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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 five 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 began working on this issue with the awareness that 1998 is the 20th anniversary of Mina P. Shaughnessy's death and that 1998 may also be the end of open admissions as we have known it at CUNY. At a time like this, we feel the need to be reflective but also to be looking toward the future. So this issue is a special issue: an examination of the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy and an examination of our field at a crossroads. We are deeply aware of the rift in our field that puts on one side those who believe that basic writers are best served by identifying them and providing classes and resources for them at their entrance to college and, on the other side, those who feel that they are better served by unqualified admission and placement in mainstream classes, believing that special designations provide an easy target for those trying to outsource, downsize, eliminate, or "improve" our programs. We think of Mina Shaughnessy and recall that, in the first issue of *JBW* in 1975, she wrote about the "young men and women who want to be in college, who have enough intelligence to do college work, but who are not skilled enough when they arrive on campus to survive in a rigorously academic environment." She also wrote about how the teachers who "teach across such a range of skills and experiences can expect to confront more questions than they will ever be able to answer and abandon more strategies than they will ever finally accept." It was her belief that *JBW* would offer a place for "the exchange of observations and theories among such teachers." And so this exchange continues.

We begin with an essay aptly titled, "'The Dilemma that Still Counts': Basic Writing at a Political Crossroads." In it, Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner look at basic writing in this "pivotal moment," recognizing that this is the time when we need to define, or re-define, basic writing by examining past research and by making suggestions for future research. Referring to Shaughnessy, they ask whether it is error that defines students as basic writers and, if it is, how we can better understand errors and the students that make them.

Jeanne Gunner's "Iconic Discourse: The Troubling Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy" attempts to historicize Shaughnessy's contribution and to examine what it means that her name has come to be the "symbolic representation of the basic writing field, its students, teachers, and pedagogy." Using Foucault's concept of the author function, Gunner examines how Shaughnessy has become the primary coordinate for the discourse of our field and what that implies.

Using a rhetorical analysis of Mina Shaughnessy's scholarship, Laura Gray-Rosendale counters recent charges that Shaughnessy's work was essentialist, accommodationist, and lacked focus on material conditions. In her "Inessential Writings: Shaughnessy's Legacy in A Socially Constructed Landscape," Gray-Rosendale identifies the contradictions, self-differences, the very inessentiality, of Shaughnessy's work and argues for a closer examination of both the texts and the historical-political context of her writing.

Howard Tinberg, in "Teaching in the Spaces Between: What Basic Writing Students Can Teach Us," presents the voices of his students telling the importance of education in their lives. While he is speaking to all of us who teach basic writing, his perspective is that of a teacher in a two-year college; from that perspective, he rejects the move to transform the mission of two-year colleges into one of narrowly defined developmental endeavors. In questioning the identity of basic writing, he reminds us that the responsibility of higher education must be with the two-year, four-year, and high schools, all working together.

In "Technology, Basic Writing, and Change," Jeffrey T. Grabill, also questions the identity of basic writing programs. He believes that program identity is a function of the larger institution, and writing teachers must focus their efforts on working with those institutional processes. Participating in technology design can provide a wedge for basic writing faculty to engage in the decision-making process and to ensure that knowledgeable writing teachers will remain in control of their curriculum and pedagogy.

We end the issue with what may seem prescient and strikingly relevant, although written as long ago as 1976, Mina Shaughnessy's extraordinary "The Miserable Truth," in which she forewarns us that we "had better keep learning how to teach writing because the brothers and sisters and cousins and children of our students will be back." In this piece, she reminds us of the inequity of public education and the young people who have been failed by these "savage inequalities." Shaughnessy tells us that the social change individuals gain through education has a power that once begun cannot be stopped. She writes, "But once the possibility of change touches their imaginations, once a right has been extended to them and they have felt its power to open and enrich their lives, they cannot got back."

Trudy Smoke *and* **George Otte**

Susanmarie Harrington
and Linda Adler-Kassner

"THE DILEMMA THAT STILL COUNTS": BASIC WRITING AT A POLITICAL CROSS-ROADS

ABSTRACT: *In light of current debates about basic writers and basic writing (like those in these pages and beyond), it seems abundantly clear that there is a need to assess our field's definition of basic writing and basic writers in order to articulate what we are, both to ourselves and to others outside the field. This article begins by reviewing definitions of basic writers and basic writing in research from the last twenty years, using this review to argue that basic writers are not defined only in terms of institutional convenience. It then offers future directions for basic writing research, suggesting that in order to learn more about writers who truly are "basic," we must return to studies of error informed by basic writing's rich traditions of cognitive and cultural research.*

It's beginning to seem abundantly clear that basic writing is facing what the historiographer Gene Wise called a "pivotal moment" in its status and development as a field. We are all "in" this moment, watching as the field works to decide what it has become, and what it should be in the future. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the recent heated exchanges (in these pages and elsewhere) between Ira Shor, who argues that basic writing is "our apartheid" and should be abolished, and Karen Greenberg, who counters with the point that basic writing classes have long been the entrance point to higher education for countless of students who might be otherwise turned away at the gates of the academy. Although the intensity of the Shor/Greenberg debate has doubtless been fanned by recent events at CUNY, the discussion about the need for basic writing did not, of course, spring from whole cloth. In fact, it's an issue that's been bandied about by the field, in various shapes and forms, since the publication of *Errors and Expectations* (and probably before that).

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Recently, however, the questions at the center of this debate have become more urgent for a number of reasons. College and university budgets are shrinking; at the same time, campuses are under increased pressure to raise admissions standards and admit "better prepared" students. Concomitant with this pressure to increase admission standards are various responses to the most current version of the "literacy crisis" that has run throughout this century, none of which are conducive to the kinds of issues basic writing students bring to the classroom. In response to these pressures, we are confronted with pressing questions about the nature of basic writing programs, students, and teaching practices.

When the Conference on Basic Writing held its first pre-conference workshop before the 1996 CCCC, these questions were at the forefront of many of the session's discussions. When the day ended, those of us in attendance decided that, as an "official body" of basic writing instructors, we needed to formulate a response to the issues that were facing us. But as we talked, we realized that it was difficult for us to pull together a sense of where we had been, and where we were going. Essentially, we needed to know how the field had defined and shaped itself as it developed, and how it responded to challenges about its future direction. Thus, this essay was born—an attempt to survey how basic writing has been defined in composition in the last twenty years. As we have worked on this project, political battles around the country have continued to develop, lending a greater sense of urgency to our feeling that we need to first examine our history before charting our future direction.

As we see it, this review is only a necessary first step; this reading serves as a guide for present and future action. Ultimately, we will contest the claim that basic writing programs owe their existence only to institutional or political impulses, or that basic writing exists, as David Bartholomae says, "only because basic writing teachers exist"; and that "the division [between non-basic writers and basic writers] makes nothing but institutional sense" ("Tidy House" 19). In fact, we will argue that basic writing programs serve compelling educational and political functions, and that one active response to the current political crises around basic writing should be a renewed and refocused effort to examine what we see as the one factor identified by writers from all parts of the basic writing literature as a marker of those writers: error. However, we make this argument judiciously and in ways that blend the best of the scholarship conducted in the field to the current time. But before we put forth what should be, it's important to examine what has come before.

If We Know Who We Think We Are, Why Do We Need a Definition?

In 1993, David Bartholomae argued that basic writing teachers "have constructed a course to teach and enact a rhetoric of exclusion and made it the center of a curriculum designed to hide or erase cultural difference, all the while carving out and preserving an 'area' in English within which we can do our work" ("Tidy House" 18). More recently, Ira Shor argued that basic writing programs are based in malignant economic and political roots: they exist, he says, to "help secure the status quo against democratic change in school and society . . . to discipline students in an undisciplined age" (92). Shor's argument extends Bartholomae's critique to include a much larger social and political universe, looking beyond the university for the forces that are shaping developmental writing programs. Although these two critiques emerge from very different theoretical traditions, both lead in the same direction: the conclusion that basic writing programs are set up to serve broad cultural goals (whether those be institutional, for Bartholomae, or economic and social, for Shor). And while Bartholomae, in his conclusion, stops short of recommending the abolition of basic writing programs, both critiques do lead to at least the serious consideration of that step. Shor's peroration challenges us to radically reconceive first-year writing instruction:

> Farewell to educational apartheid; farewell to tests, programs and classes supporting inequality; farewell to the triumphant Harvard legacy now everywhere in place, constantly troubled, widely vulnerable, waiting for change. (101)

If basic writing programs are not set up to serve students in real ways, why have them?

In the context of the larger field of composition studies, this question is timely, and its emergence can be traced along with the questions raised about mandatory first-year composition requirements (for a review of the abolitionist debate, see Connors). Questions about the legitimacy of basic writing, however, occupy a different place in public discourse. While increasing calls for accountability and outcomes assessment mean that audiences within and without the university are influencing the assessment of first-year writing programs, budget pressures and state legislature debates are actually abolishing basic writing programs. Anyone who reads both the *Journal of Basic Writing* and the *New York Times* has had the unexpected experience of seeing critiques of the CUNY basic writing program mounted by both a radical theorist and a Republican mayor, strange bedfellows indeed. While

the abolitionist debate over mandatory composition requirements is a theoretical debate with clear practical consequences, the debate over basic writing programs is carried out in public policy forums, not just academic ones.

The vitriolic nature of both public and academic debates about basic writing is linked to our field's failure to educate others about what we do. As Harvey Wiener, notes, basic writing programs, despite their successes, have not been "marketed" well by those who run them. Wiener contends:

> Perhaps we cannot prevent the unenlightened barbs of politicians with an eye on budgets or reelections, but certainly we ought to have educated our University colleagues systematically and thoughtfully about what we do. Yet we have failed here, and, as a result, we continue to suffer uninformed comments and criticisms by the professorate beyond (and unfortunately sometimes within) our English and writing skills departments. (97)

Wiener calls for programmatic assessment that will "link the specifics of instructional programming with data that would support its long-term future and fundability" (99). We agree that institutional assessment can provide information invaluable in political debates as well as program planning (for more discussion on this point, see also Collins).

Another response to the political crisis surrounding basic writing, however, is to return to the intellectual foundations of our field, to examine the myriad ways in which the category of "basic writer" has been established. What definitions of basic writing have become institutionalized? We began this project by searching for a common definition of either "basic writing" or "basic writer." A cursory review of the literature revealed, however, that such an undertaking was going to be either far more complicated, or far more simple, than we envisioned when we started. In some respects, it seemed easy to say that basic writers are students in basic writing courses, and each of us can imagine those students fairly easily. They are, after all, the students we teach on a regular basis. This simplicity of vision leads to the easy use of the term "basic writing" in *The Journal of Basic Writing*, book and article titles, or the *CCCC Bibliography on Rhetoric and Composition*. Of course, as rhetoricians we know that the basic writers at IUPUI are different from the basic writers in University of Minnesota's General College, who are themselves different from the basic writers at the University of Michigan (where the basic writers in Dearborn are different from those in Ann Arbor). And we also know that within the same class, basic writers differ one from the other, with some being

"more basic" than others. Even as we acknowledge the variety of basic writers, we find the term basic writer one that we can easily use in professional discourse, where it means something like "those students at my institution who need (a little bit) more help than most other students do to write successfully," or as Shaughnessy once wrote, "students who need extra work in writing" ("Some New" 103). Easy enough.

From another angle, however, defining "basic writer" becomes so complicated that it becomes virtually impossible to arrive at a definitive answer. A frequently-quoted passage in basic writing literature comes from the book that arguably launched the field, *Errors and Expectations*. In the opening chapter, Mina Shaughnessy noted: "The term BW student is an abstraction that can easily get in the way of teaching. Not all BW students have the same problems; not all students with the same problems have them for the same reasons" (40). Shaughnessy continued:

> There are styles to being wrong. This is, perversely, where the individuality of inexperienced writers tends to show up, rather than in the genuine semantic, syntactic, and conceptual options that are available to the experienced writer. It becomes important, then, to do more than list, prescriptively, the ways in which the student breaks with the conventional code of punctuation. Rather, the teacher must try to decipher the individual students' code, examine samples of his writing as a scientist might, searching for patterns or explanations, listening to what the student says about punctuation, and creating situations in the classroom that encourage students to talk openly about what they don't understand. One of the great values of the decentralized classroom where students participate as teachers as well as learners is that it opens up the students' 'secret' files of misinformation, confusion, humor, and linguistic insight to an extent that is not often possible in the traditional setting. However committed teachers are to starting from 'scratch,' they have difficulty deciding where 'scratch' is without this kind of help from their students. (40)

This passage illustrates the complexity involved in teaching "the individuality of inexperienced writers." Although Shaughnessy is here concerned with punctuation, her remarks about the need to read students' work carefully, in as rich a context as possible, in a setting where students' voices join with teachers' voices in problem-solving carry over to virtually any element of writing. Basic writing students have always been difficult to characterize with any clarity, and the very act of categorizing is dangerous. Shaughnessy's warning that the term

"BW Student" can interfere with teaching is, ironically, the same argument Bartholomae made in "Tidy House": the label, the institutionalization, the tracking implicit in the construction of basic writing can prevent us from seeing students as individuals with their own needs. Any definition of basic writing or basic writers can only be essentializing and reductionist, so perhaps our efforts should be directed at eradicating the term, rather than defining it. Given the diversity of institutions and students in this country, there is a lot of sense in this approach — and that explains why this passage from Shaughnessy is so appealing (and oft-quoted). It is commonly used by writers wanting to acknowledge diversity before plunging into a more particular discussion of their own notion of basic writing (e. g. Reagan; Sheridan-Rabideau and Brossell).

Yet, a decision to avoid defining basic writers seems unsatisfactory. We continue to work in "basic writing" and to teach "basic writers" in an educational environment in which basic writing and remedial programs are under attack. The very public criticisms of CUNY, for instance, revolve in large part around the existence of "remedial" courses.[1] New York City is not the only place where basic writing courses have come under legislative scrutiny. As state legislatures become more concerned with curricular matters, the pressure to abolish such courses outright, or to refuse college credit for them, will only grow. (An interesting pair of essays in the February 1996 *CCC* discussed these volatile issues in South Carolina [Grego and Thompson] and New York [Soliday].) In such a political climate, we can't afford to abandon the students who have historically been served by basic writing programs. Our internal debates about the nature of basic writing are exciting, but political exigencies challenge us to formulate a clear statement of purpose. Without forgetting the diversity of students currently enrolled in basic writing classes, we should be able to define basic writing in keeping with current theory and in awareness of the political climate. It is time to confront the years of debate about the nature of our field.

Defining Basic Writers

Our first step in this direction was a literature review. Realizing that the literature lacks any clarity on broad definitions of basic writers, we shifted focus to examine what is at stake in the myriad definitions of basic writing. How does existing research define basic writing? What about basic writers? What do the authors say are the implications of their definitions?

As we read, two broad categories emerged which allowed us to describe some basic trends in the field: studies focusing on the pro-

cesses of student writers in action, which we refer to as research grounded in cognitive perspectives; and those examining the relationships between students' literacy cultures and their work in the classroom, which we see stemming from cultural perspectives.[2]

Cognitive Issues in Basic Writing

Generally speaking, cognitively-based explorations of basic writers focus on the writers themselves and what happens in the act of composing. In shedding light on students' composing practices, such research directly addresses teachers' questions about how best to help students who struggle while writing. Much of the early research on basic writing, such as *Errors and Expectations*, for instance, illustrates how close reading of student work reveals the logic inherent in "mistakes," and how such readings can drive instruction (a tradition that continued in later studies such as Bartholomae's "Error"). Another impetus for such scholarship was, and continues to be, characterizations of basic writers as stupid illiterates. Min-Zhan Lu's discussion of the reaction against open admissions at CUNY in the 1970s demonstrates the mean-spirited nature of these attacks: CUNY students, she reports, were referred to as "dunces," "misfits" and even "sluggish . . . animals" (891).

In cognitive terms, basic writers are sometimes defined in ways that allow researchers to explore what individuals do as they write. In a sense, this is Shaughnessy's scientific examination of student text in action. When the unit of analysis is an individual student — as in Sally Barr Reagan's study of Javier, in "Warning: Basic Writers at Risk," we learn a great deal about what influences writers. Sondra Perl's "Basic Writers in the Process of Composing" closely examines the writing processes of five basic writers. Her findings amplify Shaughnessy's, in that she suggests that the basic writers studied "display[ed] consistent composing processes" (22), but that their writing was more "fluent" when they wrote about subjects which were more familiar and comfortable for them. Ultimately, she uses these results to argue that writing should be less constrictive and more experiential (31-32). Similarly, in "This Wooden Shack Place," Glynda Hull and Mike Rose explore Robert's "unconventional reading" of a poem. In focussing largely on the processes Robert uses as he reads, looking at the particular experiences he has had that lead him to imagine the poem's images in ways that are surprising, yet logical, they provide a compassionate reading of a student essay that many teachers might be tempted to dismiss. Careful study of individual students reminds us how complicated even the simplest text is.

Cognitive research like Hull and Rose's stands squarely in oppo-

sition to the notion that basic writers are remedial students (see, for example, Rose's distancing from this term in "Remedial Writing Courses"). It demonstrates that basic writers are *writers*, with complex mental processes at work. Although cognitive research fights deficit models of education, it tends to assume that the study of individuals is the key to understanding students' needs, and in its most extreme form, looks only to the study of individuals for the root of writing problems. For example, Norbert Elliot begins his discussion of the importance of narrative for basic writers:

> Basic writers have only themselves. They are the method. There is no projected self on paper, no repertoire of discourse strategies to which successes and failures may be attributed. In basic writing courses, students hurl themselves into the void, expecting to receive the benefits that literacy brings. To the basic writer, everything is personal; they try to capture their lives on the page. (19)

Most characterizations of basic writers are not quite as isolating as Elliot's view, but much scholarship explores the ways in which *individuals* learn and use language.

The relationship between oral and written language, for instance, is one area that has been explored as an explanation for students' problems. De Beaugrande and Olson's tripartite view of basic writing as a linguistic, psychological, and social phenomenon argues that a reconsideration of the relationship between writing and speech would lead to richer basic writing classrooms. The *JBW* itself, in its call for papers, suggests that basic writers are "sometimes . . . student[s] from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse . . .". The inappropriate transfer of oral strategies to written tasks, some claim, leads to poor-quality texts. Basic writing students make erroneous links between writing and speech, in that they view writing as simply "cleaned up speech," and consequently focus only on sentence-level issues (Parisi). Basic writers are not likely to see gains in planning, focusing or revising, what Parisi says are "real strides" (34).

Another line of research posits that some type of cognitive deficit contributes to poor writing ability. Sheridan-Rabideau and Brosell suggest that basic writers have "trouble starting a piece of writing expressing ideas clearly, and revising" (22), although they note that "it would be dangerous to lump all basic writing students into one category" (22). Patrick Slattery's discussion of the role of developmental models in writing instruction provides a brief overview of the conflicting research on this point. In two essays, Janice Hays argues that basic writers are dogmatic individuals who function on the lower end of Perry's developmental framework; her findings are disputed by others (see

Slattery for a full discussion). Slattery, however, concludes that developmental models are somewhat useful, but not all-predictive. His work moves towards a mediated position on a continuum between cognitive and cultural scholarship, for he concludes that cognitive development is but one of a set of factors that contributes to writing success. Further research on those other factors would lead to a fuller view of the rhetorical situations facing students.

A third dimension of cognitive research is psychological. Do basic writers have psychological deficits? Although de Beaugrande and Olson urge that "it is . . . essential to uncouple the issue of psychological development from linguistic development," (11) there is a long tradition of study into such matters, with particular focus on anxiety and self-esteem among basic writers. Peter Dow Adams, for instance, notes that the "confidence and ... motivation [of basic writers at his institution] may be extremely shaky" (27; see also Faigley, Witte, and Daly, qtd. in Minot and Gamble 119; Lunsford). But no characterization of basic writers is without contradiction elsewhere in the literature: Minot and Gamble found that basic writers had no different images of selves as writers from students in first year writing—in fact, one section of basic writers in their study had higher pre- and post-test scores than any of the sections of first-year composition.

The final dimension of cognitive research is language itself. Many basic writing studies take students' written language as the main unit of analysis, exploring the errors students make, or other dimensions of students' grammar or syntax, although this is a strand of research that has fallen out of favor as more cultural approaches to basic writing have gained ascendancy. Shaughnessy's work, in both *Errors and Expectations* and her review of basic writing literature ("Basic Writing") focuses great, and thoughtful, attention on surface-level issues. We must note, however, that while Shaughnessy's primary focus was assessment and instruction relating to students' texts, she was aware of the tensions between surface issues and other dimension of writing (see her memo described in Horner ("Discoursing" 209)). Often, cognitive researchers employ metaphors in order to make sense (perhaps to themselves, and certainly to others) of the process by which basic writers they observed engaged with academic writing. For example, in "Some New Approaches," Shaughnessy refers to a "kind of carpentry in sentence making, various ways of joining or hooking up modifying units to the base sentence" (109). Purves uses similarly tactile metaphors—likening writing to cooking ("Don't Write Good" 16-17) and woodworking ("Clothing the Emperor" 33-36).

These metaphors are a good way to demonstrate the ways in which research we have begun by classifying as cognitive blurs with research we classify as more grounded in cultural traditions. Much scholarship, of course, takes elements from each to explore the ways in

which individual writers are affected by social context. For example, Hull et al.'s "Remediation as Social Construct" still focuses on language issues, but examines why it's so difficult for teachers to get out of a mindset that promotes a simple view of remediation. Purves' crafting metaphors call attention to the ways in which writing develops through joining language elements, a process which is physical, mental, and social; these metaphors also demonstrate that writing ability is no more about only sentence-level features than a gourmet meal is about the individual ingredients.

Purves, in fact, notes that language problems are linked to social problems; basic writers, he says, did not receive the right preparation in their prior schooling and have "not been fully clued into the academic writing game" ("Don't Write Good" 16). In a more theoretical vein, he notes: "It seems to me plain as a pikestaff that if we want to help others become members of our scribal society, the best way to do so is to teach them the rules of the game" ("Emperor's New Clothes" 36). Purves argues that because literacy occurs in a social framework, we must work at it from both ends, helping students understand both the social forces that construct literacy as well as the very particular rules that govern particular literacy acts. Even David Bartholomae's "Tidy House" essay, which has become a mainstay of basic writing research from a cultural perspective, contains some discussion and linguistic analysis of several of the student essays Bartholomae uses to ground the paper's theoretical discussion.

Cultural Issues in Basic Writing

As the need to theorize basic writing scholarship has become stronger, however, cultural approaches have moved to the forefront of the field. This approach to defining basic writing focuses less on individuals than on a sense of institutional or social culture, and instead stems from the rise of "discourse community" scholarship focusing on the connections between academic writing and the broader culture of the university. While research based in cognitive work is often in the form of the case study (of writers or individual classrooms, for example), scholarship grounded in cultural theories is often largely theoretical, invoking individual students only rarely or as authors of texts to be analyzed . Here, basic writing is a place that exists only in relation to the rest of the university. The task of a basic writer is to negotiate the movement into the university.

Spatial metaphors abound in this scholarship, as basic writing is viewed as a real or metaphorical journey into a new undertaking, academic discourse. Mina Shaughnessy's "Diving In," while concerned more with the movement of basic writing instructors (than basic writ-

ing students) into this territory exemplifies this journey. Shaughnessy describes four stages - Guarding the Tower, Converting the Natives, Sounding the Depths, and finally Diving In - to describe the journey that instructors must take to successfully work with basic writers. The teacher who "dives in," Shaughnessy writes, must immerse herself in the culture of the writer. [S]he "must make a decision that demands professional courage - the decision to remediate himself, to become a student of new disciplines and of his students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence" (239). Elsewhere, Shaughnessy claimed that basic writing was "the frontier of the profession" ("Basic Writing" 206). Pamela Gay's post-colonial analysis of the frontier metaphor challenges us to explore the politics of frontier teaching, arguing that "we must learn to use difference as a source of strength" (34) and avoid reductive dichotomies between home and school culture, or between frontiers and civilization. The ways in which academic cultures have been studied have become increasingly theoretically and politically sophisticated.

Within the last fifteen years, David Bartholomae's work has come to embody the cultural approach to basic writing research, where the undertaking of basic writing is an institutionally constructed artifact of exclusion. "Inventing the University" is perhaps the classic example of this argument. As Bartholomae argues there, as well as "The Tidy House," basic writing is defined primarily by what it is not: it is not "regular" composition courses, and its students are not "regular" writers. While Bartholomae's position is no doubt familiar to most readers of this essay, we shall quickly sketch it out. He argues that the key issue for students is learning a new discourse. A new student

> has to invent the university by assembling and mimicking its language while finding some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements or convention, the history of a discipline, on the other. He must learn to speak our language. Or he must dare to speak it or to carry off the bluff, since speaking and writing will most certainly be required long before this skill is 'learned,' and understandably, this causes problems. ("Inventing the University" 135)

Hindman, elaborating on Bartholomae's argument, goes so far as to claim that the institution has invented basic writers: "basic writers are beings for us as professors of English; the notion of marginal students as 'marginal'. . . is essential to the functioning of our own system; our own autonomy and place are dependent upon someone else's dependence on our authority to assign or deny location" (60). Hindman's argument anticipates Shor's "Apartheid" argument, which

takes the university and locates it in a regressive social and economic structure Shor would work to change.

While in some ways this cultural argument is reminiscent of the cognitive arguments that students need to learn to write in ways that are acceptable to the academy, Bartholomae's point is that the discourse of the university is itself invented. As Gail Stygall argues in "Resisting Privilege," "the institutional practice of basic writing is constructed and inscribed by the notion of [Foucault's] author function, and . . . the teaching of basic writing is formulated around the educational discursive practices necessary to keep the author function dominant" (321). Because basic writers are by definition not accorded author status, Stygall explains, they are not permitted to break conventions, they are not permitted to make great developmental strides (plagiarism is suspected), they are not read as rational writers, and they cannot express a poly-sided version of the self (324-35). Institutional categorizations of basic writers lead to teachers' compressed expectations of basic writers, which in turn limit the rhetorical choices available to students. Writers' roles are restricted by the ways in which the university constructs them.

While Stygall attributes basic writers' difficulties to the ways in which the institution limits their performance, Patricia Bizzell suggests that the difficulties are rooted in the acculturation processes of students themselves. The problem may be that some students have "such limited experience outside their native discourse communities that they are unaware that there is such a thing as a discourse community with conventions to be mastered. What is underdeveloped is their knowledge both of the ways experience is constituted and interpreted in the academic discourse community and of the fact that all discourse communities constitute and interpret experience" (qtd. in Bartholomae, "Inventing" 147). In Bizzell's model, teachers need both to introduce the academic discourse community and to introduce the very notion of discourse community; writing classes should help students explore the social and communal nature of the language communities they come from.

The notion of discourse communities plays easily into the figure of the contact zone, a metaphor popularized by Mary Louise Pratt. Pratt argues that contact zones "are places where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths as they are lived out in the world today" (34). As Harris notes, Pratt's ideas "have held strong appeal for many teachers of basic writing, perhaps since our classrooms seem so often a point of contact for various and competing languages and perspectives" (31); in fact, Pratt's work is alluded to in cultural scholarship as often as Shaughnessy's work is alluded to in cognitive scholarship. The contact zone takes the gap

between academic discourse and basic writers' preparation and makes it an advantage, a teaching moment, rather than a deficit. In the contact zone, basic writing becomes an acculturation medium. In the contact zone, basic writers are the "other," those who do not fit in with the mainstream expectations. In the contact zone, that "otherness" becomes an asset, a cultural quality that promotes an enhanced understanding of the discourse rules that govern the university. As Bartholomae imagines it, in the contact zone, "one could argue that 'basic writers' are better prepared to produce and think through unseemly comparisons better than their counterparts in the 'mainstream' class" ("Tidy House" 14).

Whether the university is theorized as a contact zone (Bartholomae), a frontier (Shaughnessy), a post-colonial encounter (Gay), a game (Purves, "Don't Write Good"), or a club (Rose, *Lives*), the conceptual problem that has evolved from the increasing dominance of cultural approaches to basic writing is evident in the Shor/Greenberg debates: a focus on academic culture leads to the elision of basic writers. If the basic writing course becomes an opportunity to become conversant with college discourse, then every student entering college is a basic writer. Peter Dow Adams notes that that shifting pedagogies now mean that what we do in basic writing classrooms is really not so different from what we do in first-year composition classrooms (24). In fact, the textbook that has emerged from the basic writing program at the University of Pittsburgh, *Ways of Reading* (Bartholomae and Petrosky), is used in basic writing courses, first-year composition courses, and even advanced composition courses. In fact, some of the scholarship on basic writing is not really about basic writing anymore, in that the research seems equally applicable to any writing classroom (a point Bloom uses to argue for renaming *JBW*; see "Name"). Marcia Dickson, for instance, uses the term novice writer, rather than basic writer, in her study of the basic writing sequence at Ohio State, Marion. Many other articles that have appeared in *JBW*, such as Lee Odell's "Basic Writing in Context," are more critiques of teaching of literacy and reading in college generally than analyses of issues particular to basic writing.

When everyone is a basic writer, then "real" basic writers can get lost in the crowd (a point raised by Karen Greenberg repeatedly whenever mainstreaming is proposed; see Greenberg, "Politics" and "Response"). In a heated exchange on two listservs last fall, a debate between Shor and Greenberg turned on this very point: if we provide critical writing instruction for all students, won't some students' great needs not be met? The cultural arguments for basic writing blur very smoothly into more mainstream composition theory—which is good for the prestige of basic writing scholarship, but bad for a separate definition for basic writing programs. The more we aim to show that

the basic writing programs are not purely remedial or "bonehead" English, the more we run the risk of doing away with basic writing through our own theories. Not all writers in this tradition would go this far; Bartholomae, for example, explicitly refuses: "Would I advocate the elimination of courses titled 'basic writing ' for all postsecondary curricula beginning next fall? No. I fear what would happen to the students who are protected, served in its name" ("Tidy House" 20). But the pages of this journal saw Shor's well-theorized call to abolish basic writing programs, evidence that what is at stake for these programs, as well as for basic writers, is great indeed.

Future Directions: What We Need to Know

Given what we see in the diversity of basic writing scholarship in the last twenty years, we are faced with an important question: where do we go? We began this project with an attempt to define basic writers in a rich yet satisfying manner. Perhaps unsurprisingly, our reading and analysis has not allowed us to frame a simple definition that will settle the heated disputes now raging in hallways and legislatures. But precisely because this is such a difficult question, it is all the more important that we address it now. It seems clear that our collective failure to explore the real political consequences between the broad cultural approaches to basic writing and the cognitive approaches leaves us, our programs, and most importantly our students, vulnerable to legislatively-mandated cuts. Within composition, generally, difficult questions are being asked about the position of basic writing and basic writers in the academy. Within the broader political culture, other questions - potentially, more troubling ones - are being asked about the "worthiness" of the very students who frequently populate basic writing courses. Yet, as we suggested at the beginning of this article, we want to argue against the notion that basic writing and basic writers have been defined only in terms of their "otherness," or as an institutional convenience. There *are* answers to be had to some of the questions being fired at the field right now: What about the ways that these writers compose makes them basic writers? What about the relationships between their literacies and institutional values makes them basic writers?

As much cognitive and cultural research from the last twenty years demonstrates, basic writers are real people who bring with them real issues to the classroom. They are not defined by what they are *not* - instead, they share a common characteristic that cuts across institutions and courses: there are more errors in their writing than there are in the writing of "non-basic" writers. While the dangers facing basic writers are articulated differently in cognitive and culturally-based

scholarship, error is the one common danger cutting across the research in the field. Sentence-level errors are far and away the most likely dimension of writing that will mark basic writers (and they are the most likely dimension of writing to elicit phone calls to writing program administrators). While most writers and readers would agree that there are other dimensions of writing that are more important, such as focus, purpose, or rhetorical context, it is error that stigmatizes in a way that weaknesses in those other dimensions do not. Accordingly, cognitively-based work looks at error at the sentence level; culturally-based work tends to look at errors of form and convention, more broadly. But even the conclusion to *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* acknowledges that basic writers "will continue to make more mistakes than their mainstream counterparts" (qtd. in Hindman 58). As *Errors and Expectations* demonstrated so beautifully, student errors can be what marks them as basic writers, but errors can also be the keys to understanding students' needs.

Yet, what do we know about error? While the packed rooms at recent CCCC sessions on grammar suggest a renewed interest in that subject, error analysis is not a trendy subject in research these days. As Hull's 1985 literature review observed,

> researchers who study error study it differently now. This shift in what constitutes interesting and valued research on error, what might be called a shift in paradigms, has occurred as part of a broadening of our notions of what constitutes acceptable scientific research . . . . It also reflects a movement away from a concern solely for correctness in writing and toward an interest in rhetoric . . . . And it reflects, finally, new attitudes toward the role of error in language learning. (177)

As attention has shifted from a close focus on correctness to more rhetorical views of error, research attention has shifted away from error analysis towards generic conventions and other rhetorical matters. And while we fully support a move away from mindless correctness to a rhetorical integration of language and form, we contend that the move away from an oversimplified view of correctness has led to a reduction of interest in language use.

That said, there are a number of recent studies that bear on this point. Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford's research showed us what were the 20 most common errors in the sample they examined, and Rei Noguchi's work demonstrates strategies for teaching grammatical revision. The social dimensions of error have long been acknowledged; that is, error results not simply from a violation of a rule, but from a violation of a rule as perceived within the writer/reader relationship or within a discourse community more generally. Joseph

Williams' "Phenomenology of Error" argues that error must be viewed according to "the nature of our response to violations of grammatical rules" (159). In other words, error is not simply a matter of whether a "rule" has been violated or observed, but whether a reader has *noticed* that the rule has been violated or observed. But there has been little work done to explore the ways in which social views of error are taught, or learned. How do students view such work?

Research of the last twenty years also tells us that when those violations are noticed, the writers who produced them are judged harshly. Despite our theoretical advances, outside writing programs, writing is commonly viewed as a matter of skills that can be easily taught, and easily learned. The structure of American high school curricula promotes this view about language and writing in general, as the tendency to include grammar instruction in discrete, handbook-driven units illustrates. In most other skill-based areas, we expect a learning curve. As Alan Purves notes,

> having trouble writing is like having trouble playing the piano, cooking, or doing carpentry or plumbing. The problem with writing as opposed to those others is that people in institutions of higher education expect students to do it reasonably well. After all, most of the faculty and administrators are pretty good at it (or so they think) and they are genuinely surprised to find a student who has trouble with syntax, organization, diction, or tone, much less finding something to say about a supposedly controversial topic that few really care about. ("Don't Write Good" 15-16)

Many teachers outside writing programs are so surprised by error that they may reject the authors of error-ridden texts. And for basic writers, whose texts are frequently marked by error, this fact of academic life can be particularly devastating because it can be one of the most significant factors in determining their educational success (or lack thereof). As Hull notes, the "dilemma that still counts for many inexperienced writers in college classrooms is error. We can choose to make it count less by continued scholarship on the processes of mind that govern error commission and correction" (188). But for basic writing students, error often counts more. As Michael Newman notes, drawing on Shaughnessy's work:

> 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 be-

> come so focused on words and syntax that their writing col lapses into conceptual incoherence and communicative vacuousness. (25)

Of course, an obsession with error does not necessarily lead to correctness in writing (much less the development of other aspects of a text). Students have notorious difficulty recognizing and correcting error (interestingly, some research suggests that teachers do as well; see Greenbaum and Taylor). Very few studies examine the process of error analysis, although many note that students' perception of errors is very different from teachers'. Horner, for example, notes that when he asks students to revise errors, "Their 'corrections' often leave untouched the errors I have in mind and alter what I fail to see as originally in error" ("Rethinking" 175). Horner outlines a pedagogy for teaching error as negotiation between readers and writers, but does not look at the work of individual writers as he does so. While we know something about which errors occur; we know very little about what students do as they revise to correct error. George Otte's "Computer Adjusted Errors and Expectations" suggests that error recognition is a much more difficult process than we usually suggest (and provides one of the few studies of writers at work in this dimension of writing). As we explore the perceptions of basic writers, we need to explore their writing processes in both broad formal terms and also sentence-level terms.

Despite Hull's conclusion, which outlined a broad research agenda, the study of error has not advanced much in succeeding years. Much work remains to be done with the concept of error, theoretically and practically. Within this large category, questions abound. What are some of the causes of error? That is, drawing from the work of our cognitive predecessors, what decisions are basic writers making about their writing (specifically the sentence formations of their texts) that lead them to construct them as they do? Adding a cultural element, why are these writers making those decisions as they are - what are the beliefs and values (about academic writing or, perhaps, writing more generally) that are informing those decisions? Conversely, what are the effects of these errors? How do writers perceive them after they are "noticed" (or marked), and how does that perception affect writers' concepts of themselves as writers and students?

A second area that requires more investigation involves students themselves. Few works, with the exception of Deborah Mutnick's *Writing in an Alien World*, explore how basic writers see themselves in any broad way. As Purves notes, our labels, such as "basic writer," are "given by the judges, not the judged" ("Emperor's New Clothes" 46). What do basic writers have to say about themselves? How do they

perceive their abilities and experiences with reading and writing (and those things in conjunction with one another)? Do they agree that "error" is the feature that marks them as basic writers, or do they perceive other issues with their writing? Alternatively, do they contest the label that has been attached to them all together? What do they see as the differences between the "standards" against which they have been assessed, and their own perception of their writing and reading skills?

And finally, we echo Wiener's and Shor's calls for programmatic assessment. Without information about the effects of basic writing programs, we are unable to argue effectively for funding and other resources. Without sharing information about assessment techniques, we are unable to learn from each other. Writing program administrators should begin collecting information and sharing perspectives on how such information can be used, both internally and externally.

In addition, as individual scholars, we can use our research to further programmatic ends. Renewed attention to error will help us to better define and understand what basic writing is, who basic writers are, how we can talk about writers' needs among ourselves, and how we can represent basic writers and talk about their needs with public officials. The avenues of research outlined above should make it clear we are not advocating a return to a drill-and-skill pedagogy that divorces language from context or process. The social view of error advocated by Horner and Williams has much to offer basic writing scholarship, for it provides a way to unite broad cultural concerns and specific language concerns. The danger here, of course, is that treating error as a cultural construct once again begins to blur distinctions between groups of writers. Basic writers cannot be separated from more advanced or more proficient writers on the basis of error alone, if every writer is always in the process of negotiating. But here is where further research will enable us to make better distinctions. What kinds of errors are regarded as most severe? By which groups of readers? In what contexts?

A better understanding of what kinds of errors most contribute to the stigmatization faced by basic writers will inform a richer curriculum and more personalized writing instruction. As we explore the ways in which error is constructed by readers in the academy, we must also explore the ways in which basic writers define themselves as writers, to bring student voices into our discourse. At this critical juncture in the history of basic writing, we owe it to ourselves, and our students, to strategize about how our research agendas can further our stance in political debates.

Notes

1. Generally speaking, we reject the term *remedial* because of its pejorative associations and the limited view of writing development it promotes. We use it here because it is the prominent term in the public debate over basic writing and other developmental programs. Margot Adler's March 25, 1997 *Morning Edition* report on CUNY, for instance, used the term repeatedly ("CU of NY").

2. Of course, we do not mean to suggest that all writing research fits neatly into these categories; we have created them only as a springboard for the analysis of the definitions of writers in existing scholarship.

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Jeanne Gunner

ICONIC DISCOURSE: THE TROUBLING LEGACY OF MINA SHAUGHNESSY

ABSTRACT: *The "legacy" of Mina Shaughnessy takes the form of a particular discourse that has, until recently, directed the means of discussion of basic writing issues. This discourse is characterized by two prominent functions: it routinely returns to the Shaughnessy icon constructed since her death (a concept supported by Foucault's notion of the author function), and it treats the teacher-figure as an idealized embodiment of "authentic" knowledge and democratic feeling. Two debates within the Basic Writing community – the reaction against Min Zhan Lu's early theoretical work and the more recent acrimonious response to Ira Shor's defense of mainstreaming – reflect contending paradigms of the basic writing field, with "critical" discourse challenging the conventions and so authority of the Shaughnessy-based "iconic" discourse.*

The enterprise of Basic Writing seems to be undergoing a paradigm shift in its disciplinary formation. Whereas it once clearly operated as its own community of practitioners and theorists, in recent years its disciplinary existence has been enacted less by Basic Writing theorists per se and more by broader categories of research in rhetoric-composition—by placement and evaluation studies conducted by researcher-theorists not primarily defined as "Basic Writing" specialists (Elbow, White), by social constructionist and other poststructural/post-process theories that subsume the formerly delimited concerns called "Basic Writing" (Berlin, Lu, Stygall), by issues tied to labor practices and professionalization of the rhetoric-composition field, most vividly obvious in discussions on the universal requirement (Crowley, Connors), and by critical pedagogy and moves to reconfigure practice (and so identity) through mainstreaming (Shor). "Basic Writing" seems to be shifting from a term for a specialized teaching and research area in the field of rhetoric-composition to a pedagogical and sociopolitical concern dispersed across the spectrum of composing issues, writing curricula, and socio-educational theory, with the continuing argument over mainstreaming serving as a central site of this transformation.

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That the field has been and is in foment is apparent from the number of intra-community ideological conflicts that have surfaced in the past decade. These clashes show not only the shifting paradigms of the field but the contending discourses that have enabled change in it. The disputes that have arisen allow examination of the constraining discursive rules that, I will argue, are the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy, whose name I use in the iconic sense Joseph Harris has identified (77), rather than solely as the designation of a particular historical person. By examining the discourse associated with the formerly entrenched version of the Basic Writing field, we can begin to understand the nature of the conflicts that have arisen in the Basic Writing community of the 1990's, and to identify some of the forces behind the changes it is undergoing. In this discussion, my purpose is less to "judge" sets of discursive values and establish a binary relationship between two discursive patterns than it is to explore systems of linguistic constraint and trace points of transgression that lead to a shift in the nature of discursive authority.

Threats to the Iconic Edifice

The first major intra-community conflict began in 1991 with the publication of Min Zhan's Lu's article, "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence," a critical rereading of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* which led to a controversy that has continued in subsequent conference and journal form. The second is more recent: a set of exchanges on the CBW listserv, a highly unusual, highly personal case of "flaming" involving two major figures in the Basic Writing field. One of the figures represents the paradigm of Basic Writing as Bruce Horner has defined it, as a field dominated by a discourse that has created space for basic writing courses and students at the university but which also cooperates with traditional public discourse that erases the social and historical contexts of basic writing and writers. The other figure speaks from the paradigm of basic writing[1] as subsumed into a larger social and theoretical enterprise. In this furious exchange, the first, Karen Greenberg, charges the second, Ira Shor, her CUNY colleague, with "selling out," and attacks his recent article in which he calls for the mainstreaming of basic writers and equates basic writing with apartheid. This heated conflict has been carried on in somewhat more professionalized language in the pages of the *JBW's* last three issues.

Each of these cases serves to surface conflicting discursive sets. In each, we see two central points of intense discursive conflict. The first is what can be called the status of the icon, the icon meaning the

symbolic representation of the basic writing field, its students, teachers, and pedagogy, embodied by the text *Errors and Expectations*, the name of Mina Shaughnessy, and the temporal and geographic site of Open Admissions, CUNY's City College of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The second is the teacher-figure that is constructed in Shaughnessy's text, Shaughnessy's image, and the discourse that is her legacy. The degree of intense debate and powerful feeling attending each of these controversies suggests that something integral to the icon and so discourse of the field is at stake. Should the iconic Mina Shaughnessy be displaced, the authority for the field itself will shift away from those identified with its past formation, in a kind of professional correlative to the mainstreaming movement. And recent challenges to long-held ideologies regarding Basic Writing and Basic Writing students—challenges put forth by Min Zhan Lu and Ira Shor, among others—represent a real threat to the authority of the icon. Working from poststructural and political contexts, Lu and Shor in particular have opened up the former "Basic Writing" field, calling into question the very categories of (Basic Writing) student and research. Their work has successfully transgressed "Basic Writing" and its icon: can there be a poststructural Shaughnessy?

Formation of the Icon

Discussions of Basic Writing over the last twenty years can be seen as proceeding according to one of two primary discourses—what can be called *iconic* discourse and *critical* discourse. The former reproduces the field according to certain laws, always in relation to the iconic text and figure; the latter is transgressive, challenging the laws and the icon, and so is received with hostility by the traditional Basic Writing community. If we borrow from Foucault's theory of the author function, we can understand the conflicts cited above as a kind of struggle for discursive dominance. In a research project described in her 1994 CCC article, "Resisting Privilege: Basic Writing and Foucault's Author Function," Gail Stygall uses the concept of the author function to elucidate the ways in which the discursive practices of graduate students corresponding with basic writing students helped construct them as "basic writers"—and so to reinscribe the privilege of the academy. I follow Stygall's lead in using Foucault's concept of the author function to examine how contending discursive practices in Basic Writing theory have led to the intra-community controversies, and how discursive practices associated with the "legacy" of Mina Shaughnessy have directed the discourse of the traditional Basic Writing field.

In "What Is an Author," Foucault shows how a proper name—

like "Mina Shaughnessy"—can come to serve an author function, through which one can "group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others .... The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being, of discourse," coming to have a certain "status" (107). Such a name allows for a break from one discursive construct and the formation of another and its particular mode of being. Shaughnessy is typically acknowledged as having served this transgressive function, in that *Errors and Expectations* provided a way of speaking about and so constructing basic writers as more than remedial students producing unacceptably deviant language reflecting their innate intellectual deficit; her work established instead a mode of being for them as beginners whose errors have a linguistic logic decodable by the teacher, thus staking out a justifiable place for them within higher education.

Further, Shaughnessy might be considered what Foucault terms a "founder of discursivity," that is, someone who is "not just the author of [her] own works [but someone who has] produced something else: the possibilities and the rules of formation of other texts ... [someone who has] established an endless possibility of discourse" (114). The work itself is not the limiting conceptual foundation; it is "the primary coordinate" (116) for the discursivity it produces—the work itself is continually modified through what Foucault calls "the return to the origin," which allows for a "transforming of discursive practice itself." He cites the many re-examinations of Freud's texts and notes that each modifies psychoanalysis; thus the original work is not an absolute, but a coordinate for further discourse. *Errors and Expectations*, a text that emphasizes formalistic instruction in syntax, punctuation, handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary, continues as the originary point of reference for the Basic Writing field, even as the text's particular set of pedagogical practices have largely been left behind.

While Shaughnessy's *ideas* can be altered, innovations must maintain a connection to Shaughnessy as the Ur-author of the field, must contain the trace of her authority. Through this authority-legacy and perpetual founder-status, the author serves a function of "impeding"; Foucault says "the author is ... the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (119). The author "Mina Shaughnessy," then, while allowing for "an endless possibility of discourse," also ensures a limitation and exclusion of other ideological figures, of other authors and founders of discursivity. And thus the icon is formed, and the foundation is laid for intense conflict should another ideological formation be placed before her. Iconic discursive authority is a repetitive exercise in heritage: in such discussions of Basic Writing, Shaughnessy is perpetually posited as the starting point from which later ideas flow and to whom they are attributed, not necessarily conceptually, but always relationally. Even where conceptual difference is significant, the invocation of the name/au-

thor validates the legacy and subsumes later theory under the authority of the icon.

That Shaughnessy is an icon, and that her name functions as an author, in Foucault's sense, seems amply evident. She has been cited in dozens of publications as the founder of Basic Writing, a contestable fact of the field (see Horner on the ahistorical notion of Basic Writing as a "new frontier," 211-213). The author function operates not on literal fact, however, but on discursive practices, and so one speaks of the field as having been founded, developed, popularized by, or identified with Mina Shaughnessy. Certainly Shaughnessy was a founding co-editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, tying her name to the national journal of the field, and her name continues to be cited in every issue, typically several times. Again according to Foucault, the name of the author also exceeds the specific works written by the author; here, too, Shaughnessy functions as an author's name, since she and her primary texts are more invoked than actually cited; *Errors and Expectations*, for example, is typically referred to foundationally, rather than noted for particular conceptual attribution. By "foundational," I mean citations introduced to establish a relation to the iconic Shaughnessy herself, as in recent *JBW* articles in phrases, often part of a rhetorical conclusion, such as "Twenty years after the publication of Shaughnessy's landmark *Errors and Expectations* . . ." (Gray-Rosendale 48); "Echoing Mina Shaughnessy . . ." (Gay 14); "Mina Shaughnessy expressed much the same sentiment . . ." (Stan and Collins 15). Her authority does not depend on what she has written, nor does what many consider the outmoded nature of her work undermine her authority.

From the start of Basic Writing, because of Shaughnessy, authority has been tied as much if not more to an ethical rather than a content-based credential, intermixing the personal and professional in ways that have infused the practice and theory of the field. That Shaughnessy's name has transcended her individual works is in part the result of her ethical claim, but also the result of the name constructed for her by those who worked with her at CUNY, seemingly all of whom loved and revered her. Part of the difficulty in examining the conflict over her name and "legacy," as her influence has been termed, derives from the ethical dilemma of critiquing work that is always also personal; the critic is caught between the demands of his or her method and the desire to respect the deep feelings of love and loss expressed by colleagues. These have been expressed in print, in addition to their existence in personal discourses over the years; the print record reflects the inextricably personal and professional construction of Shaughnessy. If we examine the print record, the list is extraordinary not only for its length and contributors, but also for its continuation over time. When Shaughnessy died in November, 1978, her obituary was printed

in the *New York Times*. Janet Emig wrote a eulogy published in CCC in 1979. A 1980 issue of *JBW* ("Toward a Literate Democracy") reprints the proceedings of the First Shaughnessy Memorial Conference and includes colleague Robert Lyons's keynote address at a 1979 CUNY conference as well as five speeches and essays written by Shaughnessy. Lyons's essay, "Mina Shaughnessy," appears in a collection of essays edited by John Brereton in 1985. In 1986, Don McQuade's edited collection on the teaching of composition, *The Territory of Language*, appeared, dedicated to Shaughnessy, its title taken from *Errors and Expectations*. The Spring 1994 issue of *JBW*, marking what would have been Shaughnessy's seventieth birthday, includes a section entitled "Remembering Mina Shaughnessy," and reprints the 1979 CCC obituary and E.D. Hirsch's 1979 MLA remarks made at a session dedicated to Shaughnessy, in addition to other past "tributes" and two essays by Shaughnessy. And an NCTE-published biography of Shaughnessy by a former CUNY student Jane Maher appeared in 1997, the first chapter of which earlier appeared in the Fall 1996 issue of *JBW*. Thus the legacy not only continues, but continues to turn back—back to the years at CUNY, back to the colleagues of the times, back to the person and her works, though these are reprinted at least partially as tributes rather than "new" work, and all these elements are fused together and published in the major disciplinary venues, two of which include notices of Shaughnessy memorial awards.[2] Thus the name "Mina Shaughnessy" has come to be and continues to operate as an author and icon, and so to exercise a controlling influence on the later discourse of the field.

This name is grounded in a specific era and location as well: "Mina Shaughnessy" invokes "CUNY," or a particular construction of CUNY, whose geographical-temporal coordinates are political and material. "CUNY" as a discursive element serves to situate Basic Writing discourse in a sociopolitical context of hostility to access and to race-, ethnicity-, and class-based difference. The CUNY open admission struggles of the 1960's and 1970's thus form a multiple context for the struggles of the 1990's, a context that is both site-specific and site-iconic. The institutional site exceeds its own historical facts, and, in Basic Writing discourse, "CUNY" becomes an overdetermined term. In Basic Writing discourse, one cannot speak of Mina Shaughnessy without invoking the personal, and one cannot speak of (or from) CUNY without invoking a particular material and political meaning, making it impossible within the discourse to reconceptualize without seeming at once to betray and dehistoricize. Through its claims on the origins, the icon, the author, directs and constrains.

The Iconic Teacher-Figure

A further impeding feature of iconic discourse derives from its construction of an idealized identity for the basic writing teacher. In iconic discourse, basic writers are treated with respect, though, as David Bartholomae and Min Zhan Lu especially have shown, the basic writer is also reified as an other, a radically alien being who is a stranger to academic discourse. The basic writing teacher, however, occupies a position of honor. The teacher is constructed as a kind of hero, one who identifies with and champions basic writers, and who enacts a Virgilian role of guide into academic discourse or a Wordsworthian validator of expressivism. Like Dante's Virgil or Wordsworth's Romantic poet, this teacher is positioned as a kind of outsider—as one who is outside the institutional hierarchy and the traditional academic values that have been seen as hostile and unwelcoming to basic writers. The primary credential of such a teacher is individual commitment, a sense of mission to teach, initiate, inspire, and defend basic writers. This model of the teacher emphasizes individual will over systematic conceptual or political theorizing. Establishing this set of values as the other side of a teacher-scholar binary, iconic discourse, following Shaughnessy, posits a moral hierarchy in which Basic Writing instructors supersede the traditional "meritocracy." The highest category in this new hierarchy is reserved for teachers; membership requirements are flattened out to be respect for the student and a will to see teaching as the center of true academic value.

Thus iconic discourse establishes four rules of construction regarding the teacher-figure. First, knowledge is based in experience and agency in will, a Kantian and Coleridgean formation of the subject. The teacher-figure works from individual feeling, inspiration, and creativity rather than socially-grounded scholarship. Second, curricula and pedagogies are to be self-made, since knowledge emerges from the individual self; the lecture model, for example, produces an inauthentic teacher (and note that the question of curricular validity is not posed; in this value, current-traditional methods and grammar-based courses are seen as neither more nor less informed than other approaches). The teacher serves as the inspiring, awakening model of "how," rather than the dominating, disciplining mouthpiece of "what". Third, the teacher-figure's goal is altruistic, with negation of the self as the ultimate form of teaching. The Mina Shaughnessy icon clearly symbolizes this ultimate self-negation. Fourth, the teacher-figure works against the repressive social givens of a particular age, operating in a space of ethical imperatives rather than political agendas; while unallied with a particular political movement, Basic Writing teachers are nonetheless depicted as radically democratic.

Shaughnessy's works are replete with this will to restructure the academic value system in order to raise the teacher-figure to the highest category of worth. In her essay, "The Miserable Truth," she writes of her colleagues at CUNY,

> Probably at no school in this country is there such an accumulation of wisdom and know-how in the field of compensatory education as there is within this university at this moment. [This group of teachers] is a special fraternity joined not only by our common purposes and problems as teachers but by our having come to know, through our students, what it means to be an outsider in academia . . . . We reject in our bones the traditional meritocratic model of a college." (113)

In this passage, the teacher-figure is the site of "wisdom" and "know-how," in contradistinction to the traditional credentials of scholarship and expertise, locating the source of the teacher-figure's knowledge in experience instead, the result of identification with basic writing students and their marginalization. Shaughnessy goes on in the essay to juxtapose what she calls "the responsibility of teaching" with "merely presenting a subject" (114), placing ethical feeling over possession and transmission of content-knowledge. The implicit division of teacher and scholar is most fully developed in her article "The English Professor's Malady," in which she opens with the term "professor," using it to critique traditional attitudes and practices and citing such faculty as "provincial" (121). She then equates the "real" teacher with the "altruistic teacher" (122), establishing iconic discourse in an agonistic relationship with the traditional academy, an effect Susan Miller notes in *Textual Carnivals* when she cites Shaughnessy as having caused an increased "wedge between composition and literature" by actually publishing basic writers' writing; Miller argues "These brief encounters called for a new boundary, which appeared in the form of the paradigm that removed composition even further from its origins" (173).

This anti-literary stance can be seen in the early work of David Bartholomae, who, in addition to extending the discussion of error and student ability begun by Shaughnessy, also extends this opposition of the traditional academy and the superior Basic Writing teacher-figure, cast in terms of literary specialist versus what might be called the "authentic" reader, one whose value system is attuned to more than the narrow literary text:

> This method [of determining the "grammar" that governs the idiosyncratic discourse of writers] is certainly available to En-

> glish teachers, since it requires a form of close reading, paying attention to the language of a text in order to determine not only what a writer says, but how he locates and articulates meaning. When a basic writer violates our expectations, however, there is a tendency to dismiss the text as non-writing, as meaningless or imperfect writing. We have not read as we have been trained to read .... We have read, rather, as policemen, examiners, gate-keepers. The teacher who is unable to make sense out of a seemingly bizarre piece of student writing is often the same teacher who can give an elaborate explanation of the "meaning" of a story by Donald Barthelme or a poem by e. e. cummings. ("Study" 339; 1980)

Iconic discourse reflects a repeated insistence on a qualitative difference between literature teachers and writing teachers. In Bartholomae's "Writing Assignments: Where Writing Begins" (1983), he describes in the opening section an anecdote about a composition course taught by one of his colleagues, "a full professor and a distinguished [literary] scholar" (300) whose pedagogical approach is to lecture students on form and mechanics and to assign the "copying out [of] longhand essays by Lamb, Macaulay, Ruskin and Carlyle" (301), in the expectation that students, after such immersion in canonical style, will improve as academic writers, an approach Bartholomae terms the "Big Bang theory of writing instruction." In "Released into Language: Errors, Expectations, and the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy," Bartholomae again points out the inability of a teacher trained in literary studies, who has "spent most of his adult life perfecting his skills as a reader of texts" (76) to interpret the texts produced by students in a Basic Writing course. The literary scholar is by definition unable to be the kind of (real) teacher that the Basic Writing teacher by definition is.

In much of Basic Writing discourse, the heroic teacher-figure is not the speaking self but the lost ideal. Thus teaching is always an altruistic activity, since it entails self-negation in the effort to recover this ideal. The altruistic stance of the teacher-figure appears after Shaughnessy most frequently in the work of Mike Rose. This stance requires a certain humility and erasure of the self, allowing the writer to function rhetorically as a kind of space holder for the unsung, silenced Basic Writing teacher—a "rule" of the discourse which helps to explain the extraordinarily deep sense of community it creates among those who consider themselves Basic Writing professionals, the "special fraternity" Shaughnessy cites. In this, the teacher becomes a St. George figure, as Shaughnessy writes in *Errors and Expectations*:

> [T]he teacher as mediator between the languages students bring to class and the language of the academy must himself serve the students both as translator and model . . . . The [teacher shows his] personal use of the language, his attentiveness to the words he, as well as his students, uses, his pleasure in precise language and his courtesy in offering . . . ways of understanding unfamiliar words . . . [nourishing] the student's will, without which the academic language is too large and tedious and complex a dragon to slay. (225)

In *Lives on the Boundary,* Rose's discourse, mixing the personal and professional, an icon-approved and icon-reinforcing transgression of traditional scholarly discourse, celebrates colleagues and students, and powerfully invokes the model of the altruistic teacher-hero. The actual representation of teachers in the text is especially interesting. We meet the high school and college teachers who helped guide Rose in his movement away from a vocational location to the discourse of the academy, and then we follow Rose as he himself moves through graduate studies and his own early teaching experiences. His work with veterans, his development of a tutoring center for remedial students—these marginalized teaching activities are feelingly documented. The text ends at a point in the author's experience that precedes his later career as a gifted and dedicated instructor in a more traditionally professional context—in UCLA Writing Programs, where for close to twenty years Rose taught and where he served first as Director of Freshman English and later as Associate Director of the program, and in the Graduate School of Education, where Rose now holds a professorship. In his own story, Rose declines the hero's position—leaving it open for his ideal reader, the basic writing teacher, and marking the space of the lost Mina Shaughnessy.

Iconic Transformations

The work of Bartholomae, Rose, and Patricia Bizzell embodies the discursive transformations of the author-function that are "impeded" by the ideological figure of the author. Writing within the Shaughnessy legacy, they complicate the terms of the discussion by introducing theoretical issues in student- or teacher-based form. In Rose's ground-breaking article, "Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal" (1983), the critique portion at once lays out the deep conceptual flaws in then-current Basic Writing practice and defends the teacher who enacts them, preserving the idealized iconic teacher-figure. After reviewing evidence on the uninformed notions of many

writing teachers on the writing process and their accompanying assumptions about the role of error, Rose writes,

> But let me be quick to point out that I am not trying to lay blame on the remedial writing teacher alone, if at all. For there are powerful reasons to explain why some teachers reduce the process, conceptual, and rhetorical possibilities of composing. The public . . . make a teacher feel negligent and vulnerable if he or she does not attempt to clear up error. Furthermore . . . our scholars have not provided us with a comprehensive theory of error . . . . Thus there is little for the conscientious teacher to do but keep marking. To do less in the absence of any other guidelines seems like shirking responsibility. (359)

A division between practitioner and theorist is drawn. It is, however, also problematized: the teacher-figure is allied still with ethics, not expertise, but the difference between teacher and scholar is seen as a debilitating gap. Thus Rose opens a space for the theorist without attaching any deficit to the teacher-figure. Through the first-person plural form, the author speaks as a member of the teaching community—one of "us," as opposed to "them," the scholars, even as he creates the justification for their inclusion. Theorists are to serve practitioners—a relation that preserves iconic authority, even as it transforms the prevailing foundation of knowledge from self- to research-based experience.[3]

In the same way, reviewing the progression of Bizzell's ideas in her collection of articles, *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, we see how the social and political nature of her work can co-exist with the rules of iconic discourse. Bizzell treats her work as an extension of Shaughnessy's, relying especially on Shaughnessy's "Some Needed Research on Writing" to establish the iconic foundation for her ideas, which contextualize Shaughnessy's original teaching insights in ways that "rescue" Shaughnessy's work as relevant theoretical contributions. Bizzell cites Shaughnessy in the Introduction and all but two of the collection's thirteen essays. "Some Needed Research" is cited nine times, *Errors and Expectations* seven; no other work by Shaughnessy is cited. This continual invoking of "Some Needed Research" shows Bizzell's desire to construct her own work as part of the Shaughnessy heritage, thus preventing any reading of it as transgressive. Bizzell makes it clear that she considers her ideas to be intellectual outgrowths of Shaughnessy's work (at one point she writes, "I learned . . . that the kind of research other composition specialists seemed to feel was needed did not match what I, and I thought Shaughnessy, desired"; 8), even as her ideas have helped reconstruct the figure of

the basic writer and redefine the task of Basic Writing as Shaughnessy depicts these. In the Introduction to the collected essays, which functions as a true *curriculum vitae*, Bizzell shows how her thinking evolved over time, moving her away from the formalism of Shaughnessy to the liberatory thought of Freire and today to a more poststructural orientation in her work; all of this, though, is presented through the lens of a teacher's life. The iconic teacher-figure, though now more theoretically informed, remains as the central value in the academic enterprise.

These transformations illustrate the ways in which iconic discourse contextualizes and so constrains its subject(s). That it does so is also evident in the degree of resistance met by authors whose works follow a different rhetorical path—who speak not from the Basic Writing community, but from a position not identified with the iconic origins—from what I've termed "critical discourse". Iconic discourse invites us in on very special terms. Critical discourse in basic writing issues no such invitation. It constructs no heroes. And it is highly theoretical and political, in its relations within the academy as well as in its curricular and intellectual agenda. The role of the teacher in this discourse is given no special status; in fact, it is sometimes used as a site of ignorance, as anyone who has read the tale of the "Fuck You" essay in Bartholomae's 1993 "Tidy House" article knows[4] For the most part, critical discourse openly interrogates what it considers suspect pedagogical practices, a common move in Min Zhan Lu's writing especially. Its language merges the practitioner with the theorist, creating the voice of the expert and replacing lore with scholarship. It also replaces the agonistic stance with a self-critical voice, reflecting the historical change in rhetoric-composition's disciplinary status. It transgresses iconic discourse by speaking outside the established discursive parameters, by doing what those who operate within iconic discourse can see only as attacking or subverting the icon and so the field. Because iconic discourse tends to the agonistic, those who transgress it are assigned the identity of the traditional academic system, and hence Greenberg's construction of Shor as an "insider." To not return to the icon can only be seen as betrayal.

The first such "betrayal" came in the form of John Rouse's 1979 *College English* article, "The Politics of Composition," in which he argues that programs such as Shaughnessy's at CUNY serve an unacknowledged political function of social control. He directly attacks the Romantic teacher-hero model: "Teachers must be free to ignore evidence or theory, free to rely on their own intuition or insight. Oh, how we love to hear that!" (426). His article is an early version of Lu's "Politics of Linguistic Innocence" and Shor's "Our Apartheid"; each critiques what is seen as the unexamined ideology inherent in iconic discourse, and each provokes censure by some portion of the Basic Writing community. Their work has been attacked because they speak

against the discourse, whereas others who have modified Shaughnessy's basic concepts have worked from within the discursive set she established, as seen in the pedagogy espoused by Rose, Bartholomae (in his later works), and Bizzell, which is only relational to Shaughnessy's; each diverges from the actual practices Shaughnessy describes in her works. Where Rouse, Lu, and Shor differ is in their transgression of the ostensibly apolitical nature of iconic discourse, their redefinition of professionalism for the Basic Writing field, and their different refigurings of the teacher-hero. Lu published "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" in *College English* in 1992, extending her critique of Shaughnessy and basic writing, and setting off enough of a furor that the journal devoted a special "Symposium on Basic Writing" the following year to the angry responses. Consider how the following lines from Lu's article read from within iconic discourse:

> Because of the contributions of pioneers like Bruffee, Farrell, and Shaughnessy, we can now mobilize the authority they have gained for the field, for our knowledge as well as our expertise as basic writing teachers. While we can continue to benefit from the insights into students' experiences of conflict and struggle offered in [their] writings . . . we need not let their view of the cause and function of such experiences restrict how we view and use the stories and pedagogies they provide. (909)

Though carefully writing according to the conventional tribute given Shaughnessy within iconic discourse, Lu moves outside of it and effectively relegates the work of early pioneers to past paradigms and the realm of limited historical worth. After Lu, it is no longer necessary to invoke Mina Shaughnessy.

This attempt to resist the "return to the origin," already evident in Lu's earlier *JBW* piece, evoked a heated response from Patricia Laurence, Shaughnessy's colleague at CUNY. In "The Vanishing Site of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*," a *JBW* article recognized in 1994 with the journal's Mina Shaughnessy Award, Laurence argues that "No rereading of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* can occur in a neutral field without [the] landscape of place" (21), meaning the CUNY of the open admissions time period, suggesting that rereadings must be retellings, one of the more reactionary reactions to Lu, but useful in delineating the ways in which Lu's work is intolerably transgressive. Laurence and others "correct" Lu in their "Symposium on Basic Writing" pieces in clearly iconic terms, especially in their use of the name of Mina Shaughnessy. CUNY's Barbara Gleason writes, "It is a bit misleading to quote Shaughnessy in the

present tense, even though this is a commonly accepted academic convention. Shaughnessy thought and wrote 15-20 years ago" ("Symposium" 888), reclaiming the name "Shaughnessy" for a discourse that resists the traditional scholarly academic one. Thomas Farrell, writing in the same issue, criticizes Lu, in a circumlocutory way, for not being "aware of the impact [Shaughnessy] had on people by virtue of her personality, which may have been a bigger factor in her influence on the basic writing movement than anything she ever wrote. Shaughnessy's influence on the basic writing movement cannot be assessed properly by just reading her publications without considering the impact of her personality" (890) — meaning Lu "fails" to acknowledge the icon. The issue of *JBW* that appeared the next year, 1994, is the one which reprints the eulogies and some of Shaughnessy's works; the rationale, according to the editors, is "to remind ourselves of the breadth of Mina Shaughnessy's influence and the diversity of her friends" ("Editors" 1) — a catechismal utterance of a kind not found in critical discourse.[5]

The language of the Shor-Greenberg exchange illustrates the multiple ways in which Shor is perceived to have transgressed iconic discourse. Both are CUNY faculty members, and so their exchange also exists within iconic discourse's claim for the geographical origins of Basic Writing. Writing "against" Basic Writing, and writing from within CUNY, Shor ends up in a contemporary version of *The Furies*. In "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality," Shor opens with a statement first situating Basic Writing as a product of the 1960's, but in the next paragraph he recontextualizes this origin: "The collegiate language enterprise of which BW is the junior partner began over a century ago when Harvard instituted freshman composition" (91). He thus repositions Basic Writing as a subfield within rhetoric-composition, and thus alters the historical claim of the CUNY location. He cites scholars such as Crowley, Berlin, and Miller to review the argument of freshman composition as a class-based, gatekeeping institution, and he then places the advent of Basic Writing in this legacy of social oppression, calling it "an extra sorting-out gate in front of the comp gate, a curricular mechanism to secure unequal power relations" (92) and "part of the undemocratic tracking system pervading American mass education" (93). He defends critical pedagogy over other forms. He calls for teachers to join together in collective action to bring about material change, and quotes Freire's advice, "Don't confront the lion alone" (100), in all these ways speaking against the iconic rules for the teacher-figure's representation. Shor writes, "So many gifted and dedicated writing teachers devote themselves to their students' success. Is their devotion being mistaken for basic writing itself saving students?" (96). When Shor criticizes testing practices as one means of social control, he invokes Mina Shaughnessy as support for his view,

rehistoricizing her stance and place. In his only other naming of Shaughnessy, he shifts the authority from her to "Adrienne Rich, companion to Mina Shaughnessy in the heroic Open Admissions days at City College" (101), quoting from Rich and positioning those "days" as nostalgic, not originary.

These transgressions, not surprisingly, set off the angry e-mail exchange. In her messages, Greenberg's criticism of Shor follows the rules of iconic discourse: she calls him "self-serving," as opposed to occupying the altruistic position; she asserts that he is "not a basic skills teacher," that "Ira . . . was never one of us," proved by "[Ira's] current position as a professor in the CUNY Graduate Center's new graduate program in composition and rhetoric," which is membership in the community of inauthentic teachers, one of "them," following the iconic discursive binary of teachers and scholars; and she terms his argument for critical teaching "ludicrous": "Does anyone out there believe that we can provide what basic writers need by simply putting them into . . . 'Critical classrooms'? . . . Political enlightenment is wonderful, but students need much more to succeed in college courses that require academic literacy skills," reinscribing the committed, heroic teacher-figure and rejecting the political. Again, in her published response to Shor's article, we see the rules of iconic discourse deployed. The response begins with the contested definition of context, positioning the term in the relationship of access and institutional hostility, elitism and difference, as opposed to the kind of Marxist-historical situating favored in critical discourse. The student is constructed as a teacher-dependent outsider, and an appeal is made to the authority of the icon (". . . if Mina Shaughnessy were alive today, I believe she would think so, too"; 93). Overall, Greenberg's language enacts the ideological discourse that Lu critiques in "Politics of Linguistic Innocence" and "Conflict and Struggle." As Shor writes, "Question basic writing and all hell breaks loose" ("Inequality" 104).

The Shor-Greenberg exchanges mark points of discursive conflict, points of conflict that repeat in each instance of the conflict. Speaking from oppositional discursive and so value systems, Shor and Greenberg become the latest victims of this discourse clash, suggesting that the identity or author-function of Mina Shaughnessy is a demon-genius haunting all who write about basic writing today. More conflicts seem inevitable, as the disciplinary turn toward the re-formation of basic writing as a dispersed set of theoretical and political interests continues. The icon-based "Basic Writing" community in which individuals with very different values and beliefs once co-existed peacefully takes on an oppressive cast, demonizing those who transgress its discursive rules. And critical discourse persists in its primary operating rule, the critique of iconic discourse as a source of the binaries that divide certain students and faculty from other students and faculty,

and which rely on a student deficit model to maintain the privileged status of the basic writing teacher-hero, as Horner's discourse reveals:

> Defining Basic Writing as frontier territory effectively constructs the differences between those students labeled Basic Writers and those not, establishing the legitimacy of the distinction . . . . Such categorizing, stripped of its politics, ends up instituting "Basic Writing" as an objective reality rather than a set of social practices . . . . As the dominated members of the dominant, teachers can use such representations to negotiate their own interests and those of their students . . . . But this "objectification" of basic writing also masks the role of basic writing instruction in the larger ongoing social, economic, and political drama of history. (212-213)

Horner seems to announce a new era: "Teachers of basic writing seeking advice on improving their marginal institutional positions will find nothing on such matters in Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, despite her noted administrative expertise, nor in much of the other Basic Writing literature . . . " (218-219).

Will an iconic response once again follow? How much authority remains to and for it? As the current pressures on remediation and working conditions increase, as political issues intrude on practice, as paradigms of "context" shift, critical discourse will continue to engage its points of conflict with iconic discourse, and Mina Shaughnessy, now become a Name, may perhaps be reconstructed along the historical lines that Lu and others have advocated. The implication is not a judgment on the worth of one discourse versus another. Rather, with "Mina Shaughnessy" in play, basic writing is at a point at which the conventional discourse no longer fully serves, and so the authority determining its disciplinary formation seems itself to be in process.

Notes

1. Following Horner, I capitalize the term "Basic Writing" when the reference is to what he describes as the ahistorical construction of it.

2. Since 1980, the MLA has awarded the "Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize," which, as announced in the annual Directory issue of the journal, is awarded for "an outstanding research publication in the field of teaching English language and literature." And since 1986, the *Journal of Basic Writing* has announced in its "Call for Articles" page that a "'Mina

P. Shaughnessy Writing Award' is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every two years," courtesy of funding by a CUNY colleague.

3. Mike Rose served as a helpful interlocutor on these ideas. I am grateful to him for his time and thoughts.

4. Bartholomae's writings show a shift over time from an iconic to a critical discursive positioning. He directed Lu's doctoral dissertation; it's unclear whose critiques influenced whom.

5. The religious undertone is of course not uncommon. Shaughnessy's work has been called the "gospel" of Basic Writing (see Horner 207). In a post-presentation discussion at the 1998 Writing Program Administration conference, one of the keynote speakers mentioned Mina Shaughnessy, paused, bowed his head, and said in a low, reverential voice, "Shaughnessy: such a wonderful person and project."

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Laura Gray-Rosendale

INESSENTIAL WRITINGS: SHAUGHNESSY'S LEGACY IN A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED LANDSCAPE

ABSTRACT: *This article offers a rhetorical analysis of the charges that have been waged against Mina Shaughnessy's scholarship from poststructuralist, feminist, and Marxist quarters. While arguing that the philosophical and political interventions such work has furnished are crucial, Gray-Rosendale contends that too often Shaughnessy's research has been somewhat mischaracterized. First, the paper investigates the contradictory terminological investments within the charges against Shaughnessy (i.e., "essentialism," "accommodationism," and lack of "materialist praxis"). Second, through close readings of Shaughnessy's texts, the paper maintains that the complexity and "self-difference" of Shaughnessy's own scholarship and its historical-political context indeed undermine such criticisms.*[1]

Of late, poststructuralist, feminist, and Marxist theorists have made many critical interventions within Basic Writing theory and practice, espousing "contact zone" approaches. Focusing attention upon the material conditions of Basic Writing students and their teachers as well as the historical, social, and political influences upon their lives has been an incisive step for the field. Often such work has drawn strategic attention to the problematic ways in which Basic Writers have been represented within our own research as well as some of the ideological positions this research can potentially foster. This research has also frequently addressed our need to be self-reflexive, careful scholars within Basic Writing. In doing so, much of this work has given important voice to the needs of many marginalized Basic Writers and made many scholars more tentative about what kinds of claims they make about Basic Writers as well as how these claims might impact

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their students.

Despite such crucial strides, however, one troubling element often persists within such accounts. As argued within the 1993 "Symposium on Basic Writing, Conflict, and the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy," many of these contributions tend to somewhat mischaracterize Shaughnessy's scholarship. Offering criticisms of Min-Zhan Lu's 1992 "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?," a text which served as a lightning rod for discussing such issues, scholars challenged depictions of Shaughnessy. Patricia Laurence, who worked with Shaughnessy during the early days of Open Admissions at CUNY, maintained that Lu's argument failed to historicize interpretations of Composition leaders and their pedagogical practices, stating, "How much is missing in cultural and educational analysis that flattens the differences that we espouse in fashionable forums!" (880) Moreover, Laurence remarked that as one reads Lu's text "one can only smile ironically" while "set adrift by Lu on an educational raft" since her claims unmoor different scholars from "their times, their institutions, their fields" (880). Countering Lu, Laurence claimed that while discursive conflict may or may not be experienced by the student, it should not be understood as a curricular objective in and of itself, neither operating as an educational and cultural precondition nor outright rejected as the enemy. Laurence also criticized Lu openly for not acknowledging the extent to which employing a "vocabulary of 'conflict' or 'struggle' (then or now) rather than the language of understanding, caring, exchange, and reciprocity would have been counterproductive, irresponsible, and explosive" during this time period (882).

Likewise, Peter Rondinone, a teacher of Basic Writers at LaGuardia Community College at CUNY, himself a product of the same Open Admissions system Shaughnessy first helped to establish, charged that Lu and her supporters' desire for a mestiza consciousness itself appeared "naive" (884). This "mestiza consciousness" is defined as an identity of border residency which "develops a tolerance for contradiction and ambivalence, learning to sustain contradiction and ambivalence into a new consciousness" what Gloria Anzaldúa calls, "a third element which is greater than the sum of its severed parts": "a mestiza consciousness" [Anzaldúa 79-80]. For Lu, adopting this new kind of identity required Basic Writers to usefully "hover between two worlds- the educated and the uneducated." Rondinone indicated instead that "it makes me suspect that Lu (and those who propose this) don't really know the street corners I'm talking about (or they've forgotten). These are places where being ambivalent, being in the middle, will get you trapped in a crossfire of lead and blown into little pieces" (884). The "mestiza consciousness," compelled a "hovering" for Rondinone then, which threatened to ultimately disable the

student. In short, Rondinone declared that Lu's argument divulged very little sense of the difficulties Basic Writers from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds encounter: "Unless someone offers to pay my rent and to put shoes on my little girl, no one is going to convince me that hovering between the two worlds (educated and uneducated) is the place for me" (885).

Further, Barbara Gleason, Director of English Composition at City College, took issue with the logic of Lu's argument, demonstrating that poststructuralist critique alone often cannot do justice to Basic Writing pedagogy, program development and research because it centers on theoretical perspectives at the expense of the particular objects under analysis. Gleason advanced the point that sometimes "a foregrounding of students' internal conflicts influenced by poststructuralist theory may well serve the teacher-researcher's interests better than it serves the students' needs" (886), and that, as a result, this impulse needs to be interrogated like any other.[2] Such a concentration on poststructuralist theory could not, then, she argued, "adequately reveal the fullness and the complexity of the Basic Writing movement or even the ideas and experiences of one Basic Writing teacher" (887). In addition, Gleason elucidated that Lu's allegation, Shaughnessy's work failed to capture larger social and political dimensions, comes from a more problematic assumption that Lu maintained: formalist approaches themselves are inherently and inevitably naive or innocent. This itself compels a complete separation of form from meaning, according to Gleason and, more importantly, as Laurence herself argued, overlooks necessarily the significant historical conditions in which Shaughnessy wrote. Gleason affirmed:

> As for her linguistic premises, Shaughnessy was working within the dominant paradigm of her day, a time when transformational generative grammar was as intellectually forceful as poststructuralist theory is today. . . To say that Shaughnessy's pedagogy and research were based on the premise that form is separate from meaning is to say that Shaughnessy was influenced by some of the most commonly accepted premises and theories of her time. (887)

Gleason indicated that Shaughnessy's own theories were as much a product of her historical moment as they were the result of Shaughnessy's own teaching and research experiences.

What all of these scholars called for, then, was a greater historical and political contextualization of Shaughnessy's work. While these thinkers certainly recognized the attempts made by recent scholars to look at the "specific historical conditions surrounding the open admissions movement" (Lu 907), these thinkers also contended that this

historicization had to be fuller and more detailed in its scope. It could not simply reduce the people involved to "gatekeepers, converters, and accommodationists" (Lu 907). This paper aims to work between these perspectives, contributing a continuation of this significant "Symposium" conversation while also encouraging a dialogue with more recent poststructuralist, feminist, and Marxist scholars. Though calling attention to the flaws inherent within Shaughnessy's work is unquestionably a valid venture, as a rhetorically-invested, poststructuralist thinker, I cannot help but question the three main contentions employed most often to highlight Shaughnessy's lack of attention to the political, historical, and materialistic considerations that shape how one conceives of the "Basic Writer": her work's 1) "essentialist" view of language, 2) "accommodationist" set of tactics, and 3) failure to interrogate "material" conditions.

Recognizing that these terms operate primarily as rhetorical conventions, in this paper I first probe the definitions for such terms as well as explore how they are deployed by scholars within Basic Writing theory. As Jonathan Potter claims, such rhetorical tactics inevitably invoke a range of tropes and a set of characters which, while they may appear coherent, nevertheless serve situated and practical needs as much as political ends alone (28). After challenging the ways in which these terms are deployed and the rhetorical effects they produce, I next investigate Shaughnessy's own texts to determine whether or not they warrant such criticisms. Through close readings of Shaughnessy's texts within the context of her historical and political moment, I evidence how the self-differences within Shaughnessy's works render ambiguous if not outright defy many such negative characterizations.

I. The Essential Shaughnessy, Accommodationism, and Materialist Praxis

First I will trace several texts within which Shaughnessy is depicted as "essentializing" differences, endorsing Basic Writers' "accommodation" to mainstream culture, and not paying adequate attention to "materialist" considerations. These examples are meant to be representative of such trends within our scholarship, but my analyses and the text selections are by no means exhaustive. Additionally, since some of these texts were published, numerous scholars' positions on particular issues are likely to have shifted somewhat, yet there have been few if any public reconceptualizations of their representations of Shaughnessy's work, the purpose of inquiry here. Finally, I in no way mean to recommend that the philosophical and political investments of such scholars are not themselves exceedingly valuable. Given the

fact that I share the concerns of challenging Basic Writers' ghettoization myself, I hope to suggest that we need to be more aware of these investments' effects, applying rhetorical lenses to such texts so as to expose some of the potential pitfalls to which our own linguistic investments may unwittingly fall prey.

Min-Zhan Lu's aforementioned 1992 article contends that Kenneth Bruffee, Thomas Farrell, and Mina Shaughnessy all treated Basic Writing students' apprehensions about acculturation and their accompanying senses of contradiction and ambiguity as deficits. Lu further denounces these scholars for accepting an essentialist view of language, or "holding that the essence of meaning precedes and is independent of language," and an "*essentialist* assumption that words can express but will not change the *essence* of one's thoughts" (my italics 906). Lu then asserts that these thinkers apprehend discourse communities as discursive utopias. Urging that their efforts to curtail the psychic strain of such acculturation on Basic Writing students indicate that they regard conflict and struggle as necessarily enemies of Basic Writing instruction, Lu then chastises Bruffee and Farrell specifically for presupposing that "the goal of education is 'acculturation' into an academic community" (894).

In her argument, Lu proceeds to designate Shaughnessy's work as "accommodationist," since Shaughnessy specifically advises that a "'formal' approach is more 'practical' because it will help students master the academic meaning without reminding them that doing so might 'wipe out' the familiar reality" (905). Lu proposes that Shaughnessy champions students' decision to "'live with' the tensions of conflicting cultures" (906). According to Lu, this formal approach to Basic Writers' writing can only be taken as "practical" if "teachers view the students' awareness of the conflict between the home meaning and the school meaning of a word as something to be 'dissolved' at all costs," since this will interfere inexorably with their learning (905). For Lu, this evidences Shaughnessy's propensity to neglect the political dimensions of the linguistic choices Basic Writing students make when reading and writing, permitting Shaughnessy's separation of language use from the circumstances of lived reality. Lu concludes her essay with a bold call to action: "we need to find ways of foregrounding conflict and struggle not only in the generation of meaning or authority, but also in the teaching of conventions of 'correctness' in syntax, spelling, and punctuation, traditionally considered the primary focus of Basic Writing instruction" (910). [3]

Pamela Gay's "Rereading Shaughnessy From a Postcolonial Perspective" which appeared in the 1993 *Journal of Basic Writing* also employs this language. Gay maintains that Shaughnessy's 1976 essay "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing" was predicated upon "imperialistic assumptions of classroom practice designed to help those

students into the academic colony" (30). Gay is particularly concerned by the ways in which Basic Writers risk losing their difference and are not able, by means of Shaughnessy's pedagogical suggestions, to cultivate and enrich such differences through the language they speak, the culture they know, and the lives they've lived. As a result, Gay advises that "those of us in the first world, not hearing difference, would fail to see outside our privileged lives" (30). In order to advance her claims within her article, a curious text in which the poststructuralist voice reads statements made by Shaughnessy ironically, Gay takes exception to Shaughnessy's four-stage developmental model for teachers. Rather than previous attempts by Shaughnessy and others, to, as Gay puts it, "convert the natives," Gay instead determines that one must perceive the classroom as a dialogic space, a place where "contradictory and competing voices may erupt, disrupt, or rupture the seams of the text we call classroom discussion" (35). According to Gay, then, this discernment of difference does not seek to bypass the struggle for power. Rather, it unmasks this struggle. For Gay, like Lu, the Basic Writing student's manifest battle for power and assertion of difference within the classroom and within our research emerges as an inherent good.

Similarly Bruce Horner's 1996 "Discoursing Basic Writing" in *CCC* presents an example of this recent turn within Basic Writing research to the contact zone/conflict model (Harris) and its criticisms of Shaughnessy. Horner denounces what he terms the dominant discourse on basic writing, remarking that it is housed within Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, the *Journal of Basic Writing*, and the 1987 *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers*. Within these texts, Horner contends, the material conditions of Basic Writing students and teachers are too often suspiciously missing. There is no interrogation in such works, Horner maintains, of aspects such as salaries, job security, teaching loads, class size, classroom facilities, office space, and secretarial support. He charges Shaughnessy specifically with acknowledging political pressures on basic writing teachers and students yet doubting their legitimacy, and instead turning "her attention in the (long) meanwhile to accommodating those pressures, calling for the development of more efficient means of teaching grammar and mechanics" (215). As a result of this criticism of Shaughnessy's major published works (and one archival report from January 1992 titled "A Second Report: Open Admissions," published by the CUNY English Department's Newsletter), Horner affirms, like Lu and Gay before him, that one must give voice to different and suppressed stories, heralding our students' "yet untold tales of struggles, defeats, victories, and resistance, thereby teaching and learning from strategies of resistance and outright opposition" (219). Once again, the criticism of Shaughnessy works strategically. Airing of student conflict and

struggle is then advocated as the end to which Basic Writing scholarship and pedagogy should tend. In closing, Horner calls for a recovery of the specific historical, material, institutional, and political context of teaching and discourse within Basic Writing.[4]

Deborah Mutnick's 1996 *Writing in an Alien World: Basic Writing and the Struggle for Equality in Higher Education* also indicates the value of the Basic Writing student's struggle and conflict as an intrinsic good which ought to be foregrounded within the classroom. Basic Writing, she establishes, is a "contact zone within the academy, particularly if it is reconceived as a location in which alliances between teachers and students could subvert the margin-center hierarchy" (xiv). And, just like the aforementioned authors, Mutnick probes Shaughnessy's view of education, terming it accommodationist, and pronouncing its educational goals as predicated upon acculturation and homogeneity. Shaughnessy's work, Mutnick (like Lu) contends, holds an "essentialist view of language in which thought, meaning, and content are seen as preceding or separate from linguistic forms" (129). Mutnick's text is rather distinct, however, in one important regard. She propounds a form of difference which is not "stable, fixed, and essential, thus maintaining racial, national, and gender stereotypes rather than demystifying and historicizing them" (10), instead working against such a conception of human experience. Seeing that even within social constructionism there are essentialist proclivities, Mutnick seeks effectively to eschew presumptions which concentrate on control, mastery, and self-expression rather than social location, intertextuality, and dialogism. Drawing widely from critical pedagogy, postmodern thought, and feminism, Mutnick upholds a social constructionist pedagogy which would notice language itself as a zone of conflict in which students- especially basic writers- struggle to make semantic and syntactical choices.[5]

Problem One: What is an "essentialist" view of language?

After the examination of such assertions against Shaughnessy by poststructuralist, feminist, and Marxist critics, it is necessary to get a better sense of the lineage of the terminology being utilized. For example, what do scholars in Basic Writing accomplish rhetorically when they credit Shaughnessy with maintaining an "essentialist" view of language?

In order to better get at this question, it makes sense to trace something of the history of the term's use. The "essentialist" claim is a rhetorical tactic which has been used for ten to fifteen years within other scholarly quarters which have taken up the poststructuralist standpoint. Prominent among them, of course, has been feminist theory in

which scholars have struggled with the dilemma of needing to describe women as a social collective for political purposes but also of recognizing that creating a collective identity necessarily normalizes and excludes by trying to identify traits all women have. As Elizabeth Spelman has it, the essentialism charge has involved the attempt to posit an "essential 'womanness' that all women have and share in common despite the racial, class, religious, ethnic, and cultural differences among us" (ix).

Elizabeth Grosz asserts that the charge of essentialism pertains to those theories which assume women's essence is given and universal, often identified with women's biology and natural characteristics, but also with women's psychological characteristics or nurturance and empathy. For Diana Fuss "essentialism" is most prevalently reasoned out as a "belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (Fuss xi), or the notion that there are some natural givens which indeed precede social determination. The concept of identity that it typically invokes considers the self to be unitary, possessing a stable core that is self-identical. An essentialist view of language, then, proposes that language itself has trans-historical, eternal, and immutable essences that betoken a single reality rather than a complex system of cultural, social, psychical, and historical differences. Words have one essential meaning rather than multiple meanings that are variable or context-dependent. In this view of language, the "self" maintains a fundamental continuity over time, and posits an essential distinction from other historical subjects.

An inessential concept of language, then, would not suggest that the referential function of language is negated but rather, as Trihn Minh-Ha recommends, is "freed from its false identification with the phenomenal world and from its assumed authority as a means of cognition about that world" (31). As Chris Weedon contends, inessential conceptions of language recognize that "different languages and different discourses within the same language divide up the world and give it meaning in ways which cannot be reduced to one another through translation or by an appeal to universally shared concepts reflecting a fixed reality" (22).

However, despite the wide use of the term "essentialism" within feminist circles, as early as 1989, poststructuralists began to call attention to the problematic rhetorical effects of the use of this term as well as the dubious essentialism/difference binary. According to Fuss, this charge of "essentialism" often emerges due to problematic rhetorical purposes: the desire 1) to deny or annul the radicality of difference, or to ignore the many differences within essentialism, 2) to create the sense that "the bar between essentialism and constructionism" is "solid and unassailable" though it certainly is not (xii), and 3) to de-

velop the notion that essentialism is inherently good or bad, progressive nor reactionary, beneficial nor dangerous rather than looking at "what motivates its deployment" (xi). Fuss then also warns that much poststructuralist thinking has failed to concede that it is sometimes itself predicated upon a determinist view of social constructionism, what she calls a "sociological essentialism," or the conception that the "subject is, in essence, a social construction" (6).

Lawrence Grossberg similarly argues that social constructionist perspectives can rely upon one type of social construction as essential, one which perceives identity and language as historical constructions alone, privileging temporal dimensions over spatial or relational aspects. In this way, then, the rhetoric of poststructuralism may perhaps also risk providing a very circumscribed conception of social relations' operations. A non-essentialist view of language, which Fuss and Grossberg stress may or may not include poststructuralist tenets, recognizes not only that subjectivity is constructed, but that language is the space wherein individuals' subjectivities are socially constituted (i.e., essentialism is possible in spite of one's political or linguistic allegiances).

On Fuss's view, however, the most "essentialist" aspect within such deployments of social constructionism includes "place" or "positionality." This notion can provide a fixed, determinate understanding of the differences between subject-positions. For example, Gayatri Spivak's "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" affirms that there should exist one good form of essentialism, a "strategic essentialism" for those who are oppressed by society. In certain cases, she proposes, there may be a necessity for those from oppressed groups to declare their own essential raced, classed, and gendered bodies strategically, drawing attention to diverse histories of oppression. Spivak's call for a "strategic essentialism" raises the unsettling possibility that in certain cases one's subject-position may not be temporary, shifting, and provisional, as her arguments indicate it should be, but rather determinate, depending on who is doing the constructing and for what reasons. At such moments, strategic essentialism runs the risk of sounding oddly like an argument for a sociological essentialism in a new guise.

Since Fuss' excellent interrogation of the rhetorical effects of the "essentialism" charge, other scholars have also furnished useful insights. In *Critical Confrontations: Literary Theories in Dialogue*, Meili Steele proposes that

> one of the unfortunate effects of the poststructuralism/ essentialism nexus is that it turns differences into a bunker. The oppressed protect themselves with new self-understandings against the dominant culture. The poststructuralist, suspicious

> of all languages of constitution and justification, intervenes strategically and without principles or waits for the birth of a radically new culture. (94)

Likewise, in *Theorizing Textual Subjects: Agency and Oppression,* Steele also affirms that the whole opposition between essentialism and decentered multiplicity depends upon the problematic "poststructuralist insistence that any first-/second-person account of the subject is an essentialism" (139), making it exceedingly difficult to articulate other potentialities. Furthermore, in *Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* Iris Marion Young recognizes this binarism as flawed, rather calling for gender and other such categories to be seen as a "seriality." In this way, the essentialism/ constructionism binary could be dismantled, providing unity to the series "women" through how they are positioned vis a vis their relationships to the material organizations of social relationships, not through their roles as individuals. Drucilla Cornell also criticizes the essentialism-constructionism binary, advising that linking a biological or naturalist account of feminine sexuality to an essentialist rendering of women's reality has led to the faulty assumption that "any attempt to write feminine difference, or even to specify the construction of Woman or women within a particular context, has been identified as essentialist" (4). Finally, within Composition Studies recent attempts have been made to call attention to the limits of the essentialism-constructionism debate (Jarratt and Worsham) and to recognize that the conception of "essentialism" itself is far from static (Brady). The term "essentialism" can have many rhetorical purposes, then, but many of them seem to obscure the relative complexity of the term itself. Chief among such purposes, of course, is the swift negation of the political efficacy of another scholar's assertions.

Problem Two: What is "accommodationism"?

Much like the rhetorical problematics of the term "essentialism," the designation "accommodationist" is one that arises frequently within poststructuralist, feminist, and Marxist theoretical frameworks to characterize Shaughnessy's scholarship. As a result, an examination of the history of this term and its definition is also necessary. The term "accommodationist" submits that the mastery of academic codes depends upon assymmetrical power relations, and that this mastery is sometimes valued in ways that literally wipe out or negate a Basic Writing student's other linguistic abilities and choices. This can pressure the student, conceived as "other," to "accommodate" her/himself to the dictates of hegemonic discourses. Much like forms of "acculturation" or "assimilation," the word "accommodation" indicates

that Basic Writers come to construct and represent themselves according to the dominant dictates of Standard English and other hegemonic cultural codes rather than also being taught to value their own linguistic difference, employing it as a disruptive force against privileged conceptions of language use.

While the term "accommodation" has been used in varied circles, much like "essentialism," it has a strong history in feminist circles as well. Drucilla Cornell's *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction, and the Law* proposes that "accommodation" by women involves the appropriation of sexual difference to masculine domination rather than the creation of a new form of the feminine which is designed in resistance to such domination (13). This term has also been employed in Marxist circles in which it is argued that lower class people need not "accommodate" themselves and their identities to the whims of upper-class hegemonic discourse.

As with the term "essentialism" which has been challenged of late for its rhetorical purposes, numerous criticisms have been made concerning the term "accommodation." While it seems that the term "accommodation" is inherently negative, indicating that one is giving up one conception of oneself in favor of another, accommodation need not necessarily operate as such. In the cases of women and the economically disadvantaged, "accommodation" may not always be an entirely negative political concept since one can reasonably engage in "accommodation" to dominant cultural codes for many, often complicated reasons. Externally accommodative behavior also does not always reflect the many social identities one may have (De Vos 37). Likewise, there are many varieties as well as degrees of "accommodation" precisely because there are "many different norms and constellations of subjectivities . . . depending on differences among fields of study, discourse roles, and ideologies of knowledge-making" (Ivanic 244). Similarly it is evident that there are paradoxes involved within scholars' recommendations that Basic Writers should not be asked to accommodate themselves to the dictates of Standard English. According to Elizabeth Ellsworth's *Teaching Positions: Difference, Pedagogy, and the Power of Address,* forcing democratic dialogue and requiring students not to accommodate themselves to academic discourse is often as likely to be as anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian as any other pedagogical alternative. This becomes a particularly troubling issue for those "Basic Writers" who, while they acknowledge their socio-cultural positioning, may not want to interrogate it to the exclusion of exploring how to use academic writing conventions.[6] Requiring them to do so may indeed compel another kind of "accommodation," the accommodation to one particular political framework at the expense of others.

Problem Three: What is involved when one focuses on "materialist conditions?"

Lastly, a lack of focus on "materialist conditions," drawing upon Marxist ideology, is another rhetorical tactic often adapted to discredit the findings of other scholars, particularly Shaughnessy. In this case, one is being charged with not making the social, cultural, political, and everyday pressures upon a particular situation visible objects of inquiry. This can involve a lack of attention to working conditions, political machinations and their impacts, and allocations of resources. While more recent scholars from post-Marxists to conservatives have challenged the ways in which this charge functions rhetorically (for a good overview, see Gordon), Kenneth Burke perhaps remains its most sympathetic and therefore perhaps most thoughtful critic to date.

Burke argued that the motivations of Marxist-influenced rhetorics can most frequently involve a critique of capitalist rhetoric to the exclusion of other interests. Put simply, Marxist rhetoric can often be employed specifically to unmask the factional interests inherent in professed universal interests, especially those of bourgeois orientation (102). For Burke, the call for "materialist inquiry" was itself rather complicated rhetorically, and therefore worthy of critical examination, requiring 1) an account of extralinguistic factors in rhetorical expression, 2) the use of dialectic as one of its main principles while evidencing the inability to embrace the pragmatics of such dialectic because of an unwillingness to give "equally sympathetic expression to competing principles" (103), and 3) an analysis of the hidden advantages within other terminological investments while simultaneously seeking to obscure its own. Beyond this, the reference to "material conditions," Burke recommends, can be somewhat contradictory. For Burke, the same Marxist system of ideas which professes the universal aim of social and political action can also at times provide a rather limited or partial view of reality that can sometimes overemphasize the discussion of controversial political and social issues at the expense of other equally critical concerns.

II. Rhetorical Power and the Inessential Shaughnessy

After a brief rhetorical analysis of the terms "essentialist," "accommodationist," and "materialist praxis," it seems clear that the logic of these words and their uses can indeed be rather complicated, sometimes even paradoxical. The rhetorical purposes of such charges, of course, raise questions about whether the assertions themselves are particularly meaningful as claims about specific texts.

If one suspends these questions of the rhetorical function of these

terms, however, one is left to look at how such charges against Shaughnessy themselves hold up in light of her actual texts, perhaps an equally valid consideration. This is, of course, the consideration that has dominated much contemporary inquiry of Shaughnessy's work. One then confronts a series of other critical questions that demand answers: To what extent did Shaughnessy actually produce an "essentialist" view of language? To what extent did Shaughnessy truly extend "accommodationist" perspectives to her Basic Writing students through her research? To what extent did Shaughnessy fail to concern herself with the "material" considerations of the Basic Writing program in which she worked?

Recently some very substantial work has placed Shaughnessy's research much more fully within historical and political context. Jane Maher's *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work* indicates how Shaughnessy's moment made it exceedingly troublesome for her to take up social and political topics overtly. As Maher describes, "by the time Mina finished the conclusion [of *Errors and Expectations*], a chapter she entitled 'Expectations,' the budget cuts that had been imposed on CUNY had taken a devastating toll not only on the number of students being admitted, but on the quality of the programs that remained to serve them" (194). The constraints that such political pressures placed upon Shaughnessy's texts must be recognized prior to any full examination of her work and its complexities. As a result of such historical pressures, it is necessary to look more closely for the political and social commentary that Shaughnessy makes about language, ethnic and race relations, and material conditions.

Much of the work I now turn to comes from my own research at the Mina Shaughnessy Archives at City College.[7] Offering an odd forewarning of how Shaughnessy's 1977 *Errors and Expectations* would be taken up by contemporary scholars, one reader from Prentice-Hall Publishers, Bill Oliver, made an important claim about how the book was likely to be received in his 1976 review of the manuscript. It was not overtly categorizable within one political category, but seemed to disrupt both leftist and rightist expectations:

> I suspect that Mina's work will be roundly condemned from both the right and the left: from one point of view, it is entirely too sympathetic with the poorly prepared student, putting too much blame on the English language itself rather than on the student's ignorance and of the high school teachers; from the other point of view it is another honky trick, an exercise in liberal deceit which, when the rhetoric is penetrated, still attempts to impose a minority dialect (i.e., standard written English), blaming the students for their inadequacies as writers instead of blaming society for its biases as readers. (1)[8]

Neither characterization, Oliver warned, would be fair to the complexity of Shaughnessy's argument itself. Personal correspondence between Oliver and Len Kriegel revealed that Shaughnessy also felt she "would be attacked both from the left and from the right." As Maher has it, "Mina's concern with criticism from 'the left' centered around the (very legitimate) fear of 'exposing' errors of basic writing students to the public by publishing samples of their writing" (188). Shaughnessy's apprehensions about leftist criticisms were something Maher indicates Shaughnessy tried to account for in *Errors and Expectations*. Maher points to Shaughnessy's many attempts within her written work both in the *Journal of Basic Writing* and in *Errors and Expectations* to codify student errors and find their own value and intrinsic logics.

Within her historical and political moment, many scholars commented upon the gamble Shaughnessy's book was taking. In a 1979 speech, Bob Lyons applauds Shaughnessy for what then was a very risky move: "It was clear from several essays on Open Admissions and from several letters to the *Times* that examples of unskilled writing by non-traditional students were considered a powerful weapon by those opposed to the broadening of higher education. From his point of view, Mina had great courage in choosing to examine publicly such quantities of error-laden student writing" (1979; 4). Importantly, Oliver proceeds to assert that, "Mina has anticipated all these objections in her book; and the careful reader will perceive that what she has to say to writing teachers is much more subtle and much more valuable than anything yet to emerge from either of the extreme camps" (1). As I will argue here, a close examination of Shaughnessy's works reveals that the charges of "essentialism," "accommodationism," and "anti-materialism" appear not to account for the radical intricacy of Shaughnessy's actual assertions.

Shaughnessy's Challenge to the Essentialist Charge

Contemporary scholars who charge Shaughnessy with essentialism scarcely ever contribute thorough or direct textual evidence from her work to support this assertion. Oftentimes the charge of essentialism is evidenced merely by Shaughnessy's overt concern with the formal, detailed linguistic choices Basic Writers make rather than larger political or social concerns. Shaughnessy's preoccupation with the Basic Writer's linguistic situation in her research is often reduced by critics to a view that her conception of language is naively essentialist rather than that, as she contends, language acts are dependent upon diverse rhetorical constraints and conditions, many of which rely upon external issues of context and social environment.

In order to examine the strength of the "linguistic essentialist" charge against Shaughnessy's actual texts, I turn to Shaughnessy's own discussions concerning how language operates. In her 1977 *Errors and Expectations*, the text most often criticized for its essentialist conception of language, Shaughnessy curiously announces that language ought to be defined rhetorically, as contingent, as well as both situationally and socially determined. This new view of language, Shaughnessy understood, would have to involve a "revolution" in thinking about linguistic acts, something she was fairly certain teachers and scholars might not be ready to address. This "revolution," then, would necessarily shift the ways in which "errors" were perceived since now they were no longer linked to a referential conception of language use but an understanding of language use as context-dependent:

> It [this new conception of language] is a revolution that leads not inevitably or finally to a rejection of all rules and standards about language, namely that it is variously shaped by situations and bound by conventions, none of which is inferior to others but none of which, also can substitute for others. But it does produce a different view of error and of students who make errors . . . his [the Basic Writer's] errors reflect upon his linguistic situation, not about his educability. (121)

Thus, Shaughnessy's call for an examination of the "logic" within student error appears in part to be premised upon the assumption that language is not simply transparent or representational. Rather language use, and thereby "student error," while certainly "shaped by conventions" and "bound by situations," shifting according to the different socially and linguistically determined situations students themselves encounter, does not lead "inevitably or finally to a rejection of all rules and standards about language."

Looking more carefully at *Errors and Expectations* divulges that in many ways Shaughnessy may indeed have been tackling both a view of all standards as relative as well as a very similar essentialist conception of language use, one that she is often accused of utilizing herself. Until the publication of this text, many teachers maintained essentialist conceptions of language and therefore transparent conceptions about Basic Writers' situations. As a result, such Basic Writers were previously seen to be naturally uneducable and remedial, their identities determined almost solely through their language choices. Shaughnessy strategically sought to disrupt that, not by ignoring the fact that presumptions about "error" existed, but rather by examining the false conceptions about "error" themselves. Shaughnessy did this precisely because she held that the "alternative course of ignoring error for fear

of inhibiting the writer even more or of assuming that errors will wear off as the student writes is finally giving error more power than it is due" (128). Rather than viewing "error" as an essential part of Basic Writers' language use (such that their ideas cannot be separated from the varied logical choices through which they are conveyed), Shaughnessy suggests that "error" is due in large part to the intelligently-reasoned, rhetorically-based choices Basic Writers make. Instead, Shaughnessy invites teachers to acknowledge that every linguistic situation, shaped by contextual, rhetorical, and social features, is limited and constrained in particular and yet different ways for the Basic Writing student.

Though Shaughnessy certainly does not concentrate a great deal of attention on the problematic assumptions of academic discourse altogether, its multiple internal contradictions and variations, or radical overthrow of remedial programs, Shaughnessy does do something very critical, even rather revolutionary, for her historical moment. She continues to mark the dilemmas of the Basic Writer's rhetorical situation, particularly the predicament of moving between and amongst different discursive conventions. Here Shaughnessy references the artificial nature of the rhetorical situation of academic writing for the Basic Writing student:

> It is, first, a situation that requires him [the Basic Writer] to communicate with an anonymous reader (for whom the teacher might be said to act as a surrogate), generally on an impersonal subject and in a formal register. It is, second, a politely polemical situation in which the reader is assumed to be, if not hostile to the writer's view, at least obliged to consider it carefully, according to criteria for evidence and sound reasoning that are themselves part of the legacy of academic language. It is, finally, a situation that is locked peculiarly into time- distanced from the present by the absence of a listener and linked to the past by a tradition of discourse that has in large measure determined what topics and terms and styles of thought are appropriate to the subject. (188)

According to Shaughnessy, then, student error is as much a function of complexities raised by the ever-shifting rhetorical situation which has temporal, spatial, and social aspects as it is students' lack of familiarity with academic codes and conventions. Such codes are the "legacy of academic language," a troublesome, seemingly impenetrable method of communication which the Basic Writer has not yet inherited. Shaughnessy maintains that until this point, traditional modes of Composition teaching have failed to highlight for Basic Writers that contrasts between languages are largely a "function of different social and

linguistic situations" (188) and their complexities. It is finally recognizing language as not essentially referential but rather as rhetorical or context-dependent that Shaughnessy proposes is critical for future Basic Writing pedagogy.

In fact, within Shaughnessy's "Introduction" to *Errors and Expectations*, she clarifies that since "teachers' preconceptions about errors are frequently at the center of their misconceptions about BW students, I have had no choice but to dwell on errors" (6), despite the fact that, as becomes clear when one looks at more of her writings, this was not her only research interest. Error comes not from the student's preference of one linguistic form over another, according to Shaughnessy. Rather it emanates from a series of conflicting sites, including "the generally humiliating encounter with school language, which produces ambivalent feelings about mastery" (10), and a great deal of painful psychic conflict for the student. Shaughnessy is not then recommending that painful psychic conflict must be avoided at all costs, but that one should not turn a blind eye to the assumptions one has about language or the ways in which these can impact our students. Such passages also communicate Shaughnessy's keen discernment of the rhetorical and situational nature of language-use and the ways in which it is impacted by social and institutional conditions. Removing the concept of "error" from the problems of encoding and decoding as well as seeing it as a form of meaning-making with a set of its own internal logics which were based on rhetorical, cultural, and social factors of Basic Writers' individual linguistic situations was precisely what Shaughnessy's book set out, at least in part, to establish for its readers.

Shaughnessy also voiced versions of her understanding of an inessential conception of language use in her lesser known works. In a speech to the Conference of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors, then Director of Instructional Resources, Mina Shaughnessy, overtly considered the need for Open Admissions programs. In the Congressional Record minutes from the House of Representatives on Thursday, September 9, 1976, Andrew Young, an African American member of Congress from Georgia, reproduced this particular speech in its entirety. Young chose to do this precisely because he hoped that her comments might "arouse a greater public interest throughout this nation in the concept of open admissions at public institutions of higher learning" (Maher 183). Since financial crisis in New York had led to the abandonment of the Open Admissions policy, Young felt that his publication of her text might renew this policy.

Shaughnessy accomplished many things within this speech, one of which was a fairly elaborate discussion of how language itself functions. Here Shaughnessy gave utterance to both the difficulties she saw within the dialect issues operative in Basic Writing student circles, as well as the flexible, fluid nature one associates with a rhetorical,

perhaps even a nonreferential conception of language itself:

> How we have argued and puzzled, and struggled over the issue of mother-tongue interference, over whether to change, how to change, when to change those nonstandard features of a student's language that distract the general reader . . . But looking back, the important point seems to me that we grappled with both the phenomenon of diversity and the phenomenon of linguistic convention and in doing so developed greater respect for our students' linguistic aptitudes and for the subtle, stubborn, yet mercurial quality of language itself. (E4956)

One might rightly interrogate Shaughnessy's propensity to call one's "mother-tongue" an "interference" from the privileges afforded by this present historical moment, legitimately questioning whether Shaughnessy is calling here for an outright erasure of the student's own home discourse or a modification of it. Equally possible here, however, is that Shaughnessy is proposing a complicated co-existence for both teachers and students. In other words, Shaughnessy appears both concerned with the formal features of students' texts and the diversity of students' own linguistic choices. In this passage once again Shaughnessy betrays a willingness to 1) esteem students' own unique linguistic aptitudes as necessarily complex and rhetorical, and 2) concede that language is not merely transparent but is "mercurial," itself highly rhetorical in nature, not only *revealing* but also *constructing* meaning.[9] This passage divulges that one of the main points of Shaughnessy's work was not to advocate a linguistic conception with which merely teachers or merely students would agree. Rather, she sought to create a conception of language which would simultaneously recognize the social and linguistic situations of both students and their teachers.

Shaughnessy's Challenge to the Accommodationist Charge

One of the main reasons for the accommodationist charge against Shaughnessy most probably emanates from examples such as the one above (i.e., Shaughnessy's choice to label issues that influence Standard English as "interference errors" in *Errors and Expectations*.) Here Shaughnessy indicated that there are certain "errors" whose logic can be traced to differences in the rules within the students' home languages and the Standard English of the academy. And, though, as I proposed earlier, one certainly has reason to question the ambiguity of Shaughnessy's use of the term "interference," which she borrowed from ESL literature popular at the time, one also needs to look at whether the use of this term alone warrants her work's equation with *an*

accommodationist political agenda.

It becomes especially difficult to condemn Shaughnessy with simply advocating accommodation alone when one looks more closely, for instance, at her full discussion of dialect within *Errors and Expectations*. This is in large part because Shaughnessy also took note of the fact that Basic Writing students are likely to find learning Standard English particularly debilitating for several reasons. Chief among them, Shaughnessy insists, are racist and classist societal interpretations of dialects which inevitably impinge upon students' conceptions of themselves, making them feel like outsiders. According to Shaughnessy, such interpretations are vicious and wrong. However, they do exist, and they understandably result in students' attempts to "try to resist the interpretations that the world imposes on them" (138). This leads to two possibilities, according to Shaughnessy: 1) some Basic Writers may absorb the negative views of dialect that society holds (or, as Lu puts it, accommodate "their thoughts and actions to rigid boundaries" rather than on actively engaging in 'breaking entrenched habits and patterns of behavior (Anzaldúa 79)' (900): or 2) they may never fully learn various conventions of Standard English because of the threats they pose to their sense of selfhood and to their other linguistic allegiances. As Shaughnessy puts it

> When we remember the ways in which the majority society has impinged upon the lives of most BW students and when we recall the students' distrust of teachers and their language, engendered over years of schooling, it is difficult to see how the desire to identify with the majority culture, and therefore its public language, could possibly have survived into young adulthood. (125)

While Shaughnessy recognizes the existence of both of the above options for her students, neither one finally emerges as satisfactory. Academic discourse, for Shaughnessy, then, appears not to merely function as a means of empowerment while conflict and struggle act as the "enemies of Basic Writing instruction" (Lu 890). Interestingly, the first option is similar in description to what many contemporary scholars might call an "accommodationist philosophy" while the second is more in line with what recent scholars have themselves advocated. Instead, Shaughnessy sought an unconventional ground, one that would not erase the value of difference while also not disempowering her students by failing to make them aware of the "tools of the master" and how they functioned so that such students might put them to their own strategic uses.

Given Shaughnessy's own project with regard to issues of accommodation, recent claims against her work emerge as somewhat

problematic. One charge is that Shaughnessy holds an accommodationist perspective, proposing that she necessarily descried students' conflicts and struggles as inherently negative. It is fairly clear, however, that she did not. This claim is compounded by an assumption that formalistic approaches to Basic Writers' situations are inherently flawed. For example, Lu asserts that the

> experiences of Anzaldúa and Rose suggest that the best way to help students cope with the 'pain,' 'strain,' 'guilt,' 'fear,' or 'confusions' resulting from this type of conflict [the conflict between students' home languages and academic discourse] is not to find ways of releasing the students from these experiences or to avoid situations which might activate them. Rather the 'contextual' approach would have been more 'practical,' since it could help students deal self-consciously with the threat of 'betrayal,' especially if they fear and want to resist it. (905)

Seeming to in part overlook the contextual element of Shaughnessy's own approach, Lu then maintains that Shaughnessy's formalistic emphasis is "likely to be only a more 'practical' way of preserving academic vocabulary and of speeding the students' internalization of it" (905). Lu curiously does not point to places within Shaughnessy's texts where Shaughnessy considers conflict or other such difficulties as immanently negative. Instead, Shaughnessy implies that the kind of resistance Lu advocates, while in part helpful, may make it seriously difficult for students to ascertain the conventions of academic discourse, conventions about which they have a fundamental and democratic right to know. Moreover, Shaughnessy recognizes something which many Composition teachers themselves have experienced: forcing a foregrounding of such conflict and struggle can be incapacitating to students who may not wish to foreground it themselves. Simply assuming that students do wish to foreground such conflict risks taking students' agency and responsibility out of their own hands. In other words, while Shaughnessy appears to be weighing the positives and negatives of both approaches, implicitly Shaughnessy's assertions contest the idea that foregrounding Basic Writing students' cultural and psychic conflicts is in itself an inherent good.

Likewise, Lu's injunction that Shaughnessy's position can rightly be classified as accommodationist because of her preference for citing minority writers such as Howe, Dubois, and Baldwin, liberals who, she remarks, "'live with' the tensions of conflicting cultures" (906), emerges as somewhat problematic. Lu would then go further to define the resistance to accommodationist tactics in these terms:

> The residents of the borderlands act on rather than react to the

> "borders" cutting across society and their psyches, "borders" which become visible as they encounter conflicting ideas and actions. Rather, they use these "borders" to identify the unitary aspects of "official" paradigms which "set" and "separate" cultures and which they can then work to break down. That is, for the mestizas, "borders" serve to delineate aspects of their psyches and the world requiring change. (900)

This description of the borderland identity as inherently resistant to accommodation, however, begs several questions: While cutting across such borders is an ideal with which most scholars would agree, is that not a great burden to place upon the student and the teacher, and is it a realizable goal for the composition class? Does "living with" such tensions necessarily connote a lack of political attention to them, their effects, and their possible potentials at all given moments? Despite Lu's advocation of a new mestiza consciousness which involves multiplicity and fluidity over fixity and dualism, Lu's own language appears here to intimate in part that the political stances one might take up involve either accommodation on the one hand and conflict or resistance on the other. Certainly it bears exploring whether there might indeed be moments when "living with such tensions" may be itself politically strategic, a form of intervention within accommodationist tactics themselves. Likewise, one might reasonably call into question Lu's characterization of these writers' work as "liberal," especially the rhetorically complex scholarship of Baldwin among others which, several contemporary scholars have argued convincingly, thoroughly calls into question traditional conceptions of "raced identities" altogether, in fact disputing the "problematics surfacing in discussions of educational reform aimed at accommodation without change" (Lu 904). The recent descriptions of Shaughnessy's and these other authors' work seem to inadvertently deny any other potentialities than the binary prescriptions they hand out.[10]

Shaughnessy's Challenge to the Anti-Materialist Charge

As already observed, among those ascribing to the conflict metaphor, Horner and others condemn Shaughnessy for ignoring "material conditions," a Marxist focus on the discrete situations with which Basic Writers and their teachers are dealing. Horner specifically intimates that there is a troublesome level of conservatism within Shaughnessy's work, and an unwillingness on her part to talk about the actual political situations of Open Admissions. Much like Lu, Horner contends that her focus on the "practical" considerations "tends to accept as 'givens' the material constraints on the work of basic writ-

ing" (215). This enterprise has forced Shaughnessy and others, Horner claims, to disregard questions of

> salaries, job security, teaching loads, class size, classroom facilities, office space, and secretarial support; also to the conditions giving rise to the problems many basic writing students bring with them to college, such as health problems, lack of child care, inadequate financial aid, and a history of inadequate schooling; and finally to the immediate historical circumstances leading to the presence of these students in college and the ongoing family, economic, and social pressures on those students. (215)

For Horner, the public discourse on higher education and Open Admissions of Shaughnessy's time "perpetuates the denial of the academy as part of the material, political, social, and historical worlds" (200). He proposes rather that one needs to examine, for example, "teachers' representations of basic writing students, programs, and pedagogies," and that these "need to be understood in part by the knowledge that the positions they occupied were institutionally marginal and highly vulnerable" (207).

The distinction Horner makes from here, however, seems a bit problematic, given his desire to point to the material conditions of the historical moment that shaped the production of Shaughnessy's texts. Horner indicates that the "enterprise of Basic Writing was aligned with a depoliticized conception of educational practices and goals" that naturalized basic writing and basic writers by "positing them as 'new' and 'beginning'" in ways that stripped their situations of an understanding of the impacting historical forces and social circumstances (211-212). The comment is somewhat ironic: it appears fair to challenge Shaughnessy with ignoring the social and political circumstances of her own moment within her published texts, but unfair to challenge Horner for his choice to ignore the social and political circumstances of Shaughnessy's own historical moment and how these shaped her texts. While this irony is important, of course, it should not lead us to overlook Horner's consequential advice that these are important aspects of Basic Writers' and Basic Writing teachers' lives to which all should pay more attention in both scholarship and teaching.

While Horner is absolutely correct that Shaughnessy did not tackle all such issues within her scholarly works, as I shall show, quite clearly she did examine some of them. Shaughnessy's own historical context certainly involved a great many institutional considerations. Trapped between wanting to retain the Basic Writing students at CUNY, enormous budget cuts, and arguments that tests should be administered so as to determine "student entrance," Shaughnessy had occasion to re-

flect not only on the hypocrisy of asking Open Admissions students to take tests for entrance, but the social forces responsible for this set of events. Particularly in the speech in the Congressional Record mentioned earlier, Shaughnessy calls attention to just such issues:

> For the first time in the history of the city, we created, through open admissions, a massive feedback system which revealed an unconscionable failure to meet the educational needs of the poor and dark-skinned. To be sure, the roots of failure are tangled, and now that college teachers have begun to talk with and meet with high school teachers (largely as a result of open admissions) they are more sensitive to the many institutional conditions that have made teaching almost impossible in many of our schools. (E4956)

In this piece, Shaughnessy explicitly connects the failures of Open Admissions and her fears about student retention to larger material and institutional problems, asserting an unwillingness to let the Open Admissions program take the fall for larger economic, systemic, and educational difficulties which were then impacting it.

In this same text, Shaughnessy talks about this crisis in both historical and social terms, recognizing the impacts that such direct changes in Open Admissions policies would have upon Basic Writing students and teachers alike. "The Miserable Truth" was a speech delivered to a group of CUNY administrators, all of whom were suffering budget cuts and layoffs. The situation she portrays is a dire one:

> * Our staffs are shrinking and our class size increasing.
> * Talented young teachers who are ready to concentrate their scholarly energies on the sort of research and teaching we need in basic writing are looking for jobs.
> * Each day brings not a new decision but rumors of new decisions, placing us in the predicament of those mice in psychological experiments who must keep shifting their expectations until they are too rattled to function.
> * Our campuses buzz like an Elizabethan court with talk of who is in favor and who is out. And we meet our colleagues from other campuses with relief, "ah, good, "we say (or think to ourselves)- "you're still here."
> * We struggle each day to extract from the Orwellian language that announces new plans and policies some clear sense of what finally is going to become of the students whom the university in more affluent times committed itself to educate. (E4956)

In the above text, Shaughnessy investigates the historical moment

and cultural context which is instituting the constraints upon the production of her own research and teaching. These constraints shape the realm of what is possible for her to address in this situation. This perplexing condition of having Open Admissions students, Shaughnessy goes on to indicate, committed CUNY to being a teaching institution in ways it had yet to conceive fully. She then references the disparities between the imaginative approaches of the Basic Writing teachers at CUNY and the lack of adequate remissions for them in the forms of salary raises or reduced teaching loads, precisely the kind of attention to the material conditions of Basic Writing pedagogy for which Horner calls.

Shaughnessy also keenly draws attention to the fact that there were numerous societal conditions which contributed to this state of affairs in problematic ways. She does not point to general pressures, but instead to a very specific set of societal assumptions. These assumptions, Shaughnessy counsels, produced a society in which Basic Writing students continue to be oppressed, marginalized, and ghettoized:

> After no more than a generation of open admissions students has been allowed to lay claim to a college education, and in the first faltering years of Open Admissions, the decision has come out against them. Not, one suspects, because anyone has taken a close look at the experience itself but because the times have shifted and allowed the society to settle back into its comfortable notions about merit, notions which have produced a meritocratic scheme that perpetuates the various brands of race and class prejudice that have pervaded this society since its creation. (E4955)

Shaughnessy indicates, then, that the re-entrenchment of specific meritocratic assumptions has enabled race and class oppression of Basic Writers and their construction as "other." She also points out clearly that these meritocratic assumptions are not merely incidental, rather shaping and influencing the academy itself in many ways. According to Shaughnessy, this kind of societal oppression disables Basic Writing students as well as forces the Open Admissions system's collapse.

Inessential Writings and Concluding Comments

Despite such charges now waged against Shaughnessy as an essentialist, accommodationist, and anti-materialist, Shaughnessy herself appears to have gone so far as to see her work as an overt political intervention, and to call it such. In the 1972 "A Report on the Basic

Writing Program at City College and on the Writing Problems of its Students," Shaughnessy once again characterizes her historical moment and Open Admissions' part in it as "revolutionary" (3). This revolution, brought about by the new effects of Open Admissions,

> can be productive . . . forcing us to re-examine our assumptions about language, to confront our ignorance of whole territories of linguistic experience, to look more carefully at the process of writing to understand just how we have managed as a profession to become so unsuccessful with so many students. (3)

Interestingly, Shaughnessy, like many scholars today, points to the important political ramifications of her work. However, she also warns that the call to politicize can itself be merely empty rhetoric, a set of assertions with no real plan of action, and therefore one ought to be somewhat suspicious of it.[11] Shaughnessy goes on to caution about the perils of vague conceptions of social revolution, suggesting that they can be "wasteful . . . encouraging a kind of experimentalism that springs from shallow roots and spreads, without direction or control, often at the expense of what is truly valuable from the past" (4). Conceptions of social revolution are not intrinsically worthy of merit, then. Rather, they have to be well planned and well constructed in order to realize their goals.

Also, Shaughnessy interestingly calls attention to the variety of metaphors which have been utilized to make sense of Basic Writers' situations, metaphors which she asserts are inexorably disabling to them:

> metaphors of disease, of debility, decay, paralysis, contagion, and even of mortality rates. 'Preparation' for Open Admissions seemed, in such a context, to mean 'protection' for the teachers and their bright' students, those who had been classified by their academic records as college material.' (5)

Criticizing the way in which these scholars have used language in order to construct certain identities for Basic Writers, Shaughnessy then proceeds to challenge the new mantra of "maintaining standards" which had arisen as a result. She regards this as flawed in two modes: 1) it "pressed most directly on the remedial teachers of the college, who were charged with the task of transforming within a semester or two their 'disadvantaged' students into students who behaved, in academic situations at least, like "advantaged" students" (5), a task which overburdened teachers and forced Basic Writers to adopt false identities, and 2) it "started things off in the wrong direction: it narrowed

the base of responsibility for Open Admissions students to the remedial programs, giving 'regular' departments an illusion of immunity from change" (50), ghettoizing Basic Writers away from the rest of the academic institution.

Shaughnessy's own discussion about the homogenizing of student identity alongside the institutional impacts of such language use once more reveals Shaughnessy's willingness to take the rhetorical nature of language seriously as well as attests to her concern for the materiality of institutional relations as they impacted her students. As Shaughnessy commences to claim, language is key in this regard since it not only *represents* but also *constructs* our situations. As she indicates, "our very formulation of the problem [as an issue of 'correcting' students] keeps us from understanding it" (6). Quite clearly, then, Shaughnessy did perceive the way in which our representations of our own students could operate against them.

The 1973 "Open Admissions and the Disadvantaged Teacher" is one of Shaughnessy's rallying cries made in an effort to reformulate the conception of the problem or question itself within scholarship on language and remediation. Here Shaughnessy contests the widespread pessimism about Open Admissions, the examination of "crude measures of attrition rates, grade-point averages, or objective tests" (401). Shaughnessy advises teachers, administrators, and society at large to become accountable for Basic Writing students' complex situations. In this piece Shaughnessy also summons this audience to "resist" those people "who have tried to isolate the phenomenon of disadvantage from the society that caused it" (404), to ignore the complex ways in which social and political aspects of Basic Writers' situations, as well as their teachers' participations in them, construct debilitating identities for Basic Writing students. Initiating a political interrogation of the students' own material situations, then, Shaughnessy credits Open Admissions itself with "foregrounding the real question" or problem which is "not how many people society is willing to salvage, but how much this society is willing to pay to salvage itself" (404).

While Shaughnessy's work certainly warrants critical commentary, in this paper I hope to have revealed that both the terminological investments used recently to criticize Shaughnessy's scholarship as well as the content of the criticisms themselves are somewhat problematic. This is the case in large part because of the rhetorical contradictions that can sometimes be found within political positions frequently espoused as well as the self-difference of Shaughnessy's own texts. These are factors difficult yet quite important for those of us with poststructuralist agendas to admit.

As a result of this research, I have not made an argument for Shaughnessy's works as essential or foundational readings for Basic Writing scholars. Quite clearly Shaughnessy's works have been foun-

dational to the field, and such arguments have already been made wonderfully by others who may or may not hold my particular perspectives on language use. Perhaps more importantly, though, I have attempted to add to this conversation and to initiate further dialogue by investigating how inessential Shaughnessy's crucial texts truly are. We should not allow her writings' foundational status within our discipline or her concern with the formal features of language use to obscure her work's linguistic complexities and ambiguities or its political potentials. Recognizing the self-difference within Shaughnessy's texts may allow all of us to embrace Shaughnessy's legacy for what it still accomplishes and for what it can continue to teach scholars about Basic Writing. Reading Shaughnessy's texts in this light may also enable us to have a fuller sense of Basic Writing's history in all its rhetorical contradictions. It is Shaughnessy's inessential legacy, then, which may finally be equally critical in illuminating and shaping the landscape of Basic Writing's potential futures.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank the following people for their very helpful comments on this piece: the excellent *JBW* reviewers and the Northern Arizona University Research Group, self-formed by junior female faculty in support of our research efforts (Jean Boreen, Sibylle Gruber, Cynthia Kosso, and Randi Reppen).

[2] There have, of course, been other significant attempts to work practically with a "contact zone" pedagogy which have realized some of the limitations of enacting this strategy institutionally. Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's February 1996 "Repositioning Remediation: Renegotiating Composition's Work in the Academy" in CCC offers the main claim that "as long as the basic writing 'slot' exists, Compositionists thus privilege narrow institutional languages for describing and understanding student-writing," forcing basic writing to act as "the institutional means for positioning remediation as the gatekeeper for composition's feminized work within the academy" (82). When confronted with the possibilities of enacting a "contact zone" pedagogy, however, the authors clarify that since student writing is institutionally feminized, adding writers of other genders, races, and classes to the canon or to our classrooms does little to change that unequal power relationship. As long as that inequity exists, they contend, contact zone pedagogy "cannot be actively realized" (70).

[3] To date, none of the scholars I mention here have fully revisited their specific conceptualizations of Shaughnessy and her work. However, the release of Lu and Horner's 1998 book, *Representing the Other: Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing*, is imminent and

may well seek to address some such issues. Even since the publication of Lu's initial text, her perspective on her own rhetorical tactics as well as the issue of essentialism has altered a bit. In her 1998 "Reading and Writing Differences: The Problematic of Experience" Lu does not separate "experience" into the sphere of "individualism" but instead asserts usefully that experience itself should be interrogated carefully and examined for the material conditions which give rise to it. Likewise, at the 1998 Thomas Watson Conference, Lu suggested in "Redefining a Literate Self" that she wanted to move away from using rhetorical techniques such as "attack and defense," ones which she felt she may have employed with reference to Shaughnessy's work. In examining Richard Miller's work in "The Nervous System," she suggested importantly that scholars must become more self-conscious about their own ethics of reading and the politics of citation. In this spirit I posed a question to Lu about her own characterization of Shaughnessy and the ethics of her own reading of Shaughnessy's work. Lu did not suggest that she would alter her reading of Shaughnessy's research, instead indicating that she had been misread by various scholars who believed that she was challenging Shaughnessy's politics rather than how Shaughnessy presented that politics, her more immediate concern.

[4] Horner's position on the larger social issues concerned with material conditions has become increasingly complex as well. In his 1997 "Students, Authorship, and the Work of Composition," he would draw attention to problems within static conceptions of the "individual" and the "social," suggesting that they should be seen importantly as "dialectically interrelated and fluid" (507). Here he instead critiques the limitations of monolithic social determinism. Again, however, heretofore he has not reconceptualized his original representation of Shaughnessy or her work.

[5] Gail Stygall's 1994 *CCC* piece, "Resisting Privilege: Basic Writing and Foucault's Author Function" also argues for resistance to the reinscription of power and the definition of the author that currently resides in many Basic Writing classrooms. Stygall's criticisms of the way in which the term "basic" is held to be something "temporary, contingent, requiring emergency methods, quick fixes, 'bandaid' solutions" are very astute. Likewise are her suggestions that there can be no homogeneous Basic Writing students or classrooms, and that for institutional reasons it may be important to keep the label in place, but scholars should fight hard to see that tenured positions for Basic Writing are established and that experienced teachers teach these classes.

[6] Xin Liu Gales's 1997 "'The Stranger' in Communication: Race, Class, and Conflict in a Basic Writing Class" provides a very thoughtful criticism of how the call to "deconstruct white supremacy" can also lead to unfair practices which debilitate Basic Writers.

[7] For a review of how Basic Writers' identities have been taken historically, see my other published work on Basic Writing, "Revising the Political in Basic Writing Scholarship." *Journal of Basic Writing*. 15.2 (1996): 24-49.

[8] Oliver, of course, anticipated the reviews of Shaughnessy's 1977 *Errors and Expectations* which emerged immediately after its publication as well. Most of these different perspectives, at first, appeared in the form of praise. In Maurice Hungville's April 4, 1977 "Mistakes in Writing: Symptom or Sin?" published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for instance, Shaughnessy is praised for her "approach to error as symptom rather than sin" and for her sensitivity to the "cultural roots of error" (18), language which indicates an appreciation for Shaughnessy's liberal but not too liberal perspective. Kenneth Eble's May, 1977 review "When Words Fail Them" published in *Change* praises it in just the same fashion, offering only one criticism, the "use of 'BW' throughout to identify the 'basic writing'" student. Eble worries at the similarity between the acronym and Black Writers, fearful that it might further enforce the dichotomy of Black/White. This is an issue raised very well in William Jones' 1993 *JBW* article, "Basic Writing: Pushing Against Racism" as well. Harvey Wiener's March 1977 review of the book in *College English* reveals both applause for the political insights the book delivers as well as the following concern: "the turn to the larger elements of paragraph and essay at the end of the book will support, I fear, the untested notion (so far as I am concerned) that instruction in writing must proceed from words to sentences-to paragraphs- to essays" (717). Similarly, Susan Miller's review of February 1977 in *College Composition and Communication* called attention to the way in which the book takes up the important "political aspects of teaching Basic Writing." On what one might now call the more conservative side, E. D. Hirsch and Sheridan Baker also applaud Shaughnessy's work in their correspondence to John Wright, an editor at Oxford University Press. Hirsch states that the book "gives solid grounds for the belief that intelligence and patience can, after all, create the literate citizenry envisioned by the founding fathers," while Baker calls it the "best approach and the best guide yet for helping the educationally deprived. I think it will save many a student whose 'right to his own language' would have otherwise left him in limbo." During this same period, in David Bartholomae's correspondence to the editor, he also applauds the book, this time from an even different perspective, saying "it is only with this groundwork, and the model it provides of the writing process for students at this level of development, that we can begin to develop methods and curricula that make any sense, that are based on what our students do when they write rather than on our prejudices about what they fail to do."[9]

Shaughnessy's characterization does recognize variations within

dialects themselves, calling attention to the fact that reasons for such variation are multi-layered, complex, and socially-constituted.

[10] Interestingly, in Shaughnessy's 1977 "Some Needed Research on Basic Writing," she reveals her concern with previous scholars' conceptions of students' situations, calling attention to the lack of favor afforded to "such images as the contest or the dispute as acceptable metaphors for writing" (102), and suggesting that Basic Writers, in particular, might find such writing exercises useful. This problem, she charges, has resulted in an overinvestment in expressive and narrative modes, or what she terms "worn and inaccurate formulations of the academic mode." Clearly, then, it was not conflict or struggle that Shaughnessy sought to avoid but discussions of conflict which had the potential to damage the student. In this piece, Shaughnessy also calls attention to the fact that there is "as yet no sociology or psychology (not even an adequate history) of teaching the advanced skills of literacy to young adults who have not yet acquired them" (103). Here Shaughnessy reveals her interest in seeing such work accomplished.

[11] John Lyons' 1985 piece on Mina Shaughnessy in John Brereton's edited collection *Traditions of Inquiry* clarifies this point. He credits her with contemplating "grammatical pattern from the perspective of its multiple misuses . . . and thereby recognizes not the rule's authority, but its susceptibility to misconstruction" (182). Similarly David Bartholomae's 1986 "Released Into Language: Errors, Expectations, and the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy" in Donald McQuade's edited anthology, *The Territory of Language: Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition*, also recognizes that teachers and students must "see error as relative to the actual writing situation," that it is itself a rhetorical concept (68).

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Howard Tinberg

TEACHING IN THE SPACES BETWEEN: WHAT BASIC WRITING STUDENTS CAN TEACH US

ABSTRACT: *In a time when remediation is being attacked from both the right and the left, it would seem odd that we have not sought out the views of those directly affected: basic writers themselves. Perhaps if we did so, public discussion as to who "lost" the remediation wars would be replaced by the more productive question, "Whose responsibility is it to promote broad-based literacy in this nation?"*

Remediation under siege

I'd like to begin by noting the irony of my subtitle: "What Basic Writing Students Can Teach Us." In a time when remediation is being attacked from both the right and the left, it would seem odd that we have not sought out the views of those directly affected: basic writers themselves. We certainly have heard plenty of politicians and education professionals weighing in on the issue. The conservative Mayor Giuliani of New York, for example, sees developmental courses as inappropriate for a university setting and wants so-called senior colleges to get out of the business of providing remedial instruction—a fact which seems hardly surprising given the stormy history of open-admissions. Just recently, in fact, CUNY's Board of Trustees voted to phase out remedial instruction in the system's four-year campuses. As striking as is the reaction from the right, what is even more surprising is the view coming from the progressive camp, many of whom have taught those very same courses for years. The battle was joined six years ago when an influential figure in composition, David Bartholomae, announced at the National Basic Writing Conference,

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> I think basic writing programs have become expressions of our desire to produce basic writers, to maintain the course, the argument, and the slot in the university community; to maintain the distinction (basic/normal) we have learned to think through and by. The basic writing program, then, can be seen simultaneously as an attempt to bridge AND preserve cultural difference, to enable students to enter the "normal" curriculum but to insure, at the same time, that there are basic writers. (8)

Since Bartholomae's address, another important theorist in composition, Min Zhan Lu, has criticized teachers of basic writing for attending to matters of form only and not enough to the cultural conditions that bring students to basic writing classes (Lu) . More recently, the radical educator Ira Shor, whose life work has been devoted to empowering the marginalized student, has referred to the tracking of basic writers as the "other apartheid," and makes the case that basic writing actually "helps slow down the students' progress toward the college degree" (95). Shor's motives in calling for the end of such tracking are, to be sure, very different from those fueling attacks from the right: many on the left, Shor included, want to open the doors fully to all students and in the process remove the stigma that attaches to developmental course work. Those on the right, by contrast, want to raise the bar by which colleges accept students and in the process close the door to the non-elite. Nevertheless, the unremitting attacks from both camps against developmental education have put advocates of basic writing courses on the defensive and they have rendered basic writing students themselves nearly invisible and inaudible in this debate.

English 10.B01

I admit that for a long time I also assumed that these students were simply "not there." I preferred to teach our standard composition course and literature surveys rather than tackle the problems posed by those students who had been tracked into our developmental course. Through last minute scheduling changes, however, I recently found myself in a basic writing classroom encountering students like Denise, Christine, Adam, Melinda, Mark, Nate and the others who made up English 10, Section B01. As I walked in on that first class, I could see the discomfort written plainly on their faces. They were in this class because they had not passed our college's writing test (a forty-five minute writing sample), and they were taking a course which would not count toward progress in their majors, although it would carry

college credit (a very important point and one that would buttress my view that this course would be as challenging as any college course). These basic writers were, to use Tom Fox's phrase, in a kind of "academic limbo" (259). They were enrolled in a college course but a course that most see as pre-college. Everything about them suggested discomfort with being in that class—from the unhappy looks on their faces to their awkward posture. They seemed very tense.

And I quickly made matters worse, for sure—partly as a product of my own style but also because of my ambitions for this course. As to the first, it was clear to me from reading my students' responses to those early classes that many of them were either charmed or mystified (or both) by the words that I used. Steve, a dyslexic student who, by his own account, had gone through more than twelve years of schooling without being tested for a learning disability, wrote early about his dream of using the kind of words that I used on that first day of class—words that suggested for him the prestige and mystery of an education. But it was Elizabeth who pinned down for me what kind of effect my language—both good and bad—was having on these students. Born in the Dominican Republic and having spent less than a year in the States prior to entering my class, Elizabeth described that first day:

> Sometimes there are situations in which we are unfamiliar and even illiterate. For instance, while sitting in my chair not very comfortable, by the way, I was anxiously waiting for my English class to begin. It was my second day at college. Although I had attended this college before this was my first semester in regular classes. I was very excited about it. English 10 was mostly about writing and I had always enjoyed writing. As soon as the teacher entered the room, everybody sat straight and became quiet. The teacher took attendance and began the class. Our first assignment was to explain the word Literacy and what [that] meant to us. Soon everybody seemed to be concentrating in his or her writing, except me. That was the first time I had heard that word. I had not even a remote idea of what was that word's meaning. I looked up and down and took a deep breath wishing I were not in that classroom. That was one of those situations in which you find yourself as an illiterate person.
>
> I did not write a single word on my paper. Though I like the teacher because I could perceive he had the ability to see the insight of things I thought he was a tough teacher, who was expecting us to explain difficult words in good English. So I decided to drop his class and look for another teacher. Obviously that class was going to be very hard for me.
>
> However, the word that best describes my feelings is out-

> rageous. I changed my mind and decided to take the challenge. If I was not literate enough to be in that class, then I was determinate and willing to learn [sic]. As soon as I got out of the classroom I went to the TASC [Tutoring and Academic Support Center] to look up the word literacy in the dictionary. Finally, I found the meaning. I felt embarrassed. I could not define Literacy, which made me appear as an uneducated person who was misplaced in the wrong class. I was a little discouraged. . . .

In fact, Elizabeth achieved an enriched understanding of the term "literacy" through her very embarrassment and frustration. But I wanted her to tell this story to you not as simply evidence of her own success, although I believe it is that, but for what it can tell us about literacy itself and about the dicieness of literacy instruction. I grant that in many ways Elizabeth was not typical of the "basic writing" student—for one thing, she "enjoyed writing." That fact signaled to me that, for her, words were malleable and could bend to her wishes rather than simply remain unknowable and controlling. Moreover, although she was by no means alone among my students in her determination and motivation to learn, she seemed to combine that grit with a resourcefulness and a level of reflectiveness and courage that set her apart from her classmates. No one else among my students felt comfortable enough to write about my own classroom in their narratives on acquiring literacy.

But what really strikes me about Elizabeth's writing is its edginess. Despite her feeling comfort with writing per se and a sense of her own literacy, the classroom produced quite the opposite feeling in her—agitation and uncertainty. Her reaction to hearing a word for the first time, a word that for the teacher held special importance, was to flee. My invitation to insert her own meaning in the word she construed, I believe, as the typical teacher's set-up job: to expose students' ignorance and, perhaps, to discount in the final analysis any alternative meanings of their own. The act of "defining" literacy became the act of limiting interpretative options rather than expanding them—an activity common to classrooms. She was ready to drop the course.

If she had dropped my course, Elizabeth was prepared to find another teacher who could make her feel more comfortable in the classroom—it is very likely, given her motivation, she would have followed through on that objective. But I wonder about those other students, those who never showed for the first class. What had happened to them from the time that they had enrolled (or rather been enrolled after failing our placement exam)? Or what of those students who were in and out for most of the semester and then disappeared alto-

gether in the final weeks? Would they look for another teacher? Or would they give up on college altogether? I have been teaching at the community college level for eleven years now and I have yet to come to terms with the high attrition rates among our students. Why do so many leave? And, where do they go? I used to be devastated, personally, by the numbers of students who would leave through the semester. But after conversations with colleagues who faced similar attrition, I have since tried to come to see students' withdrawals as far more complicated than a reaction to me or my teaching methods. They are bringing years of discomfort with them into my classroom—years of estrangement from the conventions of schooling. Almost as if to drive the point home, Denise, a student about whom I will say more shortly, titled one of her essays, "I hate school"—it seemed to be an emblem for her and others in the class.

A Course About Literacy

It was clear from the start that I would be asking a lot of these students—no doubt adding to their sense of unease on that first day. I told them that the course that I planned to teach would be a college-level course, challenging them continually, and that it would not be condescending towards them. They would be doing a good deal of both writing and reading. Taking my inspiration from David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's description of a basic writing class at the University of Pittsburgh, I wanted to "reclaim reading and writing from those (including our students) who would choose to limit these activities to the retrieval and transmission of information" (4). Instead I wanted to use readings as prompts for writing that was reflective of their experience. They would even be trying their hand at contributing to an electronic listserv, which I called *bwrite* and which I imagined would provide a safe space for them to comment about the class and about our work, while at the same time enabling them to become more fluent as writers.

The theme that would guide us in our reading and writing would be "literacy": what is it? how can we achieve it and why? I thought, given the fact that these students had just failed our college's writing placement (in some cases, the reading test as well), that the standards for written literacy set up by the college would be uppermost in their minds—that plus the fact that historically these students must have struggled to understand what teachers have wanted from them and may have questioned why they were in school in the first place. I developed a sequence of writing assignments that would start with the central question, Why are you here?—and then move on to having students consider their earliest memories of speaking, reading, and

writing and to narrate an experience in which they felt illiterate, as they would define that term. From there they would bring favorite family stories to class and reflect on the uses of such stories. Later, I would have them think about the differences between school and home literacies, followed up by a reflective narrative in which they tell the story of their best class ever and render an account of what they took from that class. Somewhere near the end, I wanted them to think about how an education—that is, the acquisition of some body of knowledge and/or set of skills—might change a life. To deepen their understanding of these issues, I wanted them to read some very challenging pieces from our class anthology, including Tim O'Brien's "The Things They Carried," Richard Rodriguez' "Aria: A Memoir of a Bilingual Childhood," and an excerpt from Frederick Douglass' "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass" (all in Garnes et al).

This was the grand scheme that I brought into the class on the first day. I did wonder what right I had to ask of these students to read such difficult works, given that for many of them reading in school has been so problematic (and continued to be so, for some of them were in developmental reading classes even as they were taking my own class). I also wondered whether I would be doing them a service by having them write as much as I planned to have them write (a full-length, two-page, paper every other week, in addition to a variety of in-class pieces, not to mention the listserv and a portfolio of revised drafts), rather than short, paragraph-length pieces and exercises. Given the inevitable sentence-level errors that would mark their writing, would they have time and energy to attend to such matters if they were churning out long narratives and essays for me? Indeed, would I have time and energy to assist them with their editing needs? I wondered about all these things but decided to go ahead, in large part because I wanted to assure them that this course was serious, college level work and that, by semester's end, they would show themselves capable of such work.

But how could I know what awaited me? How could I know that these students, while sharing some frustration in school over the years, would have such different stories to tell and would have such varied abilities as writers to tell them? How could I be ready for Denise, who would bring to my class a string of nightmarish accounts of her experiences in and out of school but a tremendous motivation to succeed despite all the odds? How could I be ready for Mark, who was legally blind but who refused to wear specially adapted glasses that would help correct the problem in school? How could I be ready for Katherine, who dropped out of high school as a sophomore, came back to school years later (taking and passing the GED) like gangbusters, with tremendous maturity, energy, and insight, but who would disappear from my class shortly after the midterm without a word?

The Case of Denise

And how could I be ready for Denise? From the start, I knew she would pose a special challenge. A returning student, a single mother of two young children and the first in her family to graduate from high school, she brought her heartache into English 10, Section B01. For the class's first writing assignment, she demonstrated her anxiety about being back in school and in this classroom—not so much by what she wrote but what she left out. The assignment asked that she first examine the cover of our reader, *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community*, which contained a black and white photo of the puzzled face of a man, his hands held over his ears. I then drew upon the editors' gloss of the photo. "We selected this piece of art," the editors wrote,

> To encourage you to ask the same question of your participation in a college first-year writing course. Why are you taking this course? Why are you attending college? We admit that these are big questions with many implications. If you have trouble coming up with answers, consider the witty possibilities that Kruger [the artist], included in her work. Look closely at the cover, and you find even more text just below the figure's mouth. Are you here:
>
> to kill time?
> to get cultured?
> to widen your world?
> to think good thoughts?
> to improve your social life?
> (Garnes et al, 2)

Next, I encouraged my students to ask the same questions of themselves but to try, as I put it, "to move beyond the simple response and the narrow reading" of the questions . . . . Dig as deep as you can."

Denise, after roughly 45 minutes, wrote the following in response:

> Why are you here?
> because I want to think good thoughts on a better education, and to improve my social life so I could better myself in the near future. I want to be able to widen my world around me, so I could learn what is going on, in the outside world and to be able to get cultured around my surroundings and I don't want to kill time doing this because life could be so short sometimes

The prompt or series of questions that I meant only as a guide is taken up by Denise as the substance of her response. Although she adds a brief phrase to each borrowed category ("on a better education," for example is added to the prompt's "think good thoughts"), the writing has been pre-empted by others. My attempt to help her generate words left her without words of her own.

As contrast—and as evidence of the range of writing abilities in this class—Nate, who had entered the workforce briefly before coming to college, produced the following response under the same conditions:

> In the real world you can either start at the bottom, or you can have a building block to get the upper hand in the job place.
>
> In my senior year of high school everybody was gearing up for college. I knew that I had slacked of[f] for four years, and that I didn't want to go to any more school. With that in mind, I entered the work force. I'd always like hands on work, so I got a job at a machine shop as an apprentice. I soon found out that not having any experience and or background in the field, I would stay at the bottom for a long time.
>
> In conclusion, I can say first hand that any kind of schooling is a must if you want to have a stepping stone to get ahead.

Although not developed to any great extent (he would flesh the piece out in a revision), Nate's piece demonstrated a comfort with school writing that was undeniable. Although brief, it contained a structure nonetheless—something to hang an essay on. This was a kid who it seemed had lost interest in school but was smart enough and savvy enough to do as his friends had done—only he wanted instead to go out and work. In his support of hands-on learning, by the way, Nate articulated a view expressed often in our class discussions and by a good many of my students. One of the lessons that I would take away from the course was to reconsider the value of non-school learning. For many of these basic writers, the turning away from school was a principled and self-conscious decision. It had always been easy for me to assume that all learning begins and ends in the classroom. These students reminded me of how limited that view of education really was.

Another student, Adam, who from the start made it clear to me that he felt he should have been out there working for a living and who, throughout the semester, showed me how hard-working and level-headed he was, managed by the end of the semester to strike a very skillful balance between work and school. "The greatest way that education can change a person's life," Adam wrote,

> is by teaching them how to learn. I believe that there are many things that are taught to us in school that we will never use again in our whole lives. But that is not the reason why we go to school. By learning in school we also learn how to learn outside of school. School trains a person's mind. This way they can learn a certain trade or job in the future. Or even how to do a new sport or hobby.

It is a marvelously subtle argument for the value of what we teachers do. At the same time, Adam reminded me that the world does not stop at the classroom door. I need to make connections between students' lived experience, or experience to be lived, and the work that they do in my classroom. I must do more than pay lip service to the notion of multiple literacies and resist the privileging of classroom learning.

While Nate and Adam successfully negotiated the demands of my class, Denise found the going much tougher. Time and time again, she would voice her frustration with the way the class was going, not understanding what I was asking of her. In one conference—one of several in which she was reduced nearly to tears—I wanted Denise to reflect in writing about the changes she needed to make in one of her essays—a reflective piece that would be part of her end-of-semester portfolio. Instead she produced a rehash of her previous draft. She sensed my dissatisfaction immediately. It was not the high point of our relationship.

And yet, amidst all this storm and stress, what became clear to me was that Denise had stories to tell about and out of school and, if given the opportunity, would tell them. In a literacy narrative, written out of class, she began to fill-in the blanks of her own history:

> Well when I was in school. I was always in a special needs class all through middle school and high school. I was always in a one class room type of thing. I watched all the other kids go to room to room and I was upset about it at the time. I felt like I wasn't like the other kids in school. And when I was all done with school I was going to have this training skill after I graduated. But I didn't get to do it. They said I was to old to do it. They said I was to old for it or unable to do it. So I was mad for a long time about it. That. But I got over it though. I don't know if I was read to.
>
> But I did do a lot of reading in my bedroom at the time when I was at home. I was always in my room listening to the radio too I was always by myself, because kids used to pick on me. And they used to pick fights with me. I was never a fighter. I always stayed out of trouble. But the kids just bothered me.

> That I just used of being in my room all the time. One day a girl started a fight with me. That I couldn't take it anymore that I just beat. The pants off of her that she didn't bother me again. And every now and then when I see her she says hi to me now.
>
> And she doesn't bother me anymore.

Although straining to render speech into the formal constraints of written language, Denise achieved a breakthrough on many levels. She had found a space for her own words. She had, at the same time, established engagement with the assignment. Put another way, she was finally responding to what was being asked of her. "How difficult has it been for you personally to acquire the skills at reading, writing, and speaking you now have?" I asked in the prompt. Like the teacher in Langston Hughes' poem "Theme for English B," a text that we had read in this course, I was also saying to her, "Go home and write/a page tonight/And let that page come out of you . . ." (ll. 1-3). Of course, for Denise, as for Hughes' young speaker, it was not that simple or painless.

What she offered was a critique of a school system that callously segregates students on the basis of ability and vocation and lets slip through the cracks those who simply don't conform to the institutional plan. Denise played by the rules given her but when it came time for the pay off—the learning of the skills that had been promised her—they said she was "to old or unable to do it." In a very telling analogy, Denise revealed in an email message to all of us on the listserv that her experience in tracked classes was part of a larger pattern in her life. "When I was living at home," she wrote,

> I was one of the fourth oldest in my family [read "the oldest of four"]. Yes I felt like a slave like douglass. I always had to clean the house. Do the dishes and babysit all the time. When I was in school all my life until I graduated from high school. I was always in special needs class all through my education. And now I go to class like I wanted . . . .

I had asked students to read Douglass' narrative about learning to read and to write and to consider how his story might shed light on their own stories. Many rightly wondered whether it was logical to imagine anything that could have happened to them could be remotely like the horror of Douglass' narrative. Of course, it was not the horror of slavery that I wanted them to consider but rather the sense of powerlessness that derives from illiteracy. For so many of these basic writers, the classroom had been a setting for their own vulnerability. Denise

clearly associated school with the various beatings and humiliations that she had experienced in her life—being attacked by a friend on the way home from school, the taunting and spitting from other kids on the school bus, the beating from her mother who mistakenly believed that Denise had cut school.

And yet despite Denise's claims—and the claims of other students in my class—that specially set aside classrooms created stigmas and much hurt, many—including Denise herself—came to see the potential for good in creating a homogenous and non-threatening classroom community. Recalling her best classroom experience, Denise told the story of her three-year experience as a student in Mr. Rounds' class. She remembered his patience and his desire to show his students "how to do the work." "I would have all my subjects with the teacher," she wrote,

> The classroom size was small and broken down into groups with about five kids in each group. We also had teachers' aids to help out with the teachers. I also made a few friends because of the fact that we were together for three years and in that time I became familiar with the teacher and the classmates. I knew what to expect from the classroom environment and I felt comfortable there.
>
> I think my experience in this room taught me a lot about myself. I always had a lot of self-esteem in Mr. Rounds' classroom. But now that I am in college I find it difficult. I miss the comfortable environment of his classroom. Adapting to constantly changing classes, unfamiliar people, and different teachers' personality, I have developed a problem with low self-esteem. I am trying to better myself for my children. I am hopeful that my education will help me get off welfare.

At first glance it might seem as if Denise simply couldn't get her story straight—on the one hand, the special education classroom was humiliating; on the other, reassuring and friendly. In fact, as I read the whole of her classroom narrative, I saw a common thread running throughout. In all of her stories, Denise asked that school make sense—that it come together in a rational, predictable and meaningful way. She wanted continuity, surely—but not necessarily the continuity created by having the same teacher or classmates for years. She wanted to know where this was all going to lead to and she wanted the rewards for the work that she had done. Now the college experience seems a maze to her. She is not alone in seeing college as lacking coherence.

Challenges and initiatives

Just in case any of us is lured into thinking that basic writers don't want a challenge or want to be treated differently from other writers and other students, consider what Melinda, another student from the class, had to say about her "most memorable classroom experience," her eighth grade math course:

> In that class we already entered there with the idea we were the stupid kids who were going to be taught stupid peoples math. Mr. Barros never treated us any better or worse than honors class students. And made us feel like we could do anything we were just suppose to learn basics like addition, subtraction, multiplying, and dividing. But he got into teaching us Algebra, and geometry, which was unheard of for Chapter 1 kids. And he taught us a way that we knew we could do it and participate with are answers. Even if were wrong we wouldn't be ridiculed we would be corrected and participate with even more answers, we were enjoying are ideas being let known, and that someone thought they were important.

Challenge us, Melinda was saying: and respect us. Melinda, by the way, was one of the silent students in my class. She said very little throughout the semester and rarely smiled in room B117 or K233. And yet here she was speaking loudly and clearly—in a language that, yes, required editing for grammar and mechanics but in a language that contained power as well. Among the many lessons that these basic writers have taught me was not to misconstrue the silences that they bring to the classroom. Rather than view them as signs of indifference, of stupidity or of fear, I have come to see them as spaces in a broad and compelling narrative. Teaching basic writing requires that we become more adept at reading the complex stories that these students carry with them—and the spaces between.

But that is not all we must do—and here I want to send out a call for all of us to respond to the many threats to abolish basic writing, using as many of the media and cybermedia outlets as we can. We must all fight to preserve a space in the curriculum for basic writing because without such a space students like those I've described may very well be tracked out of higher ed altogether or simply discouraged from continuing any further in school. Having said that, I do confess to sharing some of Denise's ambivalence about remedial and vocational instruction. On the one hand, setting students on a career track

does limit their choices and may offer promises that cannot be realistically fulfilled. And separating students like Denise may further stigmatize them. And yet, as Denise so eloquently attests, there is genuine comfort to be had in a classroom where special attention is paid to students who so desperately require such interventions. In the final analysis, Denise probably would not have been where she was, taking a course with me, if she hadn't had a course like that of Mr. Rounds.

If we are agreed that basic writing merits our support, we need as well to make a case that it be regarded as college-level in its objectives and methods. Indeed, I would like to see the teaching of basic writing carry the prestige that such work deserves, taught by motivated, full-time faculty for whom incentives should be provided. Basic writing needs to become something other than a course in which the writing of paragraphs or the filling-in of workbook exercises dominates. It needs to be something other than a course that refuses to offer challenging and stimulating texts. It needs to be, like composition itself, reflective of a discipline. It needs to have weight and significance. It is time that basic writing—and developmental education generally—stop being the scapegoat for what ails schools and colleges. But it is also time for all of us to demand more of our students. Only then can we with any legitimacy say that this course has every right to be a part of the college curriculum.

But what sort of demands ought we to make of ourselves? If we teach at universities or four-year colleges, we must come to the realization that if the students whom we admit to our colleges lack basic reading and writing skills, we have a moral and ethical obligation to those students to give them what it takes to succeed in college. Rather than abdicate our responsibilities to teach basic writing and reading to others, we must stand up to the challenge and accord the resources to get the job done. Do we really want to hand over that important mission to private companies whose motives and expertise are so problematic? That said, it surely will not be enough just to disparage the "outsourcing" of developmental education to the private sector. We must make a cogent and urgent argument that we can best meet the needs of students like Denise and Melinda and Nate.

If we teach at the secondary level, we must work harder to prepare students for the challenges of both the workplace and the college or university, working in collaboration with business leaders as well as college faculty and administration. "Prepare the kids for writing," suggested Michelle, one of my basic writing students, when I asked her and the others in that class what they might want to say to high school teachers; go beyond "the basics [of] adjectives, verbs, nouns." Let them write and let them read.

Finally, I want to direct my attention to two-year college faculty, and, in the process, drop the artifice of impartiality. We two-year col-

lege faculty, like the very students whose stories I have been recounting, occupy a very strange limbo state in the academy. We are college professors and yet perceived by many colleagues at the four-year level as somehow "pre-college" or grade 13—we are seen as teaching drones, essentially, and the students whom we teach are at best marginally capable to do the heavy lifting required in a genuine college classroom. All the studies that have shown our transfer students performing as well or better than university students mean absolutely nothing to those administrators, faculty, and politicians who would gladly hand off the teaching of developmental reading, writing, and math skills to community colleges. How convenient for them to regard the two-year college as purely developmental in its mission and to view the two-year college student as not quite college material. This attitude is especially prevalent in the public universities. How ironic it would be if our transfer students, sensing that they are but second-class citizens in the big state university, choose in increasing numbers to transfer to private universities and colleges instead.

Community colleges can take all this lying down, of course, and allow others to transform their comprehensive mission into a narrower, developmental purpose. But let me say the obvious: the public two-year college will simply not have the resources to do the work that all of us should be doing—four and two-year colleges and high schools, together. Freeing up money to purchase new computers, to set up Internet and distance learning courses, will not by itself resolve the central question, Whose responsibility is it to promote broad-based literacy in this nation? I submit that we all have a stake in such a mission.

We two-year college teachers need to say, simply, that we've had enough. We need to feel confident enough in our mission and in our own capabilities to resist the reductive construction of who we are and what we do that others make of us. But beyond refusing to be complicit in the abdication of responsibility to endow literacy skills, we have an obligation to offer constructive possibilities of our own. Our unique position as "translators" or mediators between the schools and the universities gives us a special opportunity and responsibility to broker the needs of both sides. Moreover, our understanding of the worlds of work and school can serve to enrich literacy instruction at both the high school and university level.

But this transformative role begins with our own transformation. We need to believe that we are up to the task, a formidable challenge indeed given how little recognition community colleges receive. Here I find myself returning to the basic writers for instruction and inspiration. "It all starts here," wrote one student. Surely, we can be as courageous and as hopeful.

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Jeffrey T. Grabill

TECHNOLOGY, BASIC WRITING, AND CHANGE

ABSTRACT: This article explores a way to change the status and position of basic writing by focusing on technology design and its relationship with larger institutional systems. Many of our efforts to change the identity of writing programs focus on classroom issues or particular curricular efforts. The argument in this article is that the identity of basic writing is a function of larger institutional decision-making processes and therefore the focus of our efforts to change basic writing should also engage these institutional processes. The article focuses on how participating in technology design can be a wedge for engaging in decision-making about the purpose and identity of basic writing programs.

As writing teachers, we are accustomed to thinking of change within classrooms and with our students. We like to think that our classrooms are dynamic, that we have some control over them, and that every now and then, we make a difference in the lives of a few of our students. Writing teachers, in my experience, are most likely to say that we never teach the same course the same way twice and that students, the real "subject" of a writing course, make each class new. I talk about my classroom this way, and I hope that my characterization is true, that as teachers we have the power and ability to change what happens in our classrooms. I want to talk about teaching writing and change, but I will do so by looking "outside" the classroom at systems that affect the classroom. In fact, to be argumentative, I suggest that real change cannot happen exclusively within the classroom but must also take place on "larger" institutional levels.

To engage these larger institutional levels, I draw on my own experience and focus on one aspect of program design that has been an effective lever for effecting institutional change—technology design. In this respect, I look at technology not in terms of specific classroom uses or ways technology can be used to foster particular pedagogies or means of text production. I look at technology as an

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integral and necessary part of the institutional space occupied by a writing program. My purpose is to explore a method for local change that first is attentive to the institutional space that basic writing occupies and second develops tools—institutional wedges—to change that space. The institutional wedges in this case are technological in nature—the ways in which technologies can be designed to change a basic writing program by altering the place that program occupies in the larger institution (like an English Department or college). Basic writing, like all writing programs, has always been institutionally situated, so I'm exploring a way to see basic writing that allows us strategically to change and reposition it within the university and English department. My hope is to develop tools that enable the continued existence—the active creation and recreation—of sophisticated, dynamic basic writing programs within the shifting structures of colleges and universities. Participating in the design of the technologies utilized by a basic writing program constitutes one such tool for changing the institutional space basic writing occupies, for changing basic writing.

Technology Matters

I should disclose from the outset my fundamental feeling about technology and writing instruction: we can't choose to write without technology, so our choice as writing teachers and program administrators is not whether basic writing uses technologies in the classroom but rather which technologies we use and how we use them. As Stuart Blythe has discussed, we are surrounded by technologies that we use but rarely think about. We sit at desks and use pens or pencils and paper; we write on black or white boards; and every now and then we flip on the overhead projector. Most importantly, when we decide to move the desks into a new configuration, when we decide to use the white board in a new way, we are participating in subtle ways in the design of those technologies. The answers to questions about which technologies we use and why can have a significant impact on the identity of a writing program.

The connections between technology and writing are deeper. Christina Haas argues that "technology and writing are not distinct phenomena; that is, writing has never been and cannot be separate from technology" (x). Haas writes that while her statement strikes many as "common sense" on one level, the implications of such a position aren't immediately clear. Haas notes, as do Sullivan and Dautermann, that technologies often become transparent in our lives and in the research we conduct on writing, which can be good (if technologies seamlessly aid production) and can be bad (if we fail to consider how

technologies affect our lives). It is this last point, the possibility that the transparency of technology can be harmful, that is my point of departure here. If we don't consciously choose to write in certain ways with certain technologies, then those decisions will be made for us, both actively (in the sense that we may be given access to certain writing technologies and not others) and passively (in the sense that writing technologies may never be made available to our programs, to our students).

But the connections between technology and writing are deeper still. As Nancy Kaplan writes, "each tool brings into the classroom embedded conceptions of what exists, what is good or useful or profitable, and what is possible with its help" (77). Her statement is remarkable in at least two ways. The first is the way in which she connects tools to ideology, to the ways in which the choices of writing technologies govern to a significant degree who we are and what we can do as writing teachers. The second sense in which her statement is remarkable is what Feenberg would call its "ambivalence," or the sense in which every technology brings with it both constraint and possibility. In other words, the choice to use technologies in a basic writing program changes things, but importantly, the technology itself is not an autonomous agent. Rather, the choice of a writing technology opens up possibilities, and some of these potential changes may be useful, some harmful; some possibilities will be actualized, and others will go unrealized.

This brings me to the core of why technology matters—we can change it. Somebody (usually somebodies) is making the choice (or not) to make available certain writing technologies (and not others) to basic writing students, teachers, and programs. Do we, as basic writing teachers and administrators, take part in these decision-making processes? If not, why not? As I'm trying to argue here, we cannot simply see technology as one isolated variable among others that can be included or separated from the ways in which we design our writing programs. In fact, I think we can see technology as a "wedge" for active change. As Feenberg has continually argued, cultural systems from the most local to the most global are always already technological, and the only way we can create a "good" system, even to decide on the definition of a "good" system, is if people who are affected by that system participate in its design. According to Feenberg's critical theory view of technology, technological systems matter a great deal, and if they remain invisible to those most affected by those systems, they will be designed to meet certain needs and not others because while technological systems may be invisible to some (perhaps many), they aren't invisible to everyone.

In basic writing, if we talk about writing technologies at all (Stan and Collins note the lack of work on computers and basic writing), we

talk about them in terms of the classroom or how individual students may or may not use computers. I think this work is important, but I want to push us beyond the classroom. I see choices of writing technologies as part of the institutional systems we call writing programs, English departments, and universities and therefore integral to the identities of those systems. Writing is always already technological, and institutional systems (like writing programs) are dynamic and continually shape how we conduct our lives as writing teachers; institutional systems continually shape what is possible for our students. Simply put, we can't choose to ignore writing technologies, and furthermore, writing technologies matter so much to the identity of writing programs (and therefore what is possible in the classroom) that we must participate in the design of the technological systems available to basic writing. Technological design, in other words, is an avenue for agency, for changing basic writing.

Institutions Matter

My sense of technological design and the role of instructional technology in changing basic writing is dependent upon another concept—a particular view of institutions. I have used the term "institutions" and the phrase "institutional systems," yet I think it is important to understand what I mean by these terms and how they facilitate a view of basic writing as an institutional system that is open to change.

During my time as co-director of Developmental (or basic) Writing, my colleagues and I began to think about its position within the university.[1] Like many in basic writing, we had been developing curricula over a number of years that were as challenging as any "normal" composition course, and we felt our students needed to be acknowledged for their efforts. We faced three local challenges related to Developmental Writing:

* the need to introduce sophisticated writing technologies to our students for reasons of access—students could not be successful at our university without access to these technologies.
* the need to make the course credit bearing—in nearly each case, Developmental Writing does not fulfill any part of the composition requirement. After our course, most students must then take the "normal" two courses in the composition sequence. Thus students earn credits in Developmental Writing that don't count, a problem with the status of the course.
* the need to develop a *way* to change both the course and

its relation to the larger institution (the department and the university as a whole)—our problems were larger than those we were used to addressing (e.g., classroom issues), and so how to change Developmental Writing became, itself, a challenge.

But what does it mean to talk of a program as part of an "institutional system"? And how can writing teachers change institutions? My view is that we must see basic writing programs as part of much larger institutional systems and that these systems can be changed. Both stances—seeing the institution as specific and concrete and seeing it as malleable—are uncommon. That is, many readers may be thinking that viewing basic writing as part of larger institutional systems is so commonplace as to be unworthy of comment—nothing new here. But I disagree. We don't talk concretely and meaningfully about institutions because we don't know how to see them. Thus we don't see how something like technology design could change an institution.[2] In most uses of the term, "institution" is either abstract or unmanageably large (and sometimes both). In the abstract, we refer to Religion, English Studies, or The Law as institutions. We know what they are, and we even have an idea of how they operate, but it is tough to *see* them concretely, to see places to interact with and perhaps change such institutions. Similarly, the schools where we teach may seem more concrete, but they also appear hopelessly large, seemingly operated by invisible hands (or more powerful hands), certainly not ours. David Harvey writes that institutions are composed of "semiotic systems" (e.g., writing) that organize practices that affect people subject to or active through a particular institution. Institutions are the universities where we teach, the schools our children attend, and the locations of a great number of public interactions (the department of motor vehicles; social service agencies; parent-teacher groups; neighborhood committees). Institutions, then, are local systems of decision-making within which people act (rhetorically) in ways that powerfully affect the lives of others.

Conceptualizing institutions as I have is a first step toward change. To conceptualize institutional change, I draw on the concept of "institutional critique," a pragmatic mechanism for change that "insists that institutions, as unchangeable as they may seem (and indeed, often are), do contain spaces for reflection, resistance, revision, and productive action" (Porter et al., 3). The claim that institutions can be changed rests on the definition of institutions as local rhetorical systems of decision-making (17). As is likely apparent, "space" is an important term for me as well. While the concept of "space" has metaphorical or symbolic connotations, space is also quite concrete and inhabitable. The space I am talking about with respect to institutions is very "real": it is concrete and material as well as rhetorical/discursive (both the con-

crete and rhetorical refer to different, though often related, ways to conceptualize "reality"). For geographer Doreen Massey, space is constructed. Space is *produced* by interrelations and interactions between people—like the systems of decision-making that are institutions. The "space" of basic writing, then, is produced by people within university institutional systems. Basic writing is a set of interrelations (a system, like decision-making processes) with both discursive and material attributes and effects. My position is that because space is produced, it can be reproduced (changed), thereby changing the institution itself.

Both the university and the English department create rhetorical and material space for basic writing through processes like placement procedures, course number designations, administrative and teaching lines devoted to the course, and classrooms reserved for the course (those who have had difficulty scheduling a computer classroom for a writing class [a *discursive* act] can attest to the importance of such acts and the value of the *material* space attached to them). That is, the "space" of basic writing is a function of these processes. This space is both discursive (e.g., curriculum, budget lines, listings in course catalogs) and material (e.g., desks, teachers, classrooms). It is important to see that practices such as assessment and placement of students, allotting teaching lines, and curriculum and technology design are linked. They are part of a system of decision-making that connects specific courses and programs with the seemingly "larger" practices of the department, the college, the university. The key to changing institutions is to find the spaces within these institutional systems where change is possible; that is, to participate in decision-making about how we do our work in locations within the institution that we may not normally be. For us, the practices of technology and curriculum design (they are inextricably linked) were locations where we could act—they were spaces of reflection, resistance, revision, and productive action that affected the classroom, and most importantly, intersected with and affected the larger institution as well. Therefore, technology and curriculum became our "wedges" for changing the institutional space of basic writing.

Changing Basic Writing

We turned to technology and curriculum as an institutional wedge for changing the position of Developmental Writing for three reasons: (1) we were committed to teaching writing with computers for intellectual and pedagogical reasons;[3] (2) we were committed to introducing sophisticated writing technologies to our students (access); and (3)

instructional technology and its necessary intersection with curriculum also intersected with the larger institution and was an area over which we had some control. In effect, technology and curriculum design was one part of the institutional system that affected basic writing—it was our "institutional wedge" for effecting change. An "institutional wedge" is a process or an issue that can be used to "pry open" other institutional systems or processes that might otherwise be closed. Technology design was a way for us to interact with other systems of decision-making within the university—instructional technology support, for example. In this case, technology and curriculum design became the wedges of choice because they were two of the few options available to us. Technology/curriculum design was one way in which we could change the course and make the course visible and accountable to others in the university. In the case of Developmental Writing, the course was "remedial" and didn't "count." By extension, so were the students and the work they produced. Most importantly, those affected by the exclusionary boundary between "basic" and "normal" writing had little say in its construction. The course had been defined *for* students and teachers (even if for good reasons). Developmental Writing, then, was an institutional space within which work was of little value, and historically, a space over which those most affected had little control.

The first space over which we did have some control was the curriculum of Developmental Writing. The process of changing that curriculum began long before I started teaching, and so from the perspective of those within the program, there had been nothing "basic" about Developmental Writing for a long time. The curriculum used in Developmental Writing when I first joined the program as a teacher had two important characteristics. It was designed to introduce students to a range of research and writing practices that were valued by the university (although not necessarily by "English"). The curriculum was also designed with a theory of Developmental Writing students that saw them deficient (if deficient at all) in terms of possessing effective strategies for accomplishing writing tasks. Thus the curriculum began with a paper on "observing culture" that introduced students to observation-based research and writing practices, a second paper on "culture and personal experience" that explicitly built on the first by asking students to write their way into the culture they had been observing, a third paper that asked students to analyze the public discourse surrounding an issue of concern to them in any number of local communities that intersected on campus (e.g., the town or within a residence hall), and a fourth paper that asked students to enter the public discourse they analyzed in the third paper. To aid students with these writing and research tasks, the curriculum was built around analytical strategies to guide their writing processes (e.g., ob-

servational research guides, audience strategies, possible organizational plans).[4] In subsequent years, we revised the curriculum to make writing technologies themselves objects of critique (in addition to "culture" and/or "public issues"), thereby linking the class to technology in a way that refused to allow it transparency.[5] The new curriculum was theoretically and pedagogically similar to the previous curriculum. What changed were the issues/objects we examined and a few of the methods.

The normal first year writing sequence consists of one course that is largely personal narrative (with wide variety) and one course that has a research writing component (almost exclusively writing the English research paper). In Developmental Writing, students are exposed to narrative techniques and a range of research writing techniques. The traditional English research paper—either about literature or utilizing the library to show proficiency with textual sources and MLA citation styles—is only *part* of the discourse of the university. In Developmental Writing, we introduce students to a range of research practices (e.g., observation-based and online research) and diverse ways of writing up their research (largely taken from the social sciences). In addition, Developmental Writing students are asked to analyze the cultures from which they come and those into which they are moving (e.g., "the university"). In short, the course, like many if not most basic writing courses, is intellectually challenging and meets our institutional responsibilities to prepare students both for the first year writing sequence and to introduce them to the research and writing practices of the university as a whole.

While curriculum design was important for our sense of the course—we knew it was no longer "remedial"—it becomes a method of institutional critique when those responsible for a class like Developmental Writing make this argument to others—and use the curriculum as evidence. In our case, we began with the department (which wasn't difficult) and then began to have conversations with academic advisors on campus who were still recommending the class as a place for remedial grammatical work. Interacting with program stakeholders is a key move because it allows us as teachers and administrators to expand our "space" in order to begin the process of changing the identity of basic writing. Thus, over time, arguments must be made at multiple levels that (1) the class is no longer "remedial" or a "support program" (pick your negative construction), but that (2) it is a sophisticated, challenging course that better meets the needs of its students and/or its institutional reasons for existence. Our work with curriculum is serious work, and one way that we can put it to serious use is as a technique for program revision, a tactic that can facilitate conversations within the institution that can carve a place in decision-making about the work we do. In short, we tried to use new curricula as a

wedge for institutional change by constructing new relationships with stakeholders and hopefully altering the ways they make decisions about the program.

The second space over which we had some control was technology design. One of the best traditions within basic writing, I think, is the commitment to "put marginal students immediately within representative academic projects . . . " (Bartholomae "Writing" 70). The commitment to expose students to sophisticated literacies and ideas prevents basic writing from becoming (or being labeled as) "remedial," a label that can have dire institutional consequences.[6] What is rarely a part of discussions about teaching the best a university has to offer is teaching *with the best technologies* the university has to offer. Given the argument that writing is a technology and that the act or processes of writing cannot be separated from technologies, this absence is striking. Inseparable from the writing and thinking of the academy are the technologies the academy writes and thinks with. At this university in particular, understanding the role of writing technologies was crucial for envisioning our students' success. It was technologically a relatively rich university, and if our students were to be successful writers, they needed to be able to research and write successfully with computer technologies.

Pedagogically, we moved writing classes into computer classrooms because our classes became more like workshops, and in these workshops, students actually wrote in-class where peers, the teacher, and the writing tutor were present for assistance. But our move to computer classrooms was never meant to rest with word processing. Networked and internetworked technologies were central to our developing notions of writing and the curriculum revisions that followed.[7] Networked writing was another way to facilitate both in-class and more distant communication and collaboration between students and between students and their teacher. But technology was just as important for larger institutional reasons, in particular the access a computer-based writing program allowed our students. Access to computers for writing is an extremely important issue, and one that has occupied the computers and writing community for some time (see Hawisher et al.). Porter argues that access is perhaps the number one justice issue in computers and writing, and in his book on ethics and electronic writing, he provides a useful framework for understanding the complexity of access. In his framework, access is three-fold, encompassing infrastructural access (money and machines), literacy (education and training), and community acceptance (freedom to speak online). In a technologically rich environment, the borders between basic and normal writing were far more than textual—they were technological. During the Spring 1994 semester, for example, approximately 200 bulletin boards or newsgroups were set up for courses, and many more classes

used electronic mail (Yagelski and Grabill). So even if courses were not taught in dedicated computer classrooms, many university classes were utilizing sophisticated communication technologies, and nearly everyone on campus required written material to be word processed. Since 1994 (ages ago technologically), those numbers have only increased. In order to be successful writers at the university, students needed to be able to write with computer technologies. We felt strongly that Developmental Writing needed to provide the access to these technologies, especially for our students, and we provided all three types of access—to the machines, to literacies, and to community acceptance through the use of electronic communities in the classroom. In effect, we provided our students with an advantage.

The fact that Developmental Writing was a computer-based course may have added to its image as a "sophisticated" course—I think it did based on my conversations with stakeholders inside and outside the English department. But like changes in the curriculum, changes in technologies are only important as institutional levers if we use them outside the program. Technology design allowed us significant interaction with the university community outside English. Because we were involved with the design of our own instructional technologies, we were involved with technology support services on campus in a way that gave the program some status with that segment of the university community. Here as well we had to struggle with the perception that our students were "remedial" and therefore didn't need the best technologies the university had to offer. Through conversations about the design of software, systems access for students, and the classrooms in which we wanted to teach, we were not only able to have significant control over the design of our courses, but we were able to legitimize our technology use to that portion of the university community who controlled it. Quickly, those of us associated with Developmental Writing became one of the primary contacts between instructional technology support and the English department, and just as importantly, our classrooms often served as test sites for new technologies. The move from a "remedial" program that needed to argue for why it needed computer technologies to a program with status and ethos as a technologically-based writing program was an important move and a piece of the larger argument necessary for changing Developmental Writing.

A New Developmental Writing?

I claim that our processes of curricular and technology design were intended to change the institutional positioning of Developmental Writing.[8] But what has changed? My goal for Developmental Writ-

ing was to see it in a new way and to get others to see it differently as well. Institutions are dynamic, not static, and thus some change is inevitable. The key is to develop tactics for effecting *positive* institutional change. In the case of Developmental Writing, the most significant change has yet to take place – giving students credit for the work they do in the class – but I feel strongly that the groundwork has been laid for such a move. Collectively, over a number of years, we have changed the space of Developmental Writing because we have begun to change the nature of the differences between "basic" and "normal" classes and programs.

Changing basic writing is difficult work. Donna Dunbar-Odom, discussing basic writing textbooks, writes

> There is no perfect textbook that will liberate or empower its readers on its own. However, authors and publishers of textbooks need to move away from practices and attitudes that predate the Dartmouth Seminar and begin to serve an avant garde function, testing and "transcending the boundaries" of the field of basic writing, re-imagining their audience as a consequence. In other words, basic writing courses and textbooks need to be designed and written so that they produce a narrative of the intellectually, developmentally, cognitively, and emotionally capable, and most importantly, literate adult. (7)

Changing textbooks and changing local curricula have a long history as attempts to change the nature and identity of writing courses and programs. What I am suggesting here is that these attempts absent a sense of institutional power and space may not work well because they often fail to move beyond the isolated classroom itself. As Robin McTaggart argues, "Clearly the development of educational work [i.e., change through participatory action research] cannot be achieved by looking at 'teaching' practice alone" (32). The problems we faced demanded that we see Developmental Writing as more than a set of students or classrooms. Indeed, we needed to see it as more than a single isolated course. We needed to see Developmental Writing as part of larger institutional systems of decision-making about what courses existed, their value, and their relation to the curriculum as a whole. Finally, we needed to use something over which we had some control and power as our "wedge" into these larger institutional systems. Technology and curriculum design (and not, for example, assessment and placement practices) served as such a wedge.

So what is Developmental Writing (for us, locally)? It is not a location for fixing remedial texts but is rather the institutional location where students designated as "developmental" by the university can be given their own space to grow as writers. This is not necessarily a

textual or psychological space (although it can be); this space is institutional. Our purpose is improved writing and high rates of student retention, and to achieve this purpose, we provide them with small classes, significant contact with instructors, tutors, and peers, a challenging curricula, and access to the best writing technologies the university has to offer. No longer a "remedial" class in the minds of those responsible for the program and some within the university community as a whole, Developmental Writing is a sophisticated, challenging course that grants its students exceptional access to the writing and writing technologies necessary to be successful in the university.

As an institutional system, basic writing can fulfill important needs for students within the university. My purpose here has been to think about the continued existence of basic writing by exploring ways of changing institutional systems. While only the partial story of one program—and a story with ambiguous results at that—the linked tactics of technology and curriculum design can facilitate the institutional change that enables basic writing teachers (and perhaps students) to participate in the construction of their own borders. The key is to find those spaces within local institutional systems that allow students, faculty, and administrators room for the reflection necessary to develop tools for resistance and institutional change.

Notes

1. Developmental writing at Purdue is a relatively small program within the larger first year writing program. Offered only during the Fall semester, typically there are between 12-15 sections taught at a time. With the cap at 15 students per section (a real benefit of the program), Developmental Writing serves about 125 students each year. Students in this program benefit from small class sizes and a close relationship with the university writing center. A staff of undergraduate tutors is recruited and trained specifically for the program. One tutor is assigned to each section of Developmental Writing, and that tutor attends at least one class per week and meets with each student once a week for a writing tutorial.

The program is administered and taught exclusively by graduate students. Advanced graduate students work with the director of composition, but are generally responsible for curricula, instructional technology, and training new teachers (through a semester long mentoring program). While a wonderful opportunity for graduate students, the staffing of Developmental Writing is an indication of its status within the department and the university. My association with the program began as a new teacher and continued through two years as co-director and teacher. The narrative of this article and many of my arguments are the result of this direct and indirect collaboration.

2. Furthermore, we relegate such institutional work to the silence of service and therefore minimize this work and its effects. Most composition teachers and program administrators engage in some form of institutional action every day—fighting for writing programs is part of the history and *ethos* of rhetoric and composition. Yet we don't often think about this work beyond the framework of our own institutions, and we certainly don't frame such institutional action as "research" or write about it, even though these institutional actions are important to understand and share with others. This framework for understanding institutions and seeing them as a site for action and reflection is an attempt to value this work outside narrow local contexts.

3. The directors of Developmental Writing at the time that I began teaching in the program were Joanne Addison and Karin Evans. It was their decision to begin moving classes into computer classrooms because they saw the computer classroom as pedagogically beneficial and the technologies as likely to enhance the writing practices (if not abilities) of our students. My subsequent work was self-consciously an extension of their work.

4. The curriculum was modeled theoretically on the invention strategies in the textbook *Four Worlds of Writing* by Janice Lauer, Gene Montague, Andrea Lunsford, and Janet Emig.

5. The "we" I refer to here is Barb L'Eplattenier and I. Together we undertook a revision of the curriculum to include computer technologies as objects of critique.

6. At Georgia State, for example, all "remedial" programs must be eliminated as part of a university system realignment that will equalize standards across the state's four research universities. The rhetoric used to construct and maintain writing programs is meaningful—it can mean the elimination of programs and the good they can do for students. If basic writing wants to survive in a situation like this, its existence must be institutionally positioned differently from "remedial" work even though it might serve the same students.

7. One problem voiced by many teachers is the need to teach technology as well as writing, a need that consumes too much class time and energy. Teaching some technology will always be a "problem," but there are ways to lessen the burden of this. One way we have always done this is through the use of "mini-projects." These small, collaborative projects have a dual purpose: (1) to introduce students to collaborative work, and (2) to collaborate on learning the technologies necessary for success in the class. The class might decide, for instance, that it

is necessary to be able to open and save a new document in the word processor, to know how to cut and paste, and to use the spell checker. In addition, it also might be necessary to know how to read and send email messages. Small groups of students can volunteer or be assigned to learn and teach these discrete technologies to the class. But the larger point I want to make is that learning writing technologies cannot be seen as a "add-on" or "extra work" in a writing classroom. If writing technologies are important—either at the university or in the workplace—then they are curricular not extracurricular.

8. I think it is important to point out that it may not have been the intent of everyone involved with Developmental Writing to "change the institution." In fact, early in my time with the program, it wasn't my intention either—we were trying to put together a darn good course for our students. But during my second year as co-director of Developmental Writing, I began explicitly to think about the issues of identity and institutional change. The language I am using to describe it—institutional and border critique, for instance—has come later in an attempt to make sense of what I/we were trying to do and to help frame future institutional action.

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Mina P. Shaughnessy

THE MISERABLE TRUTH

A policy of admissions that reaches out beyond traditional sources for its students, bringing in to a college campus young men and women from diverse classes, races, and cultural backgrounds who have attended good, poor, and mediocre schools, is certain to shake the assumptions and even the confidence of teachers who have been trained to serve a more uniform and prepared student population. For the English teacher, the shock and challenge of this diversity is experienced first through the written words and sentences of the new students, for here, spelled out in words, woven into syntax, is the fact of inequity – in our schools and in the society that is served by these schools.

Thus began the first issue of the Journal of Basic Writing. It seems almost unnecessary to say who wrote that "Introduction" (not yet called an Editor's Column) for JBW back in 1975. The voice, the themes, the sculptural syntax – all are unmistakable hallmarks of Mina Shaughnessy. From the moment we considered making the Fall 1998 issue in some way commemorative of the founder of so much besides JBW, it seemed to us vital that this unmistakable voice, stilled but not silenced in the fall of 1978, be represented somehow.

Largely thanks to Jane Maher's Mina P. Shaughnessy: Her Life and Work, many of us have a new sense of how much besides Errors and Expectations there is to the writing she left behind. After reviewing all that, we felt that nothing better represented her contributions then and their continuing relevance now than "The Miserable Truth," a speech given to the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors in April 1976, at a time when Errors and Expectations was still a manuscript, a time when a great financial crisis (nothing less than the near-bankruptcy of New York City) was causing vast retrenchments and threatened to result in the wholesale disestablishment of basic writing programs Shaughnessy had done so much to found and foster.

Her response to this crisis was characteristic: outlining the grave perils confronting programs and colleagues so dear to her, she also ennobled them, making one want to be part of the whole imperiled enterprise. And it was clearly not a specific structure or pedagogy she wished to preserve so much as a commitment to students who must, for their sake and society's sake as well, have a fair shot, a real chance. This, we imagine, is the heart and soul of her enduring relevance: that she was always about recognizing diversity but never stopping there, insisting that we see and redress the "fact of inequity."

Conferences, I know, are times for saying encouraging things, for sharing successes with one another, and regaining a sense of being engaged with others in important work. But to begin this conference on a note of encouragement seems highly inappropriate today – something like trying to give a pep talk on the *Titanic*.

These are discouraging times for all of us, most particularly for the teachers who have been working with unprepared students on basic skills. Both students and teachers are already discovering that they are expendable, and the programs they have helped to build over the past five years to remedy the failure of the public schools (and the society of which those schools are an extension) now begin to shake and fracture under the blows of retrenchment.

We experience the crisis most directly on our individual campuses:

- Our staffs are shrinking and our class size increasing.
- Talented young teachers who were ready to concentrate their scholarly energies on the sort of research and teaching we need in basic writing are looking for jobs.
- Each day brings not a new decision but rumors of new decisions, placing us in the predicament of those mice in psychological experiments who must keep shifting their expectations until they are too rattled to function.
- Our campuses buzz like an Elizabethan court with talk of who is in favor and who is out. And we greet our colleagues from other campuses with relief. "Ah, good," we say (or think to ourselves)—"you're still here."
- We struggle each day to extract from the Orwellian language that announces new plans and policies some clear sense of what finally is going to become of the students whom the university in more affluent times committed itself to educate.

If we turn from our individual campuses to the university itself—this vast free university, the only one of its kind—we see it being pressed to retrench and retrench, treated as if it has been distributing handouts over the past six years rather than entitlements, fragmented now rather than federated as each college struggles for its survival and sees in the demise of sister colleges some advantage for itself.

And underlying all this turmoil we sense a growing national indifference to the goals of open admissions. Ironically, as the national press spreads alarm about the state of literacy in the country, funds (federal, state, and city) for teaching the educationally neglected and betrayed are disappearing. Somewhere, it has been decided that the experiment hasn't worked, that our hopes were overblown, that we are faced, in the words of *Time* magazine, with "continued failures to improve dramatically the lot of the disadvantaged" through compensatory education.

After no more than one generation of open admissions students have been allowed time to lay claim to a college education, and in the face of their achievements during our first faltering years of Open

Admissions, the decision has come out against them. Not, one suspects, because anyone has taken a close look at the experience itself but because the times have shifted and allowed the society to settle back into its comfortable notions about merit, notions which have produced a meritocratic scheme that perpetuates the various brands of race and class prejudice that have pervaded this society since its creation.

Surely there is little in such a scene to generate encouragement. Wherever we look we find reason to feel discouraged, angry, and paralyzed. Open Admissions at CUNY is being trimmed and tracked to death and we cannot begin to count the cost of its collapse. I can think of only one encouraging thought in the midst of this disaster. It is best expressed in an old Jewish saying: The truth never dies; it simply leads a miserable life.

I have said enough, for now, about the misery. But I have not touched upon the truth—the truth, that is, of what we have learned during open admissions about our students, about ourselves as teachers, and about the art and science and craft of writing. Let me mention some of the truths we have uncovered or discovered because they seem to me indestructible, despite retrenchments and shifts in the winds of social doctrines.

First, we have learned—and documented—that it is possible to get a high school diploma in New York City without reaching minimal competence in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Doubtless we suspected this before, but now we know the real taste of that failure. What open admissions writing teacher does not remember the shock of those first student essays, the stunning evidence of failure woven into the very syntax of sentences and the letters of words. For most of us it was a traumatic moment. We asked, What went wrong? What were they doing for twelve years? How can I possibly teach them to write now? Where do I begin? And behind those questions lay the troubling, forbidden thought—perhaps they are ineducable.

For the first time in the history of the city, we created, through open admissions, a massive feedback system which revealed an unconscionable failure to meet the educational needs of the poor and the dark-skinned. To be sure, the roots of that failure are tangled, and now that college teachers have begun to talk with and meet with high school teachers (largely as a result of open admissions) they are more sensitive to the many institutional conditions that have made teaching almost impossible in many of our schools.

But whatever the causes, Open Admissions documented the fact of failure. And until that happened, it was possible for thousands of students to drift quietly into the labor force of the city, taking up the jobs that others rejected, convinced somehow that something in *them* had caused the failure.

Second, we have learned that late adolescence is a creative and critical juncture in life and that, far from being eleventh-hour learners, our students come to us ready to begin their lives anew. And while the skills and priorities of studenthood are not easily acquired at the age of eighteen or over, students have demonstrated that they can acquire them at that age. In fact, much of the energy they mobilize for the effort seems to come from the opportunity college gives them to redefine themselves as young adults who might accomplish something in the world. To encourage this emerging view they have of themselves while at the same time representing honestly to them the amount of work that lies ahead has proved to be one of the teacher's most delicate and essential tasks.

Neither like children nor the retarded—with whom they have been compared—they are a distinctive group: young adults who are capable because of their maturity of observing the processes they are going through as learners, of taking conceptual shortcuts that are not available to children, of alerting us easily and swiftly to the effects of our instruction, of committing themselves to routine and work and constant, often discouraging evaluation, in order to change the quality of their adult lives.

We have not unfortunately had the time nor the expertise to study our students as learners nor to document our sense of them as a unique group, ripe for learning and capable of both steady growth and dramatic leaps into new levels of competence. But we have, in a sense, discovered them.

Third, we learned that we didn't know much about teaching writing when we started out, even though many of us had been teaching the subject before, in traditional ways and with traditional students. There were many reasons for our deficiencies, but one of the chief ones was that most of us had not been formally trained to teach writing—only to read and analyze the outstanding belletristic literature of the centuries. Teaching writing was a kind of fringe penalty for teaching literature, and since students coming into college had generally been prepared for college writing by their schools and by the culture they grew up in, we got by. There was little motivation to give much thought to those features of the skill that now seem so central to our understanding of our task. Let me mention at least a few of those features.

We had not thought much about the writing process itself: how accomplished writers behave when they write; what sorts of stages they go through; what coordinations and perceptions are required of them; and how the behavior of our students as writers differs from that of accomplished writers—are they, for example, in the habit of rescanning their sentences, can they objectify their own pages, looking at them at one moment for semantic sense and at another for formal correctness?

We had not given much thought to the relationship between oral and written language, a relationship that once seemed so simple (merely a matter of the writer's tending to his colloquialisms) but that suggests increasingly profound differences not simply in the ways we choose words but in the very ways we think under two modes.

Faced as we have been with students who have had very restricted and largely unpleasant encounters with written English, we have *had* to pay more respect to these differences, to observe them more carefully, for one thing, and to find ways of making the transition from one medium to the other more conscious. We have also had to turn our attention to the academic uses of written language, to that "dialect" of analysis that confronts our students not only with many new words and phrases, but with more heavily qualified sentences than they are used to producing in speech and with unfamiliar strategies for making their points or winning their arguments.

We had not thought much, until Open Admissions, about the fact of linguistic diversity, with which most of us collided from almost our first day of open admissions teaching when we found our classrooms filled with native Americans who had grown up with the sounds and melodies of other languages or dialects in their ears and on their tongues-Cantonese, Afro-American, Spanish, Yiddish, Greek, Polish, diverse language groups who nonetheless shared the experience of having had their language differences ignored or treated as a disadvantage, of having had the fun and pride of language drained out of their school lives.

How we have argued, and puzzled, and struggled over the issue of mother-tongue interference, over whether to change, how to change, when to change those nonstandard features of a student's language that distract the general reader. We have arrived by now, I think, at a rough and pragmatic consensus. But looking back, the important point seems to me that we grappled with both the phenomenon of diversity and the phenomenon of linguistic convention and in doing so developed greater respect for our students' linguistic aptitudes and for the subtle, stubborn, yet mercurial quality of language itself.

Such insights have had, of course, to be incorporated into our teaching. And here we can claim, I think, a major advance. Open Admissions has taught us about learning, that is, about the importance of perceiving where students are in relation to what we want to teach them, about sequential and paced instruction, about being clear and realistic, about going below the surface of our subjects, not in order to become simpler but to become more profound, for it is at the level of principle as well as practice that young adults learn more efficiently.

This was an inevitable consequence of Open Admissions. Traditionally, colleges have been able to guarantee success by *selecting* their students ahead of time rather than by *teaching* them after they arrived.

Thus it has been argued that in the days when City College screened out all except the most highly prepared graduates from academic high schools in one of the largest cities in the world, the chances of the students succeeding in college were tremendous, whoever taught them.

If we imagine a continuum of competence, with at one end the exceptionally competent and at the other the barely competent, we could say that colleges have traditionally felt it their responsibility to identify the students at the upper end of this scale and give them four more years of education. The open admissions college, on the other hand, makes a commitment to involve itself in the education of young men and women *all along* the continuum on the assumption, first, that people are not consigned to their places on that continuum forever but are capable of remarkable growth and development when given the opportunity; second, that the social benefits of advancing as many as possible along that continuum are inestimable; and third, that this broadening of the base of higher education, if properly planned and supported, can further the education of all students on the continuum.

But the decision to open a college to a more diverse population commits that college to becoming a *teaching* college, a college where everyone, not just the remedial teachers, accepts the responsibility of *teaching* rather than merely *presenting* a subject. Certainly this message about teaching has reached the skills teachers of CUNY. Working this year in the Instructional Resource Center, I have had a chance to do what few of you have perhaps had the time or occasion to do, that is, to take a close look at the work going on in skills instruction. We are all aware, of course, that many of our colleagues have gained national recognition in our field—have published articles, read papers at conferences, served on various professional organizations, produced textbooks. (It is no accident, I'm sure, that when five major publishers decided over the past year or so to produce new writing handbooks—a major publishing decision—they chose CUNY English teachers to write them.)

What I had not been so aware of, however, was the number of teachers who, without fanfare or remissions and with heavy class loads, have been at work developing imaginative new materials for our students. Probably at no school in the country is there such an accumulation of wisdom and know-how in the field of compensatory education as there is within this university at this moment. I cannot imagine a group of teachers who have ever had more to say to one another. It is a special fraternity joined not only by our common purposes and problems as teachers but by our having come to know, through our students, what it means to be an outsider in academia. Whatever our individual political persuasions, we have been pedagogically radicalized by our experience. We reject in our bones the traditional meritocratic model of a college. We reject it not only on principle; we would sim-

ply be bored teaching in such a college.

Such changes, I would say, are indestructible, wherever we go from here. And indestructible, too, are the ideas that have awakened our students. It is puzzling how long people can go on—for generations— tolerating the inequalities that restrict and even shorten their lives. But once the possibility of change touches their imaginations, once a right has been extended to them and they have felt its power to open and enrich their lives, they cannot go back. They may have setbacks. But they cannot go back. CUNY extended a right, six years ago, that has been revoked, and we appear to be back where we started in 1970, only much poorer. But no one can revoke what has gone on in us and in our students.

So the lion got out of the cage before the gates were shut. And we had better keep learning how to teach writing because the brothers and sisters and cousins and children of our students will be back. If we can transcend for a moment the personal disappointments and uncertainties that surround us now, we can perhaps agree that that is a fairly strong truth for a miserable time. And it is a truth we helped to make.

News and Announcements

Call for Papers. Working-Class Studies: Class, Identity, and Nation, the Fourth Biennial Conference of the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University. Conference dates are **June 9-12, 1999**. Proposals sought for presentations, panels, workshops, performances, exhibits, and readings that address issues and/or representations of class, race, gender, sexuality and nation in working-class life and culture. Submissions of 250-300 words, describing proposed projects with suggested presentation format. Contact: John Russo, Labor Studies Program, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, 44555; fax 330-742-1459; or e-mail Sherry Linkon at sjlinkon@cc.ysu.edu. The CWCS website is at http://as.ysu.edu/as/cwcs. Deadline for proposals: **January 8, 1999**.

Conference announcement: Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition, July 4-7, 1999. Conference theme "Rhetorical Education in America." Keynote Kathleen Jamieson. For additional information, http://www.psu.edu/dept/english/rhetcomp99/

Northeast Writing Centers Association (NEWCA) conference announcement. The 15th Annual Conference of NEWCA, "Counterring Educational Malaise: The Writing Center as Stimulant/Stimulating the Writing Center," will be held **April 10, 1999** at Bates College, Lewiston, Maine. Keynote address: Albert DeCiccio, President of the National Writing Centers Association. Additional conference information at: http://www.mcp.edu/as/wc/wc.html

Conference announcement and call for proposals: National Writing Centers Association and East Central Writing Centers Association Conference. "Writing Center 2000: Meeting the Challenges of the New Century." Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, **April 1-17, 1999**. Keynotes Muriel Harris and Edward M. White.

Call for papers: The University and the City: Urban Education and the Liberal Arts. The Program Committee invites proposals for sessions, single papers and panels on the theme, "The University and the Liberal Arts," for an interdisciplinary conference to be held **March 4-7, 1999**, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan. Information contact Julie Longo, Project Manager, Department of History, 312, F/AB, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, 48202. (313) 77-22; aa044@wayne.edu

Call for manuscripts. ***ACE Journal*** is a juried publication of the NCTE Assembly on Computers in English which is published three times a year. The editor seeks articles that relate to the teaching of English at all levels with the aid of computers. The theme for volume 2, issue 2 (to be published April 1999) is new rhetorics and strategies for computer-mediated communication. Deadline for submissions **March 1, 1999**. For information and submission guidelines contact Robert D. Royar at r.royar@morehead-st.edu, or at UPO 635, Morehead State University, Morehead, KY 40351-1689.

Call for papers/hypertext: *Tenure 2000* will be a special issue of *Computers and Composition* coming out in April, 2000, guest-edited by Susan Lang, Janice Walker, Mick Doherty, Keith Dorwick, and Susan Halter. For further information and the full call for papers/hypertext, see http://www.uic.edu/~kdorwick/tenure2000/ or contact Dr. Susan Lang at slang@siu.edu.

Conference announcement: Links to Success: Bridges Over Boundaries, An Intersegmental Conference at Cal State Hayward, May 14-15, 1999. Keynote speaker: Dr. Sue McLeod. For more information on the conference visit http://134.154.87.65/RAVEN/FACULTY/Warriner/warrinerhome.html, or contact Alison Warriner, Coordinator of Composition, Cal State, Hayward, at awarrine@csuhayward.edu.

Conference announcement: Creating and Sustaining Learning Communities: Connections, Collaboration, and Crossing Borders, March 10-13, 1999, Holiday Inn Busch Gardens, Tampa, Florida. This conference will familiarize participants with innovative learning community models, interdisciplinary themes, and methodologies for assessing student learning and learning community programs. For more information, http://www.usf.edu/~lc/conf

The 1999 Kellogg Institute for the Training and Certification of Developmental Educators will be held from **June 2 through July 23** on the campus of Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. For application or additional information, contact Director, Kellogg Institute, PO Box 32098, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608-2098, (82) 262-3307; http://www.ced.appstaate.edu/ncde.

The ***Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (JAEPL)*** invites submissions for its fifth annual issue. The *Journal* solicits theory-grounded manuscripts that discuss pedagogical concerns focusing on topics that extend beyond currently accepted attitudes towards, and paradigms of, language. Send four copies of ms., MLA style, 12-15 pages, to: Linda Calendrillo, Co-Editor, *JAEPL*, Department of English, 600 Lincoln Avenue, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston, IL, 61920, by **January 31, 1999**. Inquiries: Kristie S. Fleckenstein, Co-editor, JAEPL, Department of English, University of Missouri-Kansas City, Kansas City, MO 64110-2499, e-mail: jaepl@cctr.umkc.edu.

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