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THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF BASIC WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT MOMENT

ABSTRACT: Viewed in the context of 1960s mass movements that paved the way for an expansion of rights to women and minorities in particular, the development of academic support services like basic writing can be seen as a response to grassroots political struggles for social and economic justice. Although such services, along with affirmative action and open admissions policies, have benefited people of all backgrounds, it has been working-class African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans for whom they opened the doors of higher education. Only if we understand basic writing instruction in this larger sociohistorical context can we make sense out of the confluence of conservative and scholarly assaults on it. The author stakes out a position for the strategic value of basic writing that underscores the need to defend it – and other hardwon rights to education – while acknowledging the importance of composition scholars' concerns about the dangers of tracking, stereotyping, and misrepresenting basic writers.

The weight of the SAT's has different effects on everyone. Some people are nervous and others are claim, but it all depends on how that student has prepared his her self. Garcia said "one Saturday morning squirming with the SAT's can cancel four years of hard work."

* * *

I agree with Scott King, for a lot of reason like one is he said can we expect a decent society is allowed to kill it's own people. To me that mean how can we listed and agree with people who kill other people.

* * *

In recent years there has been a dramatic shift in the way we, as a society, view competition. Nelson's argument on how men and women view competition cannot be more accurate. Her argument is not only visible throughout the media but seems to be growing in popularity as the years pass on. It seems men have clearly lost sight of competition as a way of becoming

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closer to others and are instead focusing on the outcome rather than enjoying the process.

I begin with examples of student writing, not to affix labels to them but to ground my perspective on basic writing's role in higher education in actual texts. The passages are the first paragraphs of placement exams written by entering students at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University. Our test requires students to read a short editorial and write an essay in which they take a position on a topic, explain the writer's argument, and go on to support their own argument with evidence and examples.¹ If the third passage seems relatively clear-cut in terms of placement in freshman composition, the first and second raise key questions about college admission and what kind of instruction most benefits students with weak academic skills. Although the readers of the second passage failed the exam,² such writing is familiar to most basic writing teachers, at least at urban, working-class institutions like LIU. Similarly, we would not be shocked to find writing of the sort produced in the first passage in a freshman composition class. The fluidity of our own categories results both from the subjective element in the evaluation of any piece of writing and the uneven performances of all writers.

But individual consciousness, as many theorists have pointed out, is shaped by the social and discursive worlds with which we interact. So for a moment let us imagine that the second passage failed because the writing's obvious weaknesses—a high degree of error, syntactic confusion, and lack of focus—resonate with several related but separate national trends that influenced the readers. At all levels of education, pre-K on up, there is a frenzied call for higher standards and more and more testing; at the college level, the rhetoric of standards has been used to promulgate anti-affirmative initiatives, end open admissions, and eliminate remedial programs. In my own department, there has been a frank, disconcerting discussion about the problem of admitting students like the writer of the second passage to the university.

The first passage, on the other hand, would be less likely to raise a red flag to readers—or the general public—because its weaknesses are better concealed. Fewer surface errors, the use of a quotation, and better syntactic control give this piece of writing a coherence that seems passable—at least, borderline—for an entering college student. Looked at more closely, however, the exam reflects the writer's weak reading skills and inability to grasp or develop an argument. Writing in response to a short editorial opposing reliance on SAT scores for the purposes of college admission, the writer rather poignantly misses the point, concluding, "Everyone has their own thoughts on how to get

ready for a major exam, so I believe that what ever makes a person comfortable then that's how they should prepare themselves for what comes along with a failing or passing grade." By the same token, there is a glimmer of understanding in the response of the writer of the second passage to a different prompt, an editorial by Coretta Scott King opposing the death penalty. This writer states: "Another reason I agree is that Mr. King is right on is that the only way of stop violent is to practice nonviolence I think that one with work."

These writing samples demonstrate several issues I would like to put on the table: 1) the rhetorical and intepretive weaknesses of the writing deemed "basic" could be more difficult to address pedagogically than the error-ridden writing that failed; 2) the failed test, though by no means hopeless, does reflect complex writing problems that can be extremely daunting for teachers and students alike; 3) both passages suggest that the writers would need strong support to cope with the demands of college.³ Do we want to provide a sheltered place in the academy for these writers? Could they survive in a mainstream composition course or without any composition course at all? Should the writer of the failed passage have access to post-secondary education? And if so, in what sort of institution? Like Mina Shaughnessy, I believe that most so-called basic writers are educable; but I also know the frustrations and disappointments of students and teachers attempting to cultivate skills in a few short years that more privileged members of our society develop over a lifetime. To defend basic writing at present means contending both with conservatives who condemn us for allowing underprepared students through the doors of higher education in the first place and those in our own discipline who want to abolish remedial instruction because it stereotypes students and segregates them from the mainstream.

Political Attacks on Basic Writing, Open Admissions, and Affirmative Action

As those familiar with the history of composition know, it was at City College in the late 1960s that Shaughnessy and her colleagues developed a pedagogy called "basic writing" for students whom she describes as "true outsiders . . . strangers in academia, unacquainted with the rules and rituals of college life" (2-3). Today, more than thirty years later, as legislators and boards of trustees across the country dismantle remedial programs in the name of raising standards, and composition scholars debate the pros and cons of basic writing, it seems increasingly important to remember that "basic writing" emerged at a particular historical moment. While Shaughnessy chose the term "basic" to avoid the pejorative connotations of "remedial" or "develop-

mental," in retrospect we can see that the creation of basic writing at CUNY and elsewhere was a direct response to the struggle for open enrollment by and for working-class and poor students of color.⁴

The emergence of "basic" as opposed to "remedial" writing instruction—which arguably begins with the introduction of the first-year composition course at Harvard—coincided with the expansion of higher education to nonwhite, working-class students, primarily African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. Such reforms in the 1960s were not isolated phenomena; they would have been impossible without the impetus of the mass movements for social change that swept the country. According to Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward in *The Breaking of the American Compact*, there were two brief periods in twentieth century American history during which substantial gains were won for the working class: the 1930s, in which the industrial workers' movement secured more benefits and rights for labor; and the 1960s, in which the civil rights movement expanded the social compact to groups that had previously been excluded from it. Viewed in this context, basic writing, for all its internal contradictions, has played a vital role in increasing access to higher education, in particular for working-class people of color.

Although white ethnic students were initially the main beneficiaries of open enrollment at City University, the far more salient fact is that the number of nonwhite students increased from four percent in 1969, before open admissions, to 65 percent in 1999 (Romer), by which point CUNY's enrollment of Black and Latino students was among the largest of any university in the country. It was a student strike on April 22, 1969, led by the Black and Puerto Rican Student Community, that forced the administration to acquiesce to the demand for open admissions and ensure that CUNY reflected the demographics of New York City high schools. One has only to read Adrienne Rich's eloquent testament to the political lessons of the early years of open enrollment to appreciate the exuberance with which she and other SEEK faculty embraced the radical objectives of the student movement. Rich, who applied to teach in the SEEK program out of "white liberal guilt," passionately describes the experience of white teachers whose "white liberal assumptions" were shaken by their confrontation at CUNY with "the bitter reality of Western racism" (57).

This moment of genuine political and academic reform was unfortunately short-lived. In a 1975 foreword to "Teaching Language in Open Admissions," Rich laments the reversal of open admissions that had already occurred since the essay's original publication in 1972:

... [T]he white faculty at least . . . vastly underestimated the psychic depth and economic function of racism in the city and the nation, the power of the political machinery that could be

'permissive' for a handful of years only to retrench, break promises, and betray, pitting black youth against Puerto Rican and Asian, poor ethnic students against students of color, in an absurd and tragic competition for resources which should have been open to all. (51-2)

That retrenchment resulted in the imposition of tuition after the city's fiscal crisis in 1975 and the reinstatement of admissions requirements "close to national norms" at the senior colleges (Wiesen Cook and Cooper). Last year, on January 25, culminating a political crusade led by Mayor Rudy Giuliani and Governor George Pataki, the New York Board of Regents voted to eliminate remedial programs from all eleven senior colleges, thus ending the era of open admissions as defined in 1970. Based on 1998 projections by CUNY, five of the eleven senior colleges will lose more than half their entering students as a result of the new admissions policy, which went into effect in the spring semester of 2000. Hardest hit will be minority students whose numbers in the senior colleges could be reduced by as much as 55 percent of Latinos, 51 percent of Asians, and 46 percent of African Americans, compared to 38 percent of white students (Arenson).⁵

According to Nancy Romer, a professor of psychology at Brooklyn College active in CUNY politics, the battle over open admissions is part of a global economic crisis that has yet to be felt in the United States. Contrasting news reports of recessions, mass unemployment, bank failures, and currency crises in countries like Russia, Japan, and Brazil with continued prosperity in Western Europe and the U.S., Romer concludes: "Despite a budget surplus in both the city and the state, New York political elites, viewing these ominous economic clouds on the horizon seized the moment to decrease the public domain while expanding opportunities for capital" (48). Attributing the effectiveness of the campaign to end open admissions in New York City to the rising influence of the wealthy and the disarray of traditional progressive advocates of social justice issues, Romer argues that the current period will lead either to stepped-up grassroots organizing or a tragic defeat of the interests of all but affluent New Yorkers. Unlike the '60s mass protests for an open-door policy at CUNY, resistance to the campaign to close the door has been weak. As Romer puts it: "Academics, in the main, are not prepared to risk their jobs and students don't want to risk the opportunity for a share of American prosperity" (50). Especially disturbing is Romer's observation that a key component of the conservative campaign has been to demonize students in remedial programs, a tactic that "humiliated the students of CUNY into stunned inaction" (49).

Another instructive tale of the vulnerability of programs that have historically served under-represented students is Carol Severino's ex-

amination of the “‘urban mission’ trope” at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Severino traces the birth in 1968 of UIC’s Educational Assistance Program—a multiracial, academic support program—to popular resistance to the construction of the campus three years earlier and the displacement of established community organizations, including Jane Addams’ Hull House, and a total of 10,000 residents. Although no one at UIC can account for the initial use of the term “urban mission,” according to Severino, it was incorporated, albeit ambivalently, into UIC’s undergraduate curriculum through EAP, which had been started in response to demands by Black community organizations for increased representation in the university.

Like its prototype, the SEEK program at City University, EAP stirred controversy among faculty concerned with the impact underprepared students would have on institutional standards. Poor retention rates, the development of separate, ethnically-defined programs, downsizing throughout the ’70s and ’80s, and higher admissions standards all combined to weaken EAP severely. In 1993, Severino reports, EAP was converted into a recruitment and support program for African American students, eliminating academic instruction and totally abandoning its multiracial tradition. Most interesting in terms of how such programs have eroded and disappeared is Severino’s rhetorical analysis of the fate of the “urban mission” trope itself. UIC’s new mission statement for the 21st century explicitly rejects its “urban mission,” replacing the phrase with “urban university in a land-grant tradition.” As Severino comments, “The ‘urban mission’ is deemed ‘narrow’ and dismissed; UIC is now more oriented to the world than to its neighborhood” (50).

Meanwhile, paralleling assaults on open enrollment and academic support programs, affirmative action has been reversed in Texas, California, Washington, and most recently, Florida; legal challenges to affirmative action are pending in Michigan, Georgia, New York, Alabama, and North Carolina. Despite officials’ repeated assurances of a continued commitment to diversity, the enrollment of historically under-represented students has decreased. As a University of Central Florida student noted in reaction to Governor Jeb Bush’s plan to eliminate race and gender admissions criteria in Florida while guaranteeing the admission of the top twenty percent of graduating high school seniors to state universities: “This plan looks very good on paper. But if you really think about it, the top twenty percent of students go to college anyway” (“Regents” A18). The conservative doublespeak used to promote cultural diversity while wiping out equal opportunity programs reinscribes social inequalities in the name of fairness. Not surprisingly, diversity in selective universities—and those like CUNY with new policies designed to garner prestige—is diminishing. Both anti-affirmative action and anti-open enrollment policies have had the ef-

fect of disqualifying poorly-prepared minorities and discouraging those who are better prepared from even applying.⁶

Along with the impact of socioeconomic disadvantages and the debilitating effects of racism on college admission statistics, a disproportionate number of minority students score low on standardized tests like the SATs. Consequently, diversity in higher education cannot be achieved without admissions criteria based on more accurate predictors of success in college, such as grade point averages, portfolio submissions, and extra-curricular activities. Even with more equitable admissions policies, the "savage inequalities" in public education in this country will continue in the foreseeable future to necessitate academic support services for many students—especially those who deal with multiple disadvantages in preschool and K-12—to get over the hump of the freshman year. In urban, working-class universities with a majority of students of color, such support gives often large numbers of poorly prepared students a chance to succeed academically (at LIU, over half of entering students place into basic writing and may take for credit as many as twelve hours of writing instruction altogether); at more selective institutions, the absence of support services, in combination with anti-affirmative policies that drive away both top- and bottom-rung students of color, literally means these students' disappearance.⁷

In a detailed analysis of these trends at the University of Washington, Gail Stygall describes what she calls the "double-bind" of anti-undergraduate education and anti-affirmative action. Focusing on the rhetoric surrounding the passage and implementation of I-200, Stygall demystifies the final report of a gubernatorial commission on the future of higher education in Washington state. She shows that the commission's avowed commitment "to broadening the educational franchise" is literally cancelled out by the means—corporatization and privatization—by which it envisions meeting its goal. As Stygall ruefully puts it, "So we will actively recruit the under-represented students into something less than the regular universities. For 'them' we'll contract outside the university" (54).

A less veiled statement of aims can be seen in "An Institution Adrift," a report issued in 1999 by Mayor Giuliani's Task Force on CUNY. In the section titled "Rethinking Remediation's Place at CUNY," remediation is characterized as "a distraction from the main business of the University" (38). Rather than serve the people of New York City as CUNY has historically done, the Task Force, chaired by Benno Schmidt, maintains that the university's "mandate" is "to offer first-rate college-level programs to those who are prepared to succeed" (39). To "reconceptualize" and "reform" remediation—a goal that by the report's own admission will eliminate three-quarters of all entering degree students who fail one or more placement tests—the Task

Force recommends the implementation of a “managed competition model” in which students could “purchase educational services from the provider of their choice . . . including for-profit companies” such as Kaplan and Sylvan Learning. It does not take much to read between the lines of this report to see the goals of privatization, corporatization, outsourcing, and downsizing in its recommendations.

Making Sense of the Debates on Basic Writing

This accelerating political assault on equal opportunity in higher education nationwide helps put our own debates on basic writing in perspective. Let me try to sketch the highlights of these debates, starting not with the earliest ones which date back to immediate reactions to Shaughnessy by critics like John Rouse, but with David Bartholomae’s keynote speech in 1992 at the Fourth National Basic Writing Conference. Urging us to read against the grain of basic writing as “a grand narrative of liberal sympathy and liberal reform” and question its place in the curriculum, Bartholomae imagined a mainstream course in which students of different abilities and backgrounds would profit from confrontations in a cultural “contact zone.” His characterization of **basic writing** as having lost its political edge, “reproducing the **hierarchies we had** meant to question and overthrow,” is especially significant considering his own extensive role in transforming basic writing pedagogy from skills drills into a rigorous, intellectually-grounded course that in many places has become a standard approach at all levels of composition.⁸

Objecting to this revisionist view of basic writing, Karen Greenberg, who formerly directed the developmental English program at Hunter College, warned that unless composition experts assumed responsibility for developing more effective assessment procedures, administrators would do their job for them and programs would be destroyed. Five years later, in response to Ira Shor’s call to abolish basic writing at the same conference in 1997, Greenberg again warned of a scenario at CUNY, which has now largely come true, of a university “far trimmed down in size . . . return[ing] to the elite institution it was before 1970, when open admissions began” (94). Remaining one of basic writing’s staunchest advocates, Greenberg straightforwardly defends the importance of basic writing instruction in the absence of vastly improved academic skills of entering students: “The instruction provided by basic writing courses enables students to acquire the academic literacy skills, motivation, and self-confidence to persevere and to succeed in college” (94).

Shor’s provocative description of basic writing as “our apartheid” goes considerably beyond Bartholomae’s proposed “contact zone”

pedagogy to condemn college composition in general as a “correct usage gate” that promotes a “language policy” of “containment, control, and capital growth” (92). Rather than a sympathetic response to Black and Latino student demands by well-meaning, if sometimes naively liberal, educators, Shor views the inception of basic writing in the 1960s as “an extra layer of control . . . needed to discipline students in an undisciplined age” (92). Today, he argues, a labor surplus in the American economy caused by globalization and downsizing has created a demand for low-wage service workers rather than college graduates; and basic writing functions to impede graduation rates and channel students into “burger-flipping jobs” (91). Very relevantly, he calls attention to an increasingly obscene disparity of wealth in the U.S.⁹ and, mirrored in our own profession, the exploitation of part-time adjuncts, graduate assistants, and other “flexible” workers who teach basic writing on the academic margins.

Shor’s critique of education as a site for the reproduction of social inequities sheds light on how the apparatus of testing, tracking, vocational training, and college preparation functions to maintain the status quo. However, to indict basic writing and composition for deterring “a mass of aspiring students . . . from democracy and from the American Dream” (95-6) obfuscates the real impediments to democratizing education, some of which I have enumerated above. Looked at in a somewhat different light, Shor’s reprise of reproduction theory nevertheless raises useful questions: How have racial and class segregation functioned across institutions? To what extent will the resegregation of systems like CUNY create an “apartheid” in which the majority of students of color attend community college while their white counterparts repopulate the senior colleges? And what are the implications of the abysmal failure to desegregate public schools for the future of higher education?

Especially because of the correlation at many institutions between designated basic writers and racial and class minorities, another important set of questions revolves around the politics of representation.¹⁰ Understanding the tendency to view basic writers as “alien” and “other” in the context of academic discourse and community is crucial if we are to overcome the sort of social and linguistic prejudices that often determine our response both to students and their writing. Min-Zhan Lu’s critical analysis of our underlying assumptions about language and learning illuminates, for example, how the view of “‘academic discourse’ as discrete, fixed, and unified” (166) persists in practice even though most teachers reject it in theory; and how our acceptance as teachers of writing of novice/expert and outsider/insider dichotomies perpetuates traditional hierarchies between literature and composition. She urges us to treat error as a matter of style and a process of negotiation, a perspective that repudiates cognitivist and

cultural theories of writing development, both of which support a notion of basic writers as deficient, in favor of a social theory of writing that insists on the interrelationship of form and meaning and views writing as always sociopolitically situated. This critique of basic writing's essentializing tendencies goes to the heart of prejudices against nonstandard dialects, particularly Black English, and the reification of both standard English and academic discourse as higher forms of communication rather than as socially-constructed varieties of language.

As important as critical theory has been to rethinking leftist as well as mainstream assumptions and values, we should not let it obscure material, sociohistorical realities. If, for example, the critique of essentialist views of language and skills development leads teachers to believe that error is not a major issue for basic writers, as has certainly often been the case on my campus, then it does a disservice both to new teachers and to students. Adjunct teachers and graduate students at LIU routinely express confusion about the writing program's philosophy, despite repeated clarifications that our emphasis on reading, purposeful writing, and critical analysis should not supersede attention to form, including error.

More recently, I have been working with a middle school teacher who feels she has to sneak skills development into the classroom behind the backs of supervisors who advocate an "integrated" curriculum but are closely watching the results of a statewide eighth grade writing proficiency exam to monitor teachers' success rates on the basis of how well their students perform on the test. She believes that students in school districts like hers, described to me by the superintendent as "high poverty, racially isolated, and low-achieving" (Leverett), have been intentionally deprived of the skills taught to middle class white children. As Michael Newman observes, basic writing continues to be an important category, not because one dialect is superior to another, but because written errors send a message of exclusion. Thus, he argues, "The category remains because the words and forms used by basic writers will continue to tell the story of their aberration from academic discourse and academic life, and so frequently from their own dreams" (36).

In sum, if we are committed to democratizing education, as I believe most basic writing teachers and scholars are, we need to fight back against conservative efforts to reverse affirmative action, end open admissions, eliminate academic support programs, and thus resegregate higher education. To respond effectively at both local and national levels, we will need to understand the forces that compelled colleges and universities to open their doors to minority students in the first place as well as those that now threaten to shut them out. Basic

writing can be seen as a strategic means of keeping the doors open for students like the writer of the placement test on the death penalty cited in my epigraph.¹¹ To position ourselves and our students strategically means not to discount critiques of basic writing or to reject other models of instruction but rather to place such critiques in political and historical perspective and choose our battles carefully. Among them should be to heed Harvey Weiner's call to document the success of basic writing programs; to replicate the illuminating longitudinal study that Marilyn Sternglass conducted at City College; to experiment with new models of instruction or support existing successful programs, including WAC, depending on local conditions;¹² to forge partnerships between universities and public schools; to continue to research literacy outside the classroom in a variety of sociohistorical contexts; to participate more actively and effectively in public debates on higher education; and to support the activist agenda of emerging movements led by groups like The Coalition to Defend Affirmative Action By Any Means Necessary (BAMN), a student organization at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Michigan mobilizing opposition nationwide to anti-affirmative action legislation and the resegregation of universities.

Notes

1. We revised the LIU placement test in 1998 with the assistance of Brian Huot who helped us articulate the criteria for each level in the context of the particular needs of our program: a "low basic writer" could neither explain someone else's position nor develop an argument; a "high basic writer" could explain someone else's position but not develop an argument; and a writer who placed in freshman composition could do both tasks and was ready to build on those skills. For an excellent overview on assessment, see Kathleen Blake Yancey's "Looking Back as We Look Forward: Historicizing Writing Assessment." Also see Huot's and Yancey's coedited journal *Assessing Writing*.
2. At LIU, students who fail the placement test are required to take a noncredit course prior to the basic writing sequence; however, because such students rarely opt to attend the university, the course, though listed in the catalogue, rarely runs.
3. For an insightful analysis of placement tests written by basic writers, many of which reveal similar problems to those of the writer of my second example, see Mina Shaughnessy's chapter, "Beyond the Sentence," in *Errors and Expectations*. Explaining that students who

lack vocabulary to deal with abstractions are often unable to move beyond literal comprehension of a question, Shaughnessy cites a passage from a student placement test: "I disagree on the fact the paragraph sed that when get old you must get it secondhand. Whell that is not true becatus they are a god meny of older people hou can see a hear beter than the year one and this is true all over" (242).

4. I make this point partly in response to Bruce Horner's argument that the notion of basic writing as a new phenomenon cuts it off from its historical roots in remedial instruction and perpetuates its marginal status in the academy. While he is right on both counts in some respects, his argument is misleading, as I argue here, because basic writing did emerge at a particular historical conjuncture: the expansion in the 1960s of higher education to working-class students of color. It is in this historical context that basic writing can and should be seen as a new phenomenon.

5. The figures on the impact on minority students of eliminating remedial courses vary considerably, with even worse predictions made by CUNY sociologist David Lavin that 38 percent of whites, 70 percent of Latinos, 71 percent of Asians, and 67 percent of African Americans would be barred from the senior colleges (Staples).

6. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, even though more minority applicants were accepted to the University of California this year, there continues to be a marked decline in the number enrolled, a fact attributed to students' perception that they are unwelcome.

7. For a related view of the relationship of writing instruction to open admissions, see Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jeff Sommers' "Professing at the Fault Lines: Composition at Open Admissions Institutions." Lewiecki-Wilson and Sommers suggest that undergraduate writing instruction, particularly at open admissions institutions, can be seen as central rather than marginal to the academy, and question whether the demise of open admissions education will jeopardize the very survival of composition. They point out that conditions imposed on faculty like state-mandated testing and cutbacks resulting in a loss of courses and staff "exert pressure to move backward . . . to pre-process models" instead of forward to "post-process critiques" (458).

8. See Peter Dow Adams's "Basic Writing Reconsidered" for a critique of the message sent to basic writers by homogeneous classes and his view on the impact of composition research findings on all levels of classroom instruction

9. According to *Forbes* magazine's list of the 400 richest Americans, the number of billionaires in the U.S. has leapt from thirteen in 1982 to 268 in 1999; along with this concentration of wealth at the top — the top one percent of American households have more than the bottom 95 percent combined — 35 million people live below the official poverty line of \$13,000 for a three-person family (Sklar 23).

10. Laura Gray-Rosendale points out that the preoccupation with categorizing basic writers presupposes their identity before they arrive in the classroom. She traces the ways the question of identity has been dealt with from Helmers' account of the most pernicious representations of basic writers as "grotesque and deviant" (7) to frustration with the question itself as overly inclusive, homogenizing and simplifying the characteristics of a diverse population. What I find telling — even comical if it were not so serious an issue — is the return again and again, despite increasing objections, to the linkage of basic writers with class and ethnic markers from Bartholomae and Petrosky's depiction of them as "outside the mainstream" and mostly "minority or special-admission students" (8) to Sheridan-Rabideau and Brossel's contention that basic writers are "at-risk students" constituted by "new and diverse populations" (10). Our collective discomfort with this racialized, class-conscious description of basic writers should, I believe, serve as a mirror for us to examine our own attitudes and assumptions, to redouble our efforts not to stereotype any student on the basis of race, class, gender, or other identifications while at the same time ensuring that our newfound awareness of the pervasiveness of racism in our society does not lead us to ignore it.

11. To advocate for this student would stir controversy among my colleagues, many of whom would strongly disagree with me.

12. See, e.g., Mary Soliday's account of mainstreaming at City College and Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson's report on the replacement of basic writing with a Writing Studio at the University of South Carolina.

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