we were operating.

In terms of our own location as workshop leaders in the CCCC workshop, our questions remained cognizant of student experiences in classrooms. The shift, however, was to foreground the multiple ways in which issues of identity become more slippery and compelling when we refine this view to notice more directly the race, gender, class, age, culture, institutional position, etc. of the teacher as classroom subject. Our intent was: to acknowledge both sets of people in the room, students and the teacher; to shift the paradigm so that students **are not** perceived simplistically as the site and/or source of pathology and so that teachers **are** perceived as the primary site and/or source of power, privilege, and culture-making; and to recognize, as Keith Gilyard (1996) and Jerrie Cobb Scott (1993) suggest, the need to flip "the script" and "the marginalization coin."

In effect, we had become impatient with the discussion of identity, most especially in basic writing classrooms, as the **students'** problem, rather than also as the **teacher's** problem, and we wanted the dialogue to take into direct account the culpability of teacher location in the creation of learning space. In our work, we have been instructed by a conscious interrogation of our assumptions about who is likely to occupy basic writing classrooms on both sides of the desk, especially in public institutions. Recognizing how much classroom constituencies actually vary from institutional site to institutional site, what we have affirmed is how consistently characteristics of writing performance become conflated in research and scholarship with issues of identity

(race, class, gender, age) and with issues of good character or ethos.

In addition to interrogating our own assumptions, we have also been informed by demographic projections for the United States to the year 2020 (Campbell 1994) that indicate shifts in who is likely to occupy classrooms in the next century. By all indications, regardless of how students in the classroom may be constituted in terms of identities, what is likely is that the teacher will probably not share particular identities with the students, including the possibility of race, ethnicity, class, age, gender, etc., but also including factors such as histories of academic success, institutional status, and "cultural" sense of being. All of these factors relate to issues of "location" in the classroom that we assert will indeed become increasingly important in all of our classrooms, but clearly in basic writing classrooms. At the levels at which students are most insecure about writing performance, i.e., in basic writing courses, "location" becomes exacerbated by the pressures of multiply defined experiences of marginality, based not only on personal identity but also on social and institutional identity — or non-identity.

Our primary goal for the workshop was to debunk the myth of the conflation of race, class, culture, and character in the basic writing classroom, and to begin this process by acknowledging the teaching self. The goals of the workshop were:

> To blend self-critique and institutional "location" in creating a leverage point from which to shift paradigms for theory and practice in basic writing classrooms.
>
> To generate strategies for interrogating the multiple relationships encoded in:
> how we represent ourselves in the basic writing classroom;
> how we represent our students in the basic writing classroom;
> how these representations shape and direct what we teach, how we teach it, and how we assess progress and performance.

In order to carry out this agenda, we chose activities that were designed to be hands-on.

At the beginning of the workshop, we conducted an informal survey (See Appendix 1) in order for participants to notice the differences among their institutional sites, their material environments, as well as their student populations. The results of the survey served to remind us in quite direct ways that material conditions do indeed vary. We found that while as a group we might talk about our institutions in generic terms, they were actually quite distinctive in several ways (e.g., in terms of regional location, size, age of the student body, diversity among the faculty along gender, age, and ethnic lines, mission of

the institution, etc.).

With the survey as general backdrop, we engaged in short writing activities (See Appendix 2) to make use of the memory work that enriches discussions of classroom theory and practice. These activities included the participants thinking about perceptions of themselves in the classroom, about particular moments in their classroom during which questions of identity might be raised, and about possible gaps between how they represent themselves and how students might represent them. Having primed these memories, we structured applications (See Appendix 3) that were designed to help participants concretize perceptions, draw forth classroom-based challenges, and share strategies and solutions to contentious problems and issues. The applications were based on incidents that had arisen from Taylor's experiences in her classroom, covering a range of issues: the selection of reading materials; the use of collaborative activities; assessment issues; issues related to technology; issues related to gender, authority, ethnicity, and so on.

The heart of our session, however, and the part that in the end seemed to yield the most was the sharing of Taylor's classroom experiences as she, a white woman raised in a Jewish household in Richmond, Virginia, entered a "multicultural" classroom filled with students whose success as writers and whose success with negotiating their academic and institutional identities varied considerably.

Expectations, Alliances, and Identities: A Case in Point

> As teachers, we tend to operate without questioning the extent to which practices deviate from the ideal, socially sanctioned ideologies of society or how our individual processes of self-identity interplay with the self-identity of students. To fail to critically examine the practiced vs. the preached ideologies of society or the student vs. the teacher's self-identity is to support, through uncritical dysconsciousness, the recycling of attitudes that resist changes that benefit those marginalized in school systems. (Jerrie Cobb Scott, "Literacies and Deficits Revisited")

I remember reading Jerrie Cobb Scott's "Literacies and Deficits Revisited" for the first time in the Spring of 1996. As a graduate student in a seminar designed to introduce us to the field of basic writing and to prepare us to teach in my university's own basic writing program, I was asked to draft a bibliographic essay focused upon the field's most recent (1990's) scholarship. I knew right away what I wanted to investigate: how notions of identity—gender, class, race, region,

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ethnicity—shape contemporary basic writing scholarship. All of my work as a student of rhetoric and composition had previously addressed the relationship between identity, authority, and the teaching and valuing of student writing, and I expected these issues to prove especially crucial to the field of basic writing, where (for highly problematic reasons) students often represent a variety of cultural, racial, and economic categories of difference. But I was unprepared for what my brief bibliographical study of the *Journal of Basic Writing* and other composition journals would yield. While the issue of *student* identity permeated every facet of the scholarship, explorations of *teacher* identity seemed almost absent. I began to feel as if ghost writers were at work—quite literally. Who were these teachers, these researchers, representing the words and lives of their students? How did they figure into their own discussions?

Even now, nearly one year after reading "Literacies and Deficits Revisited," Scott's essay resonates quite powerfully for me. It points toward the tendency in basic writing scholarship to define basic writers. Whether defining these students in terms of their membership (or lack thereof) within academic discourse communities, or in terms of their cognitive "skills," the drive to define, and I would argue, objectify, students persists. Sometimes teachers and researchers focus the definitional act on the students' written products as metonymic stand-ins for the writers themselves. Perhaps most disturbingly, as William Jones reminds us in "Basic Writing: Pushing Against Racism," sometimes they utilize the term *basic writer* to serve as "euphemism and code for minority students" (74). As a white teacher I am perhaps most troubled by Jones' argument, but I will not respond to that argument by forwarding yet another definition of basic writers. Instead, like Jerrie Cobb Scott, I argue that basic writing scholars must cease to concentrate so intensely upon the act of defining these communicative "others," objectifying them and claiming all of the power that comes with the act of naming itself. I suggest that basic writing teachers and researchers must begin instead to question our own identities, examining critically the relation between who we are and the work we make possible for our students. This work is necessary for all teachers, but for white, middle class teachers of basic writing, who may find themselves, as Royster reminds us, feeling different from those who occupy the other side of the desk, the work is especially crucial. If Scott is right about the dangers of seemingly dysconscious (albeit well-intentioned) attitudes that reproduce the status quo, we must ask what it means for composition researchers and teachers **not** to address their own identities, to assume that multiple literacy practices can take place in a single classroom without the kind of "violence" that J. Elspeth Stuckey describes (1991). The challenge to teachers and researchers of basic writers is to "flip" what Scott so aptly calls the "marginalization

coin" (51) in order to allow themselves to be described, discussed, defined, or named.

This challenge drove my research in the graduate seminar last year. I remember the end of the quarter looming, along with my appointment to serve as a TA for the basic writing program the following autumn. I knew that my own identity would radically impact my teaching of the course, that my ways of valuing student texts, of determining what I would consider meaningful, had everything to do with who I was and where I came from. Before I stepped into that basic writing classroom in the fall, I needed to stop and ask: What am I doing here? What drives me to work in the context of a basic writing classroom? What do I expect of my students and how did I construct those expectations?

But scholars like Jerrie Cobb Scott remind me that making a quick reference to my own race/class/gender at the beginning of my own scholarship is not enough. I must answer the questions I raise above, but such questions should not act as ends in themselves; instead, I use such questions as a means to interrogate my own teaching practices *in order to imagine new kinds of questions*. Naming *who* we are does not let us off the ethical hook. Actually, I am not really looking to my race, class, and culture as individually distinguishable factors that impact my teaching. Instead, I consider my race and class as two examples of the multiple sites that constitute what I name my culture(s). Thus a host of other factors, including age, regional affiliations, educational history, and institutional location are also part of what shapes who I am as a teacher in my classroom, a distinction which does not negate the need for white teachers to critique their racial and socio-economic identities. Rather, the distinction helps me to broaden that critique so that it encompasses other identities in helping me to realize how race and class are always implicitly a part of other sites of identity formation. In broadening the view, the goal is to historicize and critique the sites of identity formation and the sources of my own knowledge about basic writers. Thus I can articulate *how* and *why* I "am" in the basic writing classroom.

Voicing Identities in the Basic Writing Classroom

While teaching basic writing in the Fall of 1996, I undertook an independent study of teacher identity with my mentor and advisor, Jacqueline Jones Royster. What started as a bibliographical exploration for a graduate seminar became a more tangible project. I kept a teaching journal to help me study my own identity, as it was constructed by me and by my students. At the same time, I continued my review of basic writing scholarship, problematizing the ways in which teach-

ers and researchers of basic writing represent their students without naming or critiquing themselves. My daily teaching journals reflected my own concerns regarding my position as a new teacher/scholar of basic writing, and by examining those concerns alongside others' approaches to teacher identity in basic writing scholarship, I explored potential sites for my own acts of uncritical dysconsciousness. As illustrated below, what became most informative in transforming this project into a CCCC Workshop presentation was the process of juxtaposing my voice with the voices of my students in order to study, reflect upon, and generate questions about the process of teacher identity-formation in the basic writing classroom.

Some of the characters in these journal entries are my students, but most of the characters are me: the TA struggling to stay theoretically grounded, the new teacher at the Writing Workshop trying to negotiate membership with colleagues, a white instructor worrying about her relationships with students of color, a woman troubled by gendered alliances among her students, and a suburbanite facing her own representations of rural students and their values. My competing identities, the characters here, don't always get along, and the setting has an awful lot to do with the plot. Within my journal entries, I represent student voices as they spoke during classroom conversations, via e-mail or personal conferences with me, and through their written responses to classroom assignments. Troubling for me in representing my students in writing, even when I use their own words, is that the nature of any written representation of "real" events is always just that—a linguistic representation, not an "actual" transcription capable of conveying totally what was said and what was communicated. I feel compelled to say that these stories are, of course, products of my own shaping and not intended to be set forth as unmediated "truth."

The Pre-Quarter Orientation: TA or Not TA?

The staff of the Workshop seemed so dedicated, enthused, and it was great to be among colleagues who love to talk about teaching again. But I definitely felt like the junior colleague, the student among professionals, and I resisted some of those activities. When we practiced hypothetical placement test reading, no matter how many sample essays I saw, I couldn't quite determine how to "place" an essay into one of our department's courses. When I asked what I thought made a student text successful, I said "it's communicative in context." I remember the other workshop staffers smiling at me politely.

It strikes me now how desperately I seemed to want to define myself as a graduate student visiting the Basic Writing program—not as a permanent resident. How many others find themselves, like me, expecting merely to "pass through" their basic writing teaching appointments? At my own institution, questions concerning the

professionalization, scholarly commitment, and even work ethics of our basic writing teachers seem to arise frequently. How do such institutionally driven doubts affect basic writing scholarship and pedagogy?

After a particularly difficult October staff meeting at the Workshop, I write: *Last week, while we were discussing our observations of one another's classes, the highest compliment seemed to be, "I visited x's class and he was practically invisible." I will never be invisible in my classroom. Invisibility for a TA means powerlessness, lack of authority. But I'm afraid to speak up in these staff meetings because I'm a beginner. I'm worried that I'm starting to define myself as some sort of rebel here. That's not who I want to be.*

I'm not sure that I overcame that rebellious streak; rather, I reconceptualized it as the year wore on, working hard to balance my need to ask questions of my colleagues with the recognition that I was, in fact, inexperienced. Interestingly enough, I think my colleagues, too, reconceptualized me as they saw how my questions were helping me to bring the parts of myself—student, teacher, scholar—together in my work as a teacher at the Workshop.

Once the quarter began, my journal addressed my expectations about who these basic writers would be—and how I would find ways to make connections with them.

September 25: Great Expectations

I got my roster before I taught class today. The first thing I noticed was ethnicity. Or should I say, I noticed my own attempts to guess the ethnicities of my students, and then to pretend that I wasn't noticing. Was Juan Carlos a native speaker of Spanish? Where was he from? How many of the Asian names on my roster belonged to ESL students, and how many of them named students born and raised in the Ohio suburbs? Did I really only have two women in the class? How would they deal with Kingston's The Woman Warrior? *Once I matched names to faces, I found out that "T.L." was actually a Tiffanie—thank God! She seemed really interested—her writing sample suggests she's given a great deal of thought to the challenges she faces as a Black woman at the university. She's a sophomore, though. What happened last year? Did she take the course once? I never even took Freshman Comp. What experiences, if any, will my students and I share? Do we have to share experiences in order to work together successfully?*

As the quarter progressed, I found that spending time in two buildings, one which houses the basic writing program and the other the English Department, caused me to lose track of more than just my gradebook and coffee mug. Sometimes I felt like I lost a little bit of myself—the part of me I most clearly defined as Graduate Student— each time I made the trek from the English department to the basic writing program facility. But something else gradually replaced the part I had lost: a questioning, engaged, and often troubled teacher.

September 29: The Outsiders

The other TAs in the English department don't really understand why I'm interested in teaching basic writing five days a week, and after the basic writing staff meetings I feel as though my colleagues there think I am "questioning" them and their pedagogy. I suppose I do question the program — but not its pedagogy or its right to funding. I'm really questioning the institutional structures that put such a course in place. I mostly worry about how I handled my students' questions about 052. I think I let them know that I, too, am frustrated by the placement system. I suspect that they'll continue to say, "show me the difference between my paper and a 110 student's paper." Then who will I turn to? Bartholomae's work? Mike Rose's books? How should I answer such a question?

Interestingly, once my students began sharing their drafts in mid-October, I became the cultural outsider. It's an experience I highly recommend.

October 15: "Yet Do I Marvel"

I'm noticing that my own responses to student papers are somehow engaging the question of culture — even if I choose not to articulate that to the students themselves. For instance, Demetrius' first response log batch came in, and I noticed that when describing the protagonist in The Chocolate War, *Demetrius began to use a stylistic device that I could only describe as sermonic. He spoke in his journal about Jerry (the character) and his ability to "restoreth" the spirits of his teammates and friends. Such moments are fascinating for me — markers of a rhetorical tradition outside my own tend to make me want to stop, admire, ask questions. But would it be appropriate to share such moments with students? To talk to them about the intersections of culture and rhetoric? Or, does my response simply imply that I'm too willing to generalize about African American students' discourse because I've read Smitherman or Gates? What's the best way to talk about community literacies and not fall into a kind of generalizing?*

Late October: Invisible Man

Jason, who moved here from China as a high school student, continues to worry me. The other night he wrote me via e-mail, expressing his disappointment that his classmates were not writing to him as often as he liked. "I wait for the rooster," he wrote, referring to the Eudora icon, "but he never come." Jason's quietness in class and his eagerness to speak over e-mail have contributed to my students' marking of him as Other. Sometimes I even forget he's in the room. What role should I play in helping Jason to assimilate? Should he assimilate at all?

What strikes me now as I read my journal responses to both Demetrius and Jason is how two facets of my own identity, my race and my own research agenda, colored my pedagogical instincts. As a graduate student enmeshed in discussions of contrastive rhetorics (Shen 1989) and critiques of assimilationist projects (Lu 1992, Giroux 1992), I seemed incapable of considering Demetrius' rhetoric and Jason's de-

sire for acceptance from any other perspectives. As a white instructor I might have been engaged in dysconscious acts of transgressive voyeurism (Royster 1995), reading Demetrius in terms of "nonmainstream" rhetorical traditions and attributing Jason's difficulties only to cultural difference. I found myself moved not to action, but simply to further contemplation. What might I have done instead to make Demetrius' text a part of a larger classroom discussion? How might I have asked other students to respond to Jason's request for e-mail?

In November, frustrated with classroom interaction, lack of student preparation, and low morale, I turn to my workshop colleagues for support. "It's mid-term," they remind me. But I knew more was at stake. I was terrified that my lack of experience had been translated to my students, who knew, after all, what "TA" meant in their other classes: TA's were graders, proctors, apprentices "stuck" working with first-year students while secretly (or not-so-secretly) longing to escape to their laboratories. Worse, perhaps they suspected what I often worried about myself—that their classroom *was* the laboratory and I was merely learning how to teach.

Mid-term Reflections: "I felt a funeral in my brain"

Even as the writing in my class seems to be improving, attendance is falling off. Rosa has missed eleven class days—Tiffanie eight, though many were excused absences. When Dylan comes, he doesn't bring his materials. Gordon is increasingly withdrawn—committed to his fraternity and just sort of scraping by in my class. Mike threatened me with a 6:30 a.m. wake-up call on the first day of Winter Quarter ("Your husband will think I'm your boyfriend"), and followed that comment with a pornographic e-mail to me this week—muppets doing pretty unspeakable stuff. Apparently, he believes I am the kind of person who would find humor in Web Porn. As Elizabeth Ellsworth would say, this does not feel empowering. Boundaries are being crossed by Black students and white ones, by women and men, by "good students" and forgetful ones. And where is the article of research that helps me deal with this?

I feel like I've spent the last two weeks trying to let students know that I realize I am complicit in all of this, but some boundaries can't be crossed if I am to be an effective teacher. I am becoming increasingly aware that any discussion of teacher identity in the basic writing classroom needs to take into account multiple facets of identity. My institutional identity, my age, my gender, my place in the department, my tenuous place within the Writing Workshop, and, of course, my race and class need to be considered.

All of these crucial shapers of identity came to the forefront for me when my students took the floor as presenters and discussion leaders, and I became one of the participants.

December's Presentations: The Sound and the Fury

Today the three women, Casey, Tiffanie, and Rosa presented on "sexism in 052." Rosa read from her paper about her mother's ovarian cancer.

She then told us what it was like for her to be one of three women in a class of men, describing how she altered the language of her paper so that she wouldn't upset male members of the class, particularly her peer group. That backfired. Gordon blew up, disgusted that Rosa thought he was "too dumb" to understand her. I tried to step in, explaining that she wasn't calling them dumb, but that Rosa felt uncomfortable discussing some issues with them. Was I placating Gordon or defending Rosa? When Tiffanie spoke, all hell broke loose. She claimed that all of the men who preferred Kingston's book were "Mama's Boys," while the ones who preferred Cormier's book were sexists. I watched the men on the left side of the room (students from rural areas) suck in their cheeks and count to ten. Others shut down completely. When Casey, the third woman, spoke, she prefaced her comments by saying that she had never felt discriminated against as a woman in our class. How was I to respond? Whose position was I to validate? I felt hurt and betrayed. I've certainly never been accused of not fostering feminist texts/values in my classroom. But I know I was hyper-aware of the number of men in my course, and I didn't push them to discuss gender on a daily basis. I had bitten my tongue on several occasions, worried that my male students might perceive my feminism as threatening. But I didn't want the women to be put on the spot all the time as the "representatives" of womankind.

Our reading of Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior* even further complicated my own understanding of my role within the classroom. When should I speak, and when should I remain silent?

"No Name Woman" meets Dick Vitale

I have assigned my students, in groups of five, to lead discussion once over the course of the quarter. The first two groups are talking about The Woman Warrior. Today's group (three white men from rural areas, Mike, Mike, and Mark, one white woman from Cleveland named Casey, and Shirish, a newly-made American citizen originally from India) "presented" by subjecting my class to thirty excruciating minutes of Dick Vitale on tape. The tie, they argued, was that Vitale motivates his players through story-telling the same way that Kingston's mother motivates her daughter by telling her the story of the "No Name Woman." All eyes, save mine and Tiffanie's, glazed over in worshipful abandon! These students bought Vitale's cliches and generalizations about the power of sports. "A boy, a ball, a dream," he repeated like a mantra. And I thought, what about the girls? And what does it mean to tell generations of boys that the ball is the dream? I raised these questions, but all of my students shot me down pretty quickly. Talk about culture shock. All of my students extolled the virtues of Vitale's way of seeing the world. Tiffanie and I just shook our heads and sighed.

The Grapes of Rap

The second group, comprised by all of the African American students (Tiffanie, Dylan, and Demetrius) and Rosa, a bilingual student from Mexico, presented the class with a video today, a 25 minute MTV special memorializing rapper Tupac Shakur, an artist whose films I admired and whose music I

knew very little about. I have such mixed feelings about this group's alliance. I want so badly for students of color, many of whom speak to me about racism in their dorms, to find networks of support. But my class is dividing rapidly along racial/ethnic lines. Do I assume heterogeneous groups are more effective educationally? I think as a high school teacher in Virginia I did. But now I'm not so sure. Maybe heterogeneous groups make me, not my students, feel safe. This group argued that like Kingston, Shakur uses personal experience to shape his texts. They wanted us to consider Shakur's life and death from this perspective, and then discuss our responses to the video.

The class was polite (a few eyes rolled and the boy next to me, Nathan, winced visibly as he heard of Shakur's sodomy charges). I took notes on the video. Shakur spoke powerfully and made it clear that he had to speak from and for his community. He also explained why, even though he had made a great deal of money as a rapper, he continued to live in South Central. "Where are the neighborhoods where I can be both safe and among my own people?" he asked. I felt the white student next to me bristle, but he continued to watch, tapping his foot in impatience.

The group asked us all to share our quick responses to the video. "I liked," Jason replied. He offered no further explanation. Several of the white students from rural communities muttered their responses, but one student completely surprised me by launching into a thorough discussion of Shakur and his work. I don't think the group expected Gordon to be a Tupac fan, and neither did I. I welcomed the surprise. Nathan asked about Shakur's violence. "After prison, did he keep beating people up?" Demetrius and Tiffanie fielded the question, but didn't really satisfy Nathan.

Later in the quarter, Mike told us why he had been so uncharacteristically silent after the video. "How many of us from farms even have cable TV? Do you really think we had all heard of Tupac Shakur? I only got MTV for the first time this year, in the dorm." A response like this easily gets forgotten in the midst of all of the scholarship about CUNY, SEEK, and Open Admissions programs in what Mike and Nathan call "the big city."

Final Portfolios: Grim Fairy Tales

While sharing their portfolios today, the classroom became a Dale Carnegie meeting as students vowed to submit their work to the evil Writing Workshop Committee and skip right over 053. After nine weeks of hard work, we were back to the question of placement. Nobody celebrated the improved writing as an accomplishment; rather, the improvement they saw in one another's work was important only if it granted direct access to English 110. Even as I told my students that courses like 052 are the reason they are admitted to the university — that if these courses were eliminated, so, too would the university eliminate them — they continued to script the Writing Workshop staff as the "bad guys" preventing them from reaching their "true potential" in 110 — only I could champion them to the rest of the Workshop. They seemed unable to understand that I, too, was a part of that system.

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I suspect now that my students sensed my own contradictory feelings about the work I did as their teacher. The issue of placement was so powerful for Mike, whose mother is an English teacher and whose father is the vice-principal of the town middle school, that he uses it to structure the cover letter for his final 052 portfolio. In that letter, he figures the Writing Workshop as an "Evil Stepmother" preventing this "Cinderella Class" from going to the "Ball"—English 110.

Conclusion: Grim Fairytales Revised

Perhaps the most eloquent storyteller of the quarter was Casey, a young white woman from a large city whose silence throughout the quarter is reflected in my journal; her name appears less often than anyone else's. She struggled quietly, and her final essay, an allegory written in response to the prompt, "Tell the story of 052," moved all of us. What it suggests about the identities our students themselves find most meaningful is quite provocative. Casey's paper reads as follows:

* * * *

"The City of O52"

Many, many miles below the ocean stood an enchanting city with the identification number 052. This city was trapped infinitely on the floor of the ocean in a large glass bubble. . . The members of the city were an unusual group of individuals. Not one person carried the same personality trait or the same physical feature. Although the members seemed to be nothing alike, each one of them bonded together by the simple fact that they were unhappy to be stuck in a city confined to the bottom of the ocean.

The members of the city 052 were placed there by the government because they were considered to be slightly behind the rest of the world in intelligence...[their] work was not much fun, but was there to educate them and to better enable them for the real world. . . The first few days were a little uncomfortable or even confusing for every member of the city. Being in a city that was underwater was a little bit different then the way they were used to living. . . .

There was one member of the city that was ahead of everybody else, and her name was Becky. Becky had been in this city for many, many years but was only there to guide those with assumed less intelligence. They were all a little surprised by Becky, because they had expected someone a little stricter and less happy. . . The whole group seemed to be bonding, at least that's what most of them thought. They seldom had contact with the real world but when they did, they learned that the work that was getting done in the underwater city was as complicated, and took more work than the work that was getting done in the real world. Many of the members of this interesting group became frustrated by this fact. "This is so unfair that the education we are getting down here will not count towards credit in the real world," said Nathan. Nathan always seemed to be bringing up this point every time the group met. Tiffanie and Mike agreed with Nathan. That is why the group probably bonded

so well, even if only a few people spoke up, everybody felt the same. . . .

Casey believed that a kind of "bonding" took place despite cultural, gender, racial, and regional differences. And I smile even now at Casey's depiction of me as a "laughing, happy individual" — that certainly isn't how I represent myself in my journals. Her reading of me as someone with experience, someone who has been in the city "a long, long, time" gives me pause. How do we negotiate our constructions of our own identities with our students' depictions of us? When I reread those journals, I noticed how I wrestled with notions of authority, defined variously in several instances. When students were absent, I attributed those absences to my status as a TA who couldn't "make them" come to class; I questioned my institutional authority. When I refused to push students to critique Dick Vitale's ideological stance, I denied myself a chance for feminist advocacy, perhaps subverting my own political authority, but privileging my students'. When I resisted engaging the question of multicultural rhetorics while reading Demetrius' work, I subjugated my identity as a white reader to my expertise as a rhetorician, creating a lack of professional authority, but perhaps recognizing a student's cultural authority.

What I wish to emphasize now is not a sort of "revelation." I won't argue that, yes, I had authority all along and that Casey's text helped me see that. Instead, I want to suggest that the keeping of a teaching journal — which required me not only to reconstruct classroom experiences, but to pay attention to the act of construction itself, to come to terms with how who I am prevents and/or enables me to reevaluate classroom practice — helped me to understand classroom authority in more dialogic terms. That journal allows me to ask the new kinds of questions I imagined at the outset of this essay: How did my own expectations of having to negotiate racial difference first and foremost affect the pedagogical decisions I made throughout the quarter? Was that difference, in fact, the difference my students most perceived? What other factors constitute teacher/student cultures and identities? What kinds of mechanisms shape the relationships between those factors in the classroom, determining which factors are most powerful in any given moment? Perhaps most importantly, how can interrogation of teacher/scholar identities alter the landscape of existing basic writing pedagogies?

Implications for Teaching and Research

From this collective of workshop activities, we walk away with direct challenges for what identity means in terms of classroom transformation. Our starter questions for analyzing scenarios from the basic writing classroom have acquired new life in that they have become

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the places where our rendering of challenges begin.

> What issues emerge from a shifting of our view of identity and culture formation in basic writing classrooms to include the merging of teacher and student locations in classroom space?

> How do teacher "location," student "location," and institution matter in the ways that each of us might center the gaze in the classroom and articulate the nature of the teaching/learning engagement?

> How can we use our conscious awareness of self, students, place, and enterprise in making the basic writing classroom a richer (i.e., more positive, productive, intellectually invigorated) literacy development arena?

> What advice or "cautionary tales" do we need to remember?

Clearly, we do not have prescriptions for these questions. The first three certainly constitute a rather complex agenda for research, scholarship, and classroom practices. The fourth question also brings with it ill-formed responses. However, as our experiences resonated during the workshop with the experiences of the participants, we realized that we are indeed not starting from scratch in being both warned and well-instructed by the experiences and expertise that we have developed in basic writing classrooms over the last thirty years especially.

Implications for Research and Scholarship: The scholarship in basic writing, as we discussed earlier, does not focus on teacher identity. When teacher identity is considered, scholars often provide only brief statements at the beginning of essays (e.g., "I am a white-middle-class-woman-at-a-large-state-university"), rather than sustaining self-critique throughout the piece. How might we better imagine ways to enact our identities, to question them, to consider how these identities impact our classrooms? Can a teaching journal, such as the one demonstrated here by Taylor, be considered worthy as a research tool or as a rhetorical form worthy of study? What forms would/should scholarship that is more attuned to teacher identity take?

As evidenced by the form of this article, even when we try to concentrate on teacher identities and their construction, we face challenges of ethics and representation. For one thing, student voices creep into the center of our concerns and are often the most compelling voices that we hear. How can we make room for those voices and still sustain a dialogic balance — us, them, the systems around us all? Is it possible,

for example, to focus on teacher identity without engaging the voices of our students? If it isn't possible, how do we incorporate their points of view? How do we ethically represent their experiences? Can we begin to talk about teacher and student identities as mutually constitutive? What are productive ways to do so? What can this kind of reconceptualization offer the field of rhetoric and composition in terms of methodologies in research and scholarship?

In one way, this article is yet another call to story as a very useful methodology for sharing classroom experiences—this time with the gaze on the teacher. Our call, however, is also for a critical step back from our narratives to make them reach out more inclusively and more meaningfully for the general landscape of our work. At this point, our view is that we need to think, not only about ourselves in classroom space, but also about the art of storytelling in terms of its theoretical and political implications. What have we learned about the telling of stories? How do we assign meaning and draw value for the classroom cultures from which our telling comes?

Implications for Teacher Training and Classroom Pedagogy: Re-imagining the work of basic writing programs in the twenty-first century demands that we break the cycle of classroom representations that permit our own locations as teachers to go unnoticed and uninterrogated. Who we are and how we are as human beings impact upon our pedagogical choices. Being aware of this reality permits us to see success and failure in our classrooms with different eyes, with a different sort of critical questioning. We can become more sensitive to the possibility that what in the past we may have attributed to issues related to student identity may also be a function of issues related to our own identities. Is a "problem" a matter of ill-literacy or multiple literacies? Is a "problem" a function of student ignorance and inexperience or teacher ignorance and inexperience? Can a given usage be explained within institutional contexts or home contexts? Is the "problem" tied to performance or to the nature of engagements that we ourselves forge between ourselves and our students, or between ourselves and our institutions, or between those of us inside the classrooms and the systems that operate around us? What do we as teachers really know about the literate possibilities maximally available to us in a classroom? How have we learned to make good use of what we know? How have we learned to discover what else we might need to know and make use of?

In large part, the demographics of students in writing classrooms are shifting significantly, but the demographics of teachers entering writing classrooms don't seem to be keeping a comparable pace. Writing teachers, and especially basic writing teachers, tend to be white women. Given the differences in these demographic factors, the obvious probability, as indicated previously, is a variety of mismatches

between teacher and students. Whatever a teacher's personal, social, or institutional identity, however, whether that person conforms to the norm for teacher demographics in basic writing classrooms or not, what is clear is that we need to re-think teacher training and to re-think classroom pedagogies with these factors in mind.

Obviously, we are not at all suggesting that only insiders in a particular discourse community have the capacity to teach other members of that community. We are not interested in even belaboring this point. We are suggesting that teachers think more consciously and reflectively about the implications of difference in the classroom. How can we utilize knowledge of differences across personal, social, and institutional lines to respond better to student needs or to adjust our own needs when we encounter students who seem unfamiliar to us? What do we do when the identities that we hold most dear are not the features with which our students are connecting? In Taylor's case, for example, her sense of herself as a white female instructor was less important to her than her sense of herself as a teaching assistant who was forging a professional/institutional identity for herself.

This article suggests, then, that teachers might benefit from taking into account ways to engage in dialogue with students about how they are seeing us and not just about how we are seeing them. A critical question, therefore, is how do we develop habits as teachers, and especially as teachers in training, that support: the explorations of difference in classrooms including the ways in which our own locations contribute to this complexity; the accumulation of specific knowledge about students and student performance as a multiliterate enterprise; or about the use of that knowledge in developing the flexibility to match variable strategies with variable classroom needs and to construct classroom cultures that are positive and productive?

In terms of basic writing classrooms as a specific site of engagement, are we being systematic in training people for the particular needs of students at this level? How many teachers are simply "passing through," as in Taylor's case, i.e., learning from the site but not necessarily planning to make careers there? Should we be moving as a profession to draw more colleagues to basic writing as an area to which one is professionally devoted and not just generally interested? In other words, who are we thinking of when we think of "basic writing teachers" for the twenty-first century? What are the pedagogical implications of our answers? What are the implications for teacher training?

Implications for Re-considering Invisible Literacies: In the contemporary scholarship in which "basic writer" is often conflated with minority students, many kinds of literacies remain hidden. Issues such as how regionalisms and geographical alliances affect writing instruction seem to get left out of consideration. The concept of literacy as shaped by specific contexts inside and outside of the university is not

always used to greatest advantage. The dominance of "open admissions" at particular colleges and universities sometimes dominates our views of what literacy is or is not in ways that prevent us from seeing the strengths of our own students. For example, as teachers who work often with rural students rather than urban and suburban students, we have had to re-think some basic assumptions, such as how the presence or absence of cable television affects resources for writing. Our experiences with this project have led us to take into much fuller account the ways in which conflating race or ethnicity with lack of membership in academic discourse communities actually deflects attention away from other kinds of issues. Looming large among these issues is how writing professionals at all levels might productively critique the "gatekeeping" roles of first year writing that seem to be built automatically into the very fiber of our academic system.

One Last Word

At the end of this article, we feel compelled to make one last statement. While caution in all that we do seems well-advised given how complicated classroom challenges inevitably are, the commitment to more sustaining theories of classroom engagement and more generative and respectful classroom and scholarly practices is a challenge worth accepting. Affirmed by our experiences in the workshop, watching and listening as other teachers from across the nation saw ways in which their views of issues and challenges merged with ours, we were incredibly inspired to re-commit ourselves to this work in the company of others who were doing likewise: Taylor to her work toward her dissertation; Royster as she continues to investigate issues of identity, agency, and authority in multiple environments. In the meantime, in recognition that the task of debunking mythologies demands the sharing of counter viewpoints, we submit to the discourse on classrooms this view of teachers, not just students, in extending the call to others to make a different, more inclusive, more interactive case for how attention might be brought to bear on issues of classroom identity.

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APPENDIX 1

INFORMAL SURVEY FOR
BASIC WRITING WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

1. For what kind of institution do you work?
   —two-year college
   —four-year college
   —two-year technical college
   —technological college/university
   —research university

2. Are you:
   —a writing/other skills teacher in a basic writing program
   —an administrator of a basic writing program
   —other

3. How many years have you worked with students in basic writing classrooms?
   —1-3 years
   —4-9 years
   —10 years or more

4. How much diversity is evident among your teaching faculty?
   —25% people of color
   —25% men
   —50% or more people of color
   —50% or more men
   —majority white
   —majority women

5. How many of you work in programs that are:
   —separate administratively from freshman writing
   —included administratively with freshman writing
   —a majority of teachers that are tenure track
   —a majority of the teachers that are non-tenure track

6. What are the percentages of people of color in the program?

—under 5%
—under 10%
—about 25%
—about 50%
—about 75%
—about 90%

7. How many of you are associated with programs in which the correlations between the basic writing students and the general college/university are in balance in terms of:
—race
—gender
—age
—cultural belief system
—majors
—urban vs. rural
—private vs. public schooling

APPENDIX 2

Let's begin with some short writing. I'd like you to generate three lists just to get the juices flowing. Think about a specific class—preferably a writing class that you're currently doing, or might have quite recently completed.

—List 3 adjectives that you think that your students
would use to describe you now that the course is
over or about over.

—List 3 adjectives that you think that these same
students would probably have used on the very first
day of class.

—List 3 adjectives that you would use to describe
yourself in the classroom and specify whether your
choices are closer to how you really are or how you
hope that you are.

Spend a couple of minutes reviewing your lists and jot down a sentence or two specifying whether you see differences in the lists and how you might account for there being or not being discrepancies.

Now, I'd like you to write a short, short story about a real incident. Choose one moment from your teaching that involved a question of identity or image. Explain what happened, how you felt, whether this issue is ongoing or resolved for you.

Save your story until later, but turn now to two people who happen to be seated near you. Talk about the adjectives that you generated. See if you can come up with a list of issues to share with the full group that seem to show themselves in your conversation.

Share the list of issues.

APPENDIX 3

SCENARIOS: CONSTRUCTING TEACHER IDENTITY
IN THE BASIC WRITING CLASSROOM

1. *Reading Materials*
You are teaching Robert Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, a novel classified as "young adult" and one that prompts discussion of peer pressure, teacher authority, gendered behaviors, individuals and communities (feel free to substitute the young adult novel of your choice here). Several students in your basic writing course are writing in their journals that they are enjoying the experience of engaged reading for the first time in their academic careers. Yet in classroom discussion, other students are claiming that the text is "too easy," that it is a text appropriate for "middle schoolers."
—How do you speak to both groups' of students' concerns?
—How do you select reading materials for a basic writing classroom?

2. *Collaboration*
You are teaching basic writing in a multiethnic classroom. You decide to assign peer groups for the quarter that are heterogeneous, and you pay particular attention to issues of race, culture, class, and writing strengths. Your African American students request to work together, thereby offsetting the "balance" you had worked to achieve. Suddenly, the peer groups seem to be structured along racial lines.
—How do you respond to the request?
—How do you determine the structure of peer response groups in your basic writing classroom?

3. *Structure*
Your basic writing pedagogy privileges a process-oriented, holistic approach to drafting and revising. You encourage your students to enlist a variety of prewriting strategies, but you do not prescribe them; likewise, you talk to students about "focus ideas" or an "implied thesis," but you do not ask students to begin their prewriting by drafting a thesis statement. One of your students, an Asian American

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enrolled in his first sociology course, pulls you aside after class. "I have a complaint," he says. "Today in Sociology 101, my teacher asked me to turn in my thesis statement and topic outline for my research paper. When I turned my stuff in, she said I didn't know what a thesis or an outline even was."

    —How do you answer your student?

    —How do you balance an emphasis on writing conventions with other possible emphases in the classroom?

4. Gender

Two white students, one from a rural community and the other from a suburban area, are presenting their findings concerning sexual harassment and the "P.C." movement to a multiethnic basic writing class. Only one of the ten students is female. As you listen, you become aware that the presenters are speaking about sexual harassment issues in highly problematic ways. However, these two students have expressed their frustrations regarding their own discomfort with your "multicultural curriculum" throughout the quarter.

    —How do you respond to the presentation?

    —How do you facilitate the ensuing discussion?

    —How do you determine an appropriate focus or set of values for your own course?

5. Assessment

Upon completing a quarter of your basic writing course, you feel that one of your students should, in fact, bypass the second quarter of the basic writing sequence. You tell this student that he can submit a portfolio of his work to you, and that you will write an accompanying letter of recommendation to the coordinator of the Basic Writing program advocating this action. Your other students hear it is possible to "bypass" the rest of the sequence.

    —How do you speak to the group about the process?

    —How do you explain who "belongs" in a basic writing pro -gram and who doesn't?

6. Technology

Your basic writing class meets in a computer-assisted classroom where you often utilize an on-line discussion program. You have set up two discussions or "chat rooms" for your students to participate in; the two discussions center around the "English Only" debate. As is often the case, the students divide themselves along ethnic lines; all of the Hispanic students choose to enter one chat room, while the white students enter the other. You, the teacher, are able to "float" between

the chat rooms. You notice that the white students have begun a discussion of Mexican migrant workers and issues of class that is highly problematic, but the Hispanic students on the other side of the room are not aware of the discussion.

—How do you participate in the troubling discussion?
—How do you encourage cross-talk?

7. *Experience*

You are teaching Mike Rose's *Lives on the Boundary* to your multiethnic basic writing class. Your Latino and African American students are excited by the book, but your white, rural students connect with the text on only one point: they argue that they, like Mike Rose, have been victims of testing mix-ups.

—How do you encourage both groups to think critically and creatively about the book?
—How do you account for differences in personal history and experience in your classroom pedagogy?

8. *Agency and Authority*

You are a teacher of basic writing in a multiethnic classroom, and your class is working on collaborative projects involving contemporary language issues: Ebonics, bilingualism, the "English Only" debate, and the "P.C." movement on college campuses. A group of African American students presents their thoughts on Ebonics to their classmates. One of the speakers contradicts herself several times as she reads from the Oakland City Amendment; she cites the amendment, then "translates" to her classmates in highly problematic ways. To complicate matters further, when the presentation is over, the students pose all of their questions to you, not to the group.

—What role should you play in negotiating the discussion?
—How do you simultaneously: encourage critical questioning; hold students accountable for accuracy, clarity, and precision when they lead discussion; and require respect for others in the basic writing classroom?