

Basic Writing and Second Language Writers: Toward an Inclusive Definition

ABSTRACT: Defining basic writers is becoming increasingly complex as the linguistic and cultural diversity of the college student population continues to intensify. Because the definition of basic writers influences whose needs are considered and whose needs are not, it is important to examine how basic writers are conceptualized in the disciplinary practices of basic writing. This historical article documents how the presence of second language writers has been reflected – or not reflected – in the definition of basic writers over the last four decades and highlights the importance of defining basic writers in ways that include all students who are subject to the disciplinary and instructional practices of basic writing.

Defining basic writers has always been a tricky business. Almost three decades ago, Mina P. Shaughnessy pointed out that “[o]ne school’s remedial student may be another’s regular or even advanced freshman” (“Basic”137). Similarly, a student who would be placed in a basic writing class at one institution might be enrolled in an English-as-a-second language (ESL) writing class at another. In some cases, the same students who were identified as exemplary students in high school find themselves labeled “remedial” in college (Harklau “Good Kids”). As Lynn Quitman Troyka has pointed out, describing writers as “basic,” “remedial,” or “developmental” tends to mask the diversity of the student population such terms are supposed to represent (“Defining”). Linda Adler-Kassner and Gregory R. Glau have also pointed out that “[q]uestions about what basic writing is, who basic writers are, and how to work with students in basic writing courses are some of the field’s most compelling issues” (1). As the student population in institutions of higher education grows increasingly diverse both linguistically and culturally, the definition of the term “basic writer” is becoming even more complex.

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In practice, most basic writing specialists recognize the difficulty of defining basic writers. In the professional literature of basic writing, however, the generalized term “basic writer” has often been used in referring to diverse groups of students without regard to their backgrounds—linguistic, cultural, or educational. Although it is important to avoid essentializing student populations by providing a detailed description of the particular group in question (Troyka “Defining” 13), generalized terms are sometimes necessary and useful because they enable scholars to talk about issues that cut across different institutional contexts. Yet, in teaching-related fields such as basic writing, those generalized terms—and the image of the “basic writer” reinscribed by the use of those terms—also implicitly define basic writing teachers and scholars as well as the scope of the field of basic writing. In other words, the conception of the basic writer in the professional literature has a significant bearing on who is included and who is excluded in the discussion of student needs and of pedagogical and administrative solutions.

One group of students who have traditionally been excluded from the conception of basic writers in the professional literature are the so-called Generation 1.5 ESL students—active learners of the English language who have received at least several years of U.S. high school education.¹ They are often recent immigrants or refugees, although some international ESL students also fit this description. They come to basic writing courses for various reasons. In many cases, they are placed in basic writing courses rather than ESL writing courses because they are not clearly identifiable as ESL writers from their student records or from their spoken and written language features. Sometimes students are required to take basic writing courses after completing ESL writing courses because writing placement exams—many of which are not designed with nonnative speakers in mind—indicate that they are still unprepared for required first-year composition courses. In some cases, Generation 1.5 students are placed in basic writing courses rather than ESL writing courses because, for historical reasons, many ESL writing courses are designed for international ESL students (Matsuda “Reexamining”), whose needs are at least partially different from those of Generation 1.5 ESL students.² In other cases, institutions have no choice but to place all ESL writers—both Generation 1.5 students and international students—into basic writing courses because they have not been able to obtain the resources or the expertise to develop and maintain separate ESL writing courses.

Despite the presence of Generation 1.5 students in basic writing classrooms, the amount of attention given to them in the field of basic writing has been, as I will show, rather scant. My goal in this historical essay is to examine how ESL writers—especially Generation 1.5 students—have fared in the conception of basic writers in the disciplinary

practices of basic writing since the 1960s. In so doing, I hope to highlight the importance of defining basic writers in ways that include all students who are subject to the disciplinary and instructional practices of basic writing.

In constructing my historical narrative, I refer frequently to specific institutional practices that played an important role in the development of basic writing as a field of inquiry. Yet, my goal here is not to critique the work of basic writing specialists at the institutions mentioned or to examine the development of those programs in the larger political contexts. While I recognize the need for a more politically interested historiography, my primary focus here is to document how ESL issues have been positioned in relation to the disciplinary practices of basic writing. What I hope to accomplish with this article is to provide a description of the disciplinary context that shaped and was shaped by specific institutional and pedagogical practices, thereby laying the groundwork for the examination of the larger political context as well as more situated inquiry into specific institutional practices.

The Increase of Generation 1.5 ESL Writers in the 1960s

Although Generation 1.5 ESL writers have gained significant recognition only in the last decade or so, especially as a result of the publication of *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition* (Harklau, Losey, and Siegal), their presence in U.S. higher education – and basic writing classrooms – is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1956, William Slager of the University of Utah noted the presence of a “large number of immigrants who have serious difficulties with English.” As he explained, “Many of these students have lived in the community for years; they may even have graduated from local high schools and have served in the armed forces. Yet their scores in the English language tests are often as weak as, or weaker than, those of the newly arrived foreign students” (24-25).

Because of the language difficulties that were, in some ways, reminiscent of those faced by international ESL students, who had been part of U.S. higher education from earlier on (see Matsuda “Composition”), immigrant ESL students were often placed into existing ESL courses or “the Remedial English course for the regular American students” (Slager 25) based on the availability of courses rather than the students’ needs. However, neither ESL writing courses nor remedial writing courses were able to provide adequate instructional support for immigrant ESL writers. Remedial English courses were inappropriate for obvious reasons: They were designed with monolingual native speakers of English in mind and did not include components that addressed specific difficulties that immigrant ESL students had, which “overlap[ped those] of the newly arrived foreign student’s and the

native-born American's" but were "the same as neither." In short, Slager emphasized that immigrant ESL students needed special assistance in learning English "for they cannot pass the regular freshman course" (26-27).

To many teachers and administrators at institutions where ESL programs or courses were already available, "an obvious solution" was "to put the immigrant and the foreign student in the same class, since their test scores prove to be comparable" (Slager 25). Slager argued, however, that this practice was "unwise" because, "although both groups need special work in English as a foreign language, the kind of work they need is often very different" (25). In most cases, existing intensive ESL programs — many of which were originally developed at internationally known research institutions, such as the University of Michigan — were designed specifically to address the needs of international ESL students, who, unlike immigrant ESL students, had rather limited previous exposure to the linguistic, cultural, and educational practices in the United States. As Slager, a former staff member of Michigan's English Language Institute, pointed out, "the same materials and techniques" developed at Michigan "do not work ideally with the immigrant":

Even though they have serious problems in English as a foreign language, the immigrants do not profit from classes that are specifically devised for the newly arrived foreign students. They need special work on grammar of usage. But they often need no help at all in aural comprehension; and since they have lived for some time in this country, they need very little orientation. (28-29)

Drawing on the habit-formation model of language acquisition, which was the most popular theory of language learning at the time, Slager explained the language difficulties encountered by immigrant ESL students as the unlearning of previously acquired language habits influenced by features of their native language.³ Based on this assumption, he further argued that the task for immigrant ESL students — and for their teachers — was "more complicated" than for international ESL students (28). For this reason, he argued the need to develop courses and materials designed specifically for immigrant ESL students in U.S. higher education. He wrote:

As yet, the best that can be said is that no linguistically sound materials have appeared specifically aimed at preparing the immigrant (who is in many ways already part of our community) for work in English on the college level. That there is a need for such specialized materials, there can be no doubt. (29)

However, the issue of providing linguistic support for immigrant ESL students did not attract significant attention until much later because the increase in this group of students was, at least initially, a gradual process. Although, as Slager suggested, some institutions had already enrolled a large number of immigrant ESL students by the mid 1950s, other institutions did not begin to admit immigrant students with severe language difficulties until much later. At Hunter College of the City University of New York, for example, "immigrant groups" prior to the 1970s "had evidently mastered English before applying for admission" (Decker, Jody, and Brings 88), and ESL students were placed into "regular credit courses with native speakers" (Martino 22). In fact, the ESL student population before the 1970s consisted largely of international students who came to the United States on student or exchange visas; the immigrant ESL population remained relatively small until the late 1960s and early 1970s.

One of the reasons that relatively few immigrant ESL students had made their way into higher education was the admission requirements. Immigrant ESL students, because they were residents of the United States rather than "international" or "foreign" students, were expected to meet the same admission criteria as other U.S. students who were native English speakers. However, immigrant ESL students were often unsuccessful in gaining admission because few elementary and secondary schools were able to provide adequate linguistic support for them to succeed academically. Furthermore, as Guadalupe Valdés and Richard A. Figueroa have shown in *Bilingualism and Testing: A Special Case of Bias*, standardized tests, which are often designed only with monolingual speakers of English in mind, tend to disadvantage bilingual minority students. (For further discussion of how writing exams may disadvantage second language writers, see Benesch; Johns "Interpreting.")

In contrast, most international students, who went through different application processes, did not face this particular institutional barrier. Before English language proficiency tests such as the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP) and the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) were developed in the 1960s, institutions did not have adequate means of assessing students' English language proficiency prior to their arrival in the United States. As Steven G. Darian, citing Edward Cieslak, wrote:

In a 1952 survey of 257 foreign students, Cieslak reports that under half (47 per cent) had to submit evidence of English proficiency prior to admission. Most frequently the evidence of proficiency consisted of statements by consular officials, cultural attachés, English teachers overseas, or an officer from a

school the student attended. The second most used evidence was a statement that English had been studied in secondary school. Twenty-three percent of the foreign students surveyed listed screening of English by individuals who had returned home from the United States. Thirty-five percent stated that no proficiency in English was required. (107-8)

Although standardized college admission tests had been around since the beginning of the twentieth century, institutions were not able to use them as part of the admission requirement for international students because these tests were not readily available outside North America. Instead, international students were required to demonstrate their English language proficiency by successfully completing coursework in intensive English programs or, since the 1960s, by taking English language proficiency tests for nonnative speakers such as MTELP and TOEFL that were administered in various parts of the world (Spolsky).

Even when immigrant ESL students made it into college, institutional responses to their unique needs were negligible because their presence was often not officially recognized by institutions of higher education. Immigrant ESL students were virtually invisible to administrators—though certainly not to teachers who encountered them in the classroom. As Linda Harklau, Meryl Siegal, and Kay M. Losey have pointed out, institutions have not typically collected records of students' linguistic backgrounds ("Linguistically" 2). Although some attempts to adjust existing ESL or basic writing courses to the needs of immigrant ESL students were made locally, in most cases these efforts were left to the individual teacher's discretion. All in all, the immigrant ESL student population did not reach a critical mass until the 1970s, and composition specialists and second language specialists in general were slow to respond to Slager's early call for specialized materials and courses for immigrant ESL students.

Open Admissions and the Rise of Basic Writing

One of the most important forces for institutional change came around 1970 with the advent of the open-admissions policy that took effect at many urban institutions. Open admissions brought an influx of students who had traditionally been excluded from higher education, including a large number of citizens and permanent residents of the United States who spoke languages other than English at home. The most widely publicized and well-documented case of open admissions took place in the spring of 1970 at the City University of New York (CUNY).

Although the majority of the open-admissions students at CUNY

during the first few years were U.S. citizens of European descent, there also was a growing number of “ethnic minorities,” many of whom were speakers of so-called standard English as a second dialect (SESD) as well as English as a second language (Cross). The open-admissions students also included a large number of “foreign-born” students. By 1980, at least 21.4% of newly entering students and 18.5% of transfer students at CUNY were born outside the United States (City University of New York). Referring to the diversity of the student population, Anne Folger Decker, Ruth Jody, and Felicia Brings, in *A Handbook on Open Admissions*, characterized CUNY as “a funnel into which people of all classes, races, religions, nationalities, and experiences were poured and out of which ‘college students’ emerged” (10).

The influx of students from a wide variety of backgrounds prompted some important institutional changes because it became clear to many that existing college curricula, which had traditionally served native speakers of English from relatively homogeneous upbringings, were not able to provide instructional support appropriate for the open-admissions students. The difficulties faced by open-admissions students were multiple—including cultural differences as well as a fundamental lack of preparation in math and English, especially reading and writing. Many institutions across the nation followed CUNY’s lead in developing support programs for the new population of college students. By 1974, 71% of all accredited colleges and universities in the United States had or were in the process of creating a basic skills program (Smith et al., cited in Lunsford *Historical* 45). In a survey of 58 U.S. colleges, Andrea Lunsford also found that 90% of these institutions “either already had or were planning to institute remedial English programs for their students” (cited in Lunsford *Historical* 45).

At CUNY, the differing needs of ESL students were recognized from the outset, and separate tracks of basic skills courses for basic writers and ESL students were created. Open-admissions students were generally categorized into “foreign-born” students—including recent immigrants and international students—and “native-born” U.S. students, some of whom also might have been second language writers. For instance, Hunter College, one of CUNY’s four-year institutions, created “a parallel...sequence of courses” (Shaughnessy “Introduction” 3) “to help the [ESL] student acquire greater facility in written and spoken English” (Lavin, Alba, and Silberstein 261). Decker, Jody, and Brings also reported: “The English department [at Hunter College]...proposed that reading and writing be dealt with separately and that writing remediation be further specialized into non-ESL and ESL programs” (95). Additional support for ESL students was provided through tutoring programs, although they were not originally intended for ESL writers (88).

Efforts were also made to distinguish ESL students from basic

writers through placement exams. Hunter College administered tests “in English structure and mechanics, reading comprehension, and second-language problems, as well as an essay exam to be scored by the English faculty” (Decker, Jody, and Brings 54). While the testing procedure was generally effective, it was time consuming for faculty members in the English department, and attempts were made to simplify it. As Decker, Jody, and Brings wrote:

In the summer of 1972...the English department tried eliminating the essay for these students in order to shorten the testing time and to see if placements could be made solely on the basis of an objective test. The department found that the objective test was fine for gross sorting—“needs remediation” or “does not”—but only a writing sample can indicate the fine distinctions between levels of remediation or the need for ESL (English as a Second Language) placement. In fact, the objective test originally adopted to select for ESL problems could not discriminate ESL from among a variety of other nonstandard English problems such as dialect and black English; when used without a writing sample, the test often indicated ESL placement for students who spoke only English. (56-57)

Realizing the complexity of identifying students who needed ESL support, Hunter College resolved to use multiple testing instruments, including an essay and the second language test as well as “objective” tests in reading, written English, and mathematics (Decker, Jody, and Brings 57).

CUNY’s effort to distinguish basic writers from ESL students systematically and to provide separate instruction was an exception rather than the rule. At many other institutions, where the number of ESL students was relatively small or the commitment to providing instruction in basic skills was not as strong, resources were not allocated to develop separate programs for basic writers and ESL writers. In those situations, ESL students were often placed with native English-speaking students into basic writing courses or non-ESL sections of composition courses. For example, James R. Nattinger wrote in 1978 that “Portland State University, like any public urban university, has many second dialect and second language speakers, and like most, assigns these students to composition classes without regard for linguistic background” (79). In an article published in the 1987 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, Jean Sanborn also wrote: “At many colleges, advanced English as a Second Language students enroll in regular basic writing courses or visit the Writing Center, particularly at small schools like Colby College that do not have an ESL program or faculty trained in ESL” (60).

Although some composition teachers with additional expertise in second language teaching argued that basic writers and ESL writers can profitably be taught together (Roy "Alliance"; "ESL"), the vast majority of composition teachers continued to be unprepared to work with ESL writers in their classrooms. For this reason, the placement of basic writers and ESL writers in the same class was considered inappropriate by many second language specialists, who argued for separate courses for ESL writers on the basis of linguistic differences.⁴ For example, James Nattinger argued that basic writing courses may be appropriate for speakers of so-called "Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD)" students but not for ESL writers "who...should study English composition apart, with a teacher trained in ESL methods" (79). In "ESL/Remedial English: Are They Different?" Sandra Lee McKay also warned that placing basic and ESL writers together to preserve financial resources without consideration for the special needs of ESL students was unwise.

ESL Issues in the Work of Mina Shaughnessy

Partly due to second language specialists' arguments for separate courses as well as the institutional separation at influential programs such as CUNY's, the field of basic writing did not fully integrate issues related to ESL writers within its scope. Although there were some notable exceptions (e.g., Lay "Chinese"; Rizzo and Villafane; Davidson; Bruder and Furey), the place of ESL issues in the field of basic writing in the 1970s was at best marginal. Perhaps one of the best ways to understand the relationship between ESL writing and basic writing is to examine how basic writing and writers have been defined by prominent figures in the field. In this section, I want to focus on the definitions of basic writing and writers by Mina P. Shaughnessy (1924-1978), undoubtedly one of the most influential leaders — both intellectually and morally — in the development of the field of basic writing in the 1970s. In a series of highly influential publications, she called for an increased attention to the writing needs of open-admissions students, thus contributing to the emergence of basic writing as a respectable subfield of composition studies.

Although Shaughnessy was genuinely committed to helping all open-admissions students and was also aware of the presence of ESL students, the place of ESL writing issues in her view of basic writing was rather tenuous. In "Basic Writing," a 31-page bibliographic essay, for instance, reference to ESL appears in only one paragraph. Her focus in this brief paragraph is not so much on the needs of ESL writers in basic writing classrooms but on the relevance of ESL pedagogy to basic writing. Shaughnessy seems to include immigrant ESL writers in her definition of basic writers when she refers to students who "have

come from families and neighborhoods where people speak other languages" (139). Later in the same essay, however, she states: "Because of the *quasi-foreign nature* of the difficulties basic writing students have with formal English, many of the techniques developed in foreign-language teaching seem to be applicable to basic writing" (162; emphasis added). The use of the prefix "quasi-" suggests that basic writers' difficulties are not of "foreign" nature. That is, the definition of basic writers implicit in this sentence is distinct from ESL students who came from other countries, although it may include speakers of a "contact variety" of English (Valdés 103)—i.e., native speakers of non-dominant varieties of English whose speech and writing may exhibit linguistic features that resemble those of ESL writers.

That Shaughnessy was concerned almost exclusively with native-born U.S. citizens is also apparent in *Errors and Expectations*. In her introduction, Shaughnessy classified open-admissions students into three types, including: "(1) those who met the traditional requirements for college work"; "(2) those who had survived their secondary schooling but not thrived on it, whose reading was seldom voluntary and whose writing reflected a flat competence"; and "(3) those who had been left so far behind the others in their formal education that they appeared to have little chance of catching up" (2). Describing the third group of students, whom she characterized as "the true outsiders" (2), she wrote that their "difficulties with the written language" made them seem "as if they had come from a different country" (2; emphasis added), implying that they are not actually from other countries. Later, she noted that the student population she considers in *Errors and Expectations* is, for the most part, those who are "native to the United States, where they have had from twelve to thirteen years of public schooling, mostly in New York City" (7).

Although ESL was not Shaughnessy's utmost concern, she was not oblivious to the presence of ESL writers, either. In fact, her editorial in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* (1975) refers to the presence of "foreign-born students, who make up about 10 percent of each freshman class" at City College ("Introduction" 3). However, she also recognized that "native-born" basic writers and "foreign-born" ESL students had differing needs, as she wrote in *Errors and Expectations*:

The native-born students differ from the second-language students in significant ways: they [native-born students] have usually experienced little or no success with written English in school, which is often not so of foreign-born students in relation to their native languages; they have not identified the real reason for their lack of success in writing, having usually perceived themselves (and having been perceived by their

teachers as well) as native speakers of English who for some reason use “bad” English; and...they have been functioning in English for years, understanding the English of people in their communities and being understood by them in the full range of situations that give rise to speech, and managing...to hold jobs, get diplomas, and talk with a variety of “outsiders.” (92)

In short, Shaughnessy considered basic writing to be a site of institutional practices that was distinct from ESL in terms of the population served. The needs of foreign-born ESL students with limited experience in English-speaking environments were to be addressed separately in courses that were specifically designed to prepare ESL students for work in required composition courses.⁵

ESL Issues in the *Journal of Basic Writing*

Although the field of basic writing has focused its attention on the needs of native-born students for the most part, basic writing specialists, who were motivated by their concern for all open-admissions students, did not ignore ESL students entirely. In fact, the *Journal of Basic Writing*, established in 1975 by Shaughnessy and her colleagues at City College of New York, CUNY, provided a site of interaction between basic writing and ESL writing teachers and researchers; during the first few years, *JBW* included several articles related to ESL issues. The first issue of the journal included two such articles (Lay “Chinese”; Rizzo and Villafane). In 1977, an article by David M. Davidson considered the application of sentence combining in an ESL writing program, and, in 1979, Mary Newton Bruder and Patricia R. Furey’s article “The Writing Segment of an Intensive Program for Students of English as a Second Language” also appeared. Shortly after Shaughnessy’s death in 1978, however, ESL issues disappeared from the pages of *JBW* for several years.

The status of ESL issues in *JBW* changed again in the latter half of the 1980s, when Lynn Quitman Troyka became the editor. Troyka, who served between 1986 and 1988, made several important institutional changes that contributed significantly to the increase of ESL discussions in *JBW*. First, she helped to broaden the scope of the journal. The new editorial policy, which was announced in the 1985 issue, reflected her inclusive definition of basic writers:

The term “basic writer” is used with wide diversity today, in some cases referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and in other cases referring to a student whose academic writing is

fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population to which they are referring. (Call for Articles)

Whereas previous issues of *JBW* called for articles on specific topics, the new policy stated that "Authors need not limit themselves to topics previously announced for the *JBW* because issues will no longer be devoted to single topics" (Call for Articles). In addition, the call for articles included the term "English as a second language" in the list of possible topics.

The second change Troyka introduced was to make *JBW* a refereed journal. While the direct impact of the blind-review system on the scope of *JBW* is difficult to assess, it is worth noting that the introduction of the system was followed by a substantial increase in the number of ESL-related articles. In fact, during Troyka's three-year tenure as editor, *JBW* published at least six articles that dealt with issues related to ESL writing (i.e., Herendeen; Jie and Lederman; Johns "ESL"; Liebman; Purves; Sanborn).⁶ In other words, *JBW* published more articles on ESL during the three years under Troyka's editorship than it had in the first eleven years of its existence.

As the visibility of ESL-related articles in the *Journal of Basic Writing* increased in the mid 1980s, ESL issues finally came to be recognized as a legitimate concern for basic writing specialists. In an update to Shaughnessy's bibliographical essay on basic writing, Andrea Lunsford mentioned the changing definition of basic writing:

Defining the population of student writers we refer to as "basic" also presents difficult problems, which were first clearly elucidated in Shaughnessy's work in the sources she cites in the preceding essay in this book.... The growing foreign student population and the even faster growing number of students whose native language is not English greatly complicate definitions both of basic writing and of literacy. As Richard Lanham of UCLA notes, this shift in population will surely present one of the greatest challenges our discipline has had to face. ("Update" 211-12)

Later in the same essay, Lunsford referred to articles on language transfer (Lay "Chinese"; Rizzo and Villafane) and on the mixed placement of ESL students and basic writers (Nattinger; Roy "Alliance").

After Troyka stepped down as editor and Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller took over as co-editors in 1989, submissions to *JBW* on issues related to ESL did not slow down, and names of authors who were also well-known in second language studies frequently appeared in the journal. In 1989, two articles addressed ESL issues in significant

ways. The first one was “The Other Side of the Looking Glass” by Carlos Yorio and the second, “The Need for Conceptualizing at All Levels of Writing Instruction” by Marilyn Sternglass. In the following year, the journal published four ESL-related articles, including “Promoting Literacy Through Literature: Reading and Writing in ESL Composition” by Jacqueline Costello; “The Rhetoric/Syntax Split: Designing a Curriculum for ESL Students” by Barbara Kroll; “Writing: A Holistic or Atomistic Entity?” by Kyle Perkins and Sheila R. Brutten; and “Through Students’ Eyes: The Experiences of Three ESL Writers” by Vivian Zamel.

Submissions of ESL-related articles were so numerous that, in a 1990 *JBW* editorial (vol. 9, no. 2), Bernhardt and Miller lamented that “...there continues to be at least one area in which we have an *overabundance* of submissions (ESL) and another in which there is virtually none (computers in basic writing)” (2; emphasis added). Although no article on ESL was published in 1991, in 1992 three articles related to ESL appeared in the journal (Benson, Deming, Denzer, and Valeri-Gold; Patthey-Chavez and Gergen; Lay “Learning”).

The intensity of interest in ESL issues prompted CUNY to host a special conference on ESL and, in 1991, to establish *College ESL*, a journal which identified itself as “a unique forum for exploring questions and concerns regarding the education of English as a second language (ESL) students, specifically urban immigrant and refugee adults in college and pre-college settings” (*College ESL* Editorial Policy). Anticipating the creation of a new journal focusing on ESL issues, Bernhardt and Miller made the following announcement in their 1990 *JBW* editorial (vol. 9, no. 1):

Topics related to the teaching of writing to non-native speakers of English appear to be particularly popular, so much so that we welcome the advent of a new journal – also published by The City University of New York – focused on this area. An announcement and call for papers for *College ESL* appears elsewhere in this issue. (1)

The creation of *College ESL* was a significant step in the history of ESL because it marked the recognition of the increase of immigrant and refugee students in higher education during the 1980s and the 1990s. As Gay Brookes, editor of *College ESL*, wrote in the inaugural issue of the journal:

Our experience is defined in part by our ESL students – college-age and adult, living in urban centers, by and large permanent residents of the United States who have come as immigrants and refugees. As is true in many urban colleges across the country, ESL students are growing in numbers in the City

University of New York. Nearly one of every two students in CUNY speaks English as a second language. They differ in many ways from foreign students who come for education only and plan to return to their countries, and who are traditionally educated and middle-class. Most significantly, the ESL population is vastly heterogeneous. They have in common that English is not their first language, but that may be all. They form a common part of the overall student body, and teaching them, responding to their educational needs, is complex.

We wanted a journal to talk about these students in the classroom, the university, the workplace, society, and the family and community, about how we teach them and meet their educational needs and about a host of issues related to them and their language development. (Brookes i)

The establishment of *College ESL*, however, may also have reinforced the disciplinary division of labor between composition studies and second language studies—just as the creation of the TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) organization did in the 1960s (see Matsuda “Composition”). In effect, it institutionalized the separation of ESL and basic writing as academic specialties. The immediate impact of the division was apparent in the changes in *JBW*’s acceptance patterns; the number of ESL-related articles published in *JBW* dropped noticeably after 1992. During the remainder of Bernhardt and Miller’s tenure as editors, the journal published only two articles that focused on ESL issues (i.e., Cochran; Severino).

ESL concerns were not completely removed from the scope of *JBW*, however, especially because Trudy Smoke of Hunter College, who is also well known for her work in ESL (see, e.g., Smoke *Adult ESL*), became a co-editor in 1995—first with Karen Greenberg (1995-1996) and then with George Otte (1996-2002). In addition, Tony Silva, a second language writing specialist and co-editor of the *Journal of Second Language Writing*, joined the editorial advisory board in the same year. Under the editorship of Smoke and Otte, a few articles addressed ESL issues in a central way (e.g., Clark and Haviland; Mlynarczyk).

With the fall 2001 issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, Trudy Smoke stepped down as editor and was replaced by Bonne August, Chair of the English Department of Kingsborough Community College. At about the same time, another change occurred that prompted a shift in *JBW*’s editorial policy; the editors’ column for spring 2002 announced that *College ESL* would soon cease publication:

We have indeed considered and published ESL-focused work in the past (and “English as a second language” is indeed an

interest mentioned in our call for articles), but now we found ourselves wanting to highlight and not just acknowledge this interest. . . . [W]e want to stress our interest in accounts of ESL research and instruction that seem especially relevant to work in BW because of the overlap and interface between the fields, ever less distinct, ever more embroiled with the difficulties of definition and (often related) vulnerabilities of their special populations. (Otte and August 1)

The spring 2002 issue of *JBW* included two articles that focused primarily on ESL students (Mlynarczyk and Babbitt; Pally, Katznelson, Perpignan, and Rubin). The fall 2002 issue included another article centered on concerns of second language writers (Williams).

Beginning with the spring 2003 issue, Rebecca Mlynarczyk, Co-Director of the ESL Program at Kingsborough Community College and a frequent writer about ESL issues, became co-editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing*. In addition, several ESL specialists joined *JBW*'s editorial board: Gay Brookes, Martha Clark Cummings, Elizabeth Rorschach, Ruth Spack, and Vivian Zamel. While the effects of recent changes in the editorial policy of the *Journal of Basic Writing* remain to be seen, it seems significant that the journal has reemphasized its recognition of the need to consider issues related to second language writers in basic writing programs as well as the interdisciplinary relationship between basic writing and ESL.

ESL Within the Field of Basic Writing

A disciplinary divide between the fields of basic writing and ESL still seems to prevail in the general conception of basic writers. By the mid 1990s, the field of basic writing had come to focus almost exclusively on basic writers who were native speakers of English, although second language writers continued to be present in many basic writing courses. In a 1995 article published in *JBW*, J. Milton Clark and Carol Peterson Haviland pointed out the limitation of inclusiveness in basic writing classes for ESL writers:

As we considered our philosophical and theoretical commitments to inclusiveness and collaboration, we began to recognize how limited that inclusiveness and collaboration was, particularly with the non-native speakers we have in our fairly typical Southern California basic writing classes: a mix of white, African American, Latino, Asian, and American Indian native speakers as well as Latino and Asian non-native speakers who have scored in the lower half on California State University's English Placement Test and are enrolled for one, two, or three

quarters of prefreshman composition instruction. (58)

Some basic writing specialists continued to acknowledge the presence of ESL writers in basic writing programs. In her discussion of basic writing in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition* (1996), Troyka writes: "For a small but rapidly growing subset of BW [Basic Writing] students, English is not their first language. Some, though not all, have completed courses in English as a second language (ESL) by the time they take BW" (69). In contrast, Bill Bolin's essay on "basic writing/writers" published in *Keywords in Composition Studies* (1996) makes no mention of the presence of ESL writers in the basic writing classroom at many institutions. While Paul Heilker and Peter Vandenberg, the editors of *Keywords*, provide a disclaimer that essays in this volume do not "attempt to capture the established knowledge of a unified discipline," the fact that Bolin did not discuss the presence of ESL writers in a project that sought to explore "the multiple layers of meaning inhabiting" the term (Heilker and Vandenberg 1) seems to suggest that ESL is often overlooked as a significant constituent in basic writing classrooms. The omission of ESL from this critical examination of key terms in composition studies has an important implication because, as Heilker and Vandenberg suggest, "in the very process of rendering the fluid, actively contested meanings of these terms we [contributors to the volume] risk reifying them" (4-5).

Towards a More Inclusive Definition of Basic Writing

As I have tried to show, ESL writers, despite their significant presence in basic writing classrooms, have remained peripheral in the disciplinary practices and academic scholarship of basic writing during the last four decades. In the formative years of basic writing, certain institutions such as Hunter College, where the particular institutional arrangement made the separation between ESL and basic writing appropriate as well as feasible, influenced the view of basic writing as distinct from the field of ESL in the population served. Although the *Journal of Basic Writing* provided a viable forum for the discussion of ESL issues for a while, the creation of *College ESL*, a separate forum for the discussion of second language issues, was followed by a decline in the number of ESL-related articles in *JBW*. While there continue to be some basic writing specialists who acknowledge the presence of ESL writers, the dominant conception of basic writers in the professional literature does not seem adequately to reflect the presence of ESL writers.

It would have been more appropriate for basic writing to focus exclusively on the needs of native English speakers if native English-speaking basic writers and ESL writers could be identified clearly and

accurately *and* if all institutions were able to offer appropriate placement options for all types of writers.⁷ Unfortunately, neither is the case at the present time. The distinction between basic writers and second language writers is becoming increasingly untenable because of the increasing diversity among second language writers and basic writers. Furthermore, creating all possible placement options is often not feasible in today's institutional and political climate, in which many institutions are seeking ways to preserve resources by eliminating what are perceived as remedial programs and by consolidating related programs (Smoke "Instructional"). In order to address the needs of ESL writers who will continue to be enrolled in basic writing courses, all basic writing teachers—or, better yet, all writing teachers—need to be prepared to work with ESL writers.

It is important to stress the need for additional professional preparation for all writing teachers who are likely to encounter ESL writers in their classrooms at some point in their careers. Yet, it would not be fair to place the responsibility solely on individual writing teachers because, as I have tried to demonstrate, the lack of attention to ESL writers in basic writing is more systemic in nature. Underlying the marginalization of ESL writers in the field of basic writing—as well as in composition studies in general—is the persistence of the disciplinary division of labor as a metaphor in conceptualizing the interdisciplinary relationship between composition studies and second language studies. Underlying the disciplinary division of labor is the notion that faculty in composition studies work with native English speakers and those in TESOL with nonnative speakers—a notion that came into being during the formative years of composition studies and TESOL and continued to be influential until fairly recently (Matsuda "Composition"; "Situating").

In order to address the needs of ESL writers in basic writing classrooms, then, it is important to recognize the problem of the disciplinary division and make conscious efforts to include ESL issues in the discussion of basic writers and basic writing, as Linda Adler-Kassner and Gregory Glau did when they made the effort to include a section on "Teaching English as a Second Language" in *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Basic Writing*. In order to develop scholarship on ESL writers and writing that is relevant to basic writing teachers, it is important to increase interdisciplinary cooperation between basic writing specialists and second language specialists.⁸ As we continue to use the term "basic writing," we must also constantly remind ourselves of the practical difficulty and ethical complexity of defining basic writers, as many basic writing specialists have suggested (see, e.g., Hull, Rose, Fraser, and Castellano; Troyka "Defining"). Given the increasing diversity of students who come to basic writing classrooms, it is no longer possible to define basic writers in terms of abstract and ulti-

mately unreliable criteria such as their writing placement test scores, language backgrounds, or immigration status. Rather, the general definition of basic writers needs to include all students who are subject to the disciplinary and pedagogical practices of basic writing.

Notes

1. Linda Harklau provides a succinct review of research on Generation 1.5 students in "Changing Currents in Second Language Writing Research: A Colloquium" (Matsuda, Canagarajah, Harklau, Hyland, and Warschauer 153-56).

2. With the recognition of the presence of Generation 1.5 students, many ESL writing programs are beginning to make the necessary adjustments to accommodate all types of ESL writers. For a discussion of how ESL specialists have begun to address the needs of Generation 1.5 ESL writers, see Harklau, Losey, and Siegal.

3. The behavioral view of language learning as habit formation and the contrastive view of the problem of language learning as negative transfer have been discredited and replaced by other theories of second language acquisition. For an overview, see Silva, Leki, and Carson.

4. See Matsuda ("Composition") for a review of similar arguments that were raised in the 1950s and the 1960s.

5. In arguing that Shaughnessy's intention was not to address the needs of ESL students, I do not intend to deny the usefulness or relevance of her work for ESL writers. Sandra Lee McKay, in her review of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*, points out that "many of the errors delineated by Shaughnessy are prevalent in the essays of ESL students" (McKay "Errors" 416). McKay also argues that Shaughnessy's book is "quite relevant to ESL" because both basic writing teachers and ESL teachers are concerned about "the growth of the student and the need for accuracy in language use" (McKay 417). Shaughnessy and others were also aware of the growing body of knowledge in second language studies and sought to apply insights from ESL pedagogy in order to help native English-speaking basic writers (Matsuda and Jablonski).

6. I have intentionally omitted "Krashen's Second-Language Acquisition Theory and the Teaching of Edited American English" by Elizabeth Tricomi from consideration because her article is concerned with the application of Krashen's work to the teaching of native English-

speaking basic writers and has little to do with ESL writers.

7. For a discussion of various placement options for ESL writers, see Silva "Examination"; Matsuda and Silva.

8. Opportunities for such interdisciplinary cooperation are increasing slowly but steadily. At the 2004 meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, for example, the Special Interest Group on Second Language Writing, organized by Kevin Eric De Pew and Susan K. Miller, will focus on the relationship between ESL writing and basic writing.

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