

# EDITORS' COLUMN

In the last issue, this column took note—once again—of the perennial redefinition of *JBW's* enterprise: What we talk about when we talk about basic writing. A second persistent and no less vexing matter is the audience, or audiences, to whom and with whom practitioners of basic writing talk. The cast of stakeholders in basic writing is large and frequently contentious, calling upon practitioners not only to demonstrate the worth of their work but also to insure that they—we—“do no harm.” The student who challenges us to explain what she will gain from a basic writing course, especially if it offers no credit or blocks the way to a chosen major; the policy maker who questions why such courses are offered in our colleges at all; the colleague who defines basic writing as inevitably discriminatory or marginalizing—each audience has different concerns and different criteria.

Several pieces in this issue address questions of how and to whom we explain, justify, defend, and offer our work. Policy makers, in particular, often present unsympathetic audiences because, suggests Stanford Goto, policy-oriented discourse and pedagogically-oriented discourse are so difficult to translate into one another's terms or constructs. “Basic Writing and Policy Reform: Why We Keep Talking Past Each Other” points out the tendency of policy-related discourse to frame issues in a vertical, hierarchical construct that is hard to justify with the non-linear, sometimes horizontally-oriented constructs favored in the discourse of pedagogy. Goto recommends strategies that might help advocates to bridge this “methodological gap.”

The language(s) spoken in academia and the problematic and contested term “academic discourse” concern Judith Hebb in “Mixed Forms of Academic Discourse: A Continuum of Language Possibility.” Taking off from some of Patricia Bizzell's thinking, Hebb conceives of a continuum of discourse in which students might locate themselves, thus enabling them to enter and contribute to academic conversation without stigma and, having found a place there, perhaps to enrich it.

It is not only academic language that might be seen as potentially more fluid or malleable. Our representation of ourselves as teachers, both to students and to ourselves, need not be fixed or static. Rather, Shari Stenberg argues that it might be—and perhaps can best be conceived of as a dynamic process of negotiation. In “Learning to Change: The Development of a (Basic) Writer and Her Teacher,” Stenberg describes a dialogic process through which, by learning to allow a student to establish her own identity and goals as a writer, the teacher was able to construct an identity for herself that better supported that student. Stenberg's case study prompts further questions about teachers' interventions in students' writing process.

Two authors advocate what would be in effect dialogues between related fields. Samuel Cohen imagines a potentially useful dialogue between basic writing and writing across the curriculum in "Tinkering Toward WAC Utopia." WAC as a field could learn—as he contends that basic writing has—that its goals, including the apparently purely formal and instrumental ones, will best be achieved if the broader goal of helping students develop as thinkers informs the overall enterprise.

Jessica Williams, in "Undergraduate Second Language Writers in the Learning Center," reviews a substantial range of second language acquisition research to determine what it offers tutors and teachers of basic writing. English Language Learners and members of what has become known as Generation 1.5 (the group of students who may have immigrated as young children or who may even have been born here but whose home language is not English) often find their way to basic writing classrooms or even more often to writing centers. Williams argues that the application of interactional and Vygotskian approaches in these settings could result in more appropriate and more effective instruction.

David Miller, in "Developmental Writing: Trust, Challenge, and Critical Thinking" begins with Mike Rose's term "mental arabesques." Complex and subtle critical thinking is not, in his view, something entirely alien and unfamiliar to developmental students, but rather can be seen as "extensions and abstractions of cognitive and metacognitive functions" that are routine and familiar. If, however, teachers are to help students in their—to borrow words from Kutz, Groden, and Zamel—"discovery of competence," they must establish structures in which risk seems possible and even inviting and which provide extended application and practice.

Two issues back, George Otte commended his outgoing co-editor, Trudy Smoke. Now it is the turn of a still novice co-editor to acknowledge George's contribution and leadership. Two outstanding characteristics mark George's tenure at *JBW*, as indeed they mark so many of his accomplishments: he is a consummate collaborator and he looks forward rather than backward. Singularly *not* doctrinaire, George has never envisioned *JBW* as the reflection of his own views—except in its openness to the full spectrum of positions and ideas and in its respect for the student writers who are its chief concern. He has sought out the multiple voices speaking for and about basic writing and stimulated thoughtful dialogue among them. His impressive talents have been devoted to encouraging authors, to offering advice (but never mandating it) to help them shape their texts into clear and forceful expressions of their thinking, and to insuring that the journal met his own deadlines—the summer and winter solstices.

Ever alert to new opportunities, especially those offered by tech-

nology, and to new winds blowing from theoretical, pedagogical, or political directions, George makes wise use of what has been learned in the past to anticipate and address the needs of the future. In his valedictory, "High Schools as Crucibles of College Prep: What More Do We Need to Know?" George calls out for both research and action in the areas where high school and college intersect. Writing out of a career devoted to creating bridges between different segments of the academic enterprise, George argues not only that high school teachers and their college-level counterparts need to work together in extended and collaborative ways, but also that we need serious inquiry into the very nature of our task, as change quickly overtakes secondary and higher education. Typically, George's own involvement is active as well as reflective.

The contributions to this issue offer many possibilities for dialogue and conversation—and some for action, as well.

—**Bonne August** *and* **George Otte**