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BUREAUCRACY AND BASIC WRITING PROGRAMS; OR, FALLOUT FROM THE JAN KEMP TRIAL

Literacy programs generally emerge from political clashes between the haves and the have nots, between those who press for change and those who defend the status quo, or between those who wish to open education to the masses and those who promote education for the elite. Basic writing programs are no exception. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, minority groups were exerting tremendous pressure on institutions of higher education to recruit more minority students. Against this force were traditional academicians concerned that a large influx of nontraditional students would lower standards and dilute the quality of a college education. Basic writing programs were developed for the most part to reduce the strife between such factions.

Even though basic writing programs have helped many students succeed in college, vestiges of the politics that led to the creation of these programs remain. Basic writing programs are hit with many obstacles. They often continue to be viewed as political liabilities, being considered the focus of political pressure from the federal government and civil rights groups and a threat to the "character" or "image" of particular institutions. In general, literacy programs tend to be viewed as temporary solutions to transient problems (see Rose 355-59). Many politicians and academic administrators seem anxiously to await the day that "remedial" programs can be phased out.

Since politics is an inevitable feature of basic writing programs, those of us who teach in them need to understand the "nature of the beast."

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Unfortunately little has been written on the kinds of political issues that confront basic writing programs. What is needed especially is a better understanding of how the *structure* of a literacy program affects its political life. If a basic writing program is administratively a part of some larger academic unit, such as a Department of English or a College of Education, does it gain security or does it become a purgatory for graduate teaching assistants, instructors, and inexperienced assistant professors? If a basic writing program is a free standing unit, does it gain independence and respect or is it more vulnerable?

Such issues certainly need to be explored in more depth. This paper will analyze how higher education in Georgia reacted to the Jan Kemp trial, an event which, I believe, can illustrate paradigmatically the kinds of political issues that arise in basic writing programs that are administratively separate from a traditional academic department or college.

THE TRIAL

In the early 1970s, the Board of Regents (the governing body of higher education in Georgia) experimented with several approaches to raising the academic competence of nontraditional students. After the Regents found that summer enrichment programs and other short-term interventions were generally ineffective, they created Developmental Studies, a statewide program to provide extensive instruction in composition, reading, and mathematics. Each institution of higher education was charged with the task of a separate division, apart from traditional academic units, that would be responsible for providing "remedial" instruction before students were admitted to core academic classes. From the beginning, the Board of Regents established certain statewide regulations for the programs. Most of these related either to placement or exit standards.

It was in the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia that Jan Kemp began to teach composition during the late 1970s. In 1982, she was dismissed, ostensibly because she was argumentative with her superiors. Kemp then filed a lawsuit, charging that she was terminated because she had complained about the preferential treatment of athletes.

The widely publicized trial revealed numerous violations of state policy, professional ethics, and common sense. About twenty-five percent of the students in the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia, a program funded largely through the athletic foundation, were athletes. It might be predicted that this seemingly incestuous structure could lead to abuse. It did. For example, one of the existing state policies restricted Developmental Studies students to four attempts to pass courses in a particular area—composition, reading, or mathematics. The record shows that athletes at the University of Georgia were sometimes allowed five or six attempts, apparently for no reason other than they could continue to be eligible to play football.

The problems, however, extended beyond this vested financial agreement. Virginia Trotter, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, went as far as to change the grades of six football players who were then enrolled in Developmental Studies classes, so that they would be eligible to play in the Sugar Bowl. She first discussed the matter with Fred Davison, President of the University, and she felt that she had acted with his implicit approval.

The improprieties revealed during the Kemp trial were many and varied. It ended in February, 1986, as sensationally as it had begun. Kemp won reinstatement to the University of Georgia and a settlement of 2.5 million dollars. To avoid appeals, she later settled for a lesser amount, reportedly about one million dollars.

THE AUDIT

As a result of the trial, it became clear that problems existed within and, more importantly, *outside* the Developmental Studies Program at the University of Georgia, and changes were made. Fred Davison, the President, resigned; Virginia Trotter, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and LeRoy Ervin, the Director of Developmental Studies, were both reassigned. But the repercussions extended far beyond the University of Georgia campus.

Concerned that the kind of violations revealed during the Kemp trial might be widespread, the Board of Regents ordered an audit of every Developmental Studies Program in the state. During the first phase of the audit, an investigative team interviewed the director of each program, faculty, athletic counselors, the Vice-President for Academic Affairs, and other institutional officials. During the second phase, a team of accountants reviewed student records for a three-year period (1982-83, 1983-84, and 1984-85). Week after week, the state's newspapers carried stories about violations of state policy. All institutions had at least a handful of violations; some were reported to have violations in the hundreds. But the story presented by the press seems far less serious once one reads the actual reports and, more importantly, each institution's response to the reports. Indeed, only five or six institutions—according to the Board of Regent's own reports—were considered "not in general compliance" with state regulations.

Those institutions "not in general compliance" were not cited for the kind of corruption that had occurred at the University of Georgia. A couple of the institutions had an excessive number of violations because their procedures for monitoring students were inadequate. For example, Columbus College, a small four-year institution judged "not in general compliance," did not have student records computerized and thus could not use computers to monitor students. It was cited for thirty-nine instances in which students did not take placement examinations, actually a rather minor violation (Columbus College Audit). Since students may be required to take as many as three entrance examinations (English, reading, mathematics), these violations could relate to as few as thirteen students over a three-year period. The college responded to the audit

by saying that they had asked the students to take the examinations, but some simply had not shown up. Because the institution could not monitor the students by computer, some slipped through. The institution felt that some of the other violations (thirty students were allowed more than "four attempts" to exit, and fourteen students were allowed to exit without meeting all the exit standards) were partially due to an institutional reorganization. The Director of the college's Developmental Studies Program had died during the period under audit. Columbus College certainly needed to modernize its record keeping, but the institution's violations hardly constituted a major scandal.

In reports on other institutions, it appears that the auditors incorrectly cited violations. For example, Kennesaw College was cited for fifty-two instances of students taking courses out of sequence (Kennesaw College Audit). The auditors assumed that English 098 was a prerequisite for English 099, but Kennesaw College's catalog clearly states that 099 is a prerequisite for 098.

Other apparent violations related to differences in interpretation of state policy. Bainbridge Junior College (BJC) was criticized for a violation in the intent of a policy that students enroll in Developmental Studies classes "during consecutive quarters of attendance and not enroll in credit courses instead of the required D[evelopmental] S[tudies] P[rogram] course(s)" (Bainbridge Junior College Audit). Bainbridge's President Mobley replied:

> We maintain that BJC is not in violation of Regents' policy concerning the *intent* mentioned by auditors. The historical record we have enclosed dates back to the draft document of the original academic committee . . . , which we believe was not interpreted correctly by the auditors. As a matter of record, the language of the intent was addressed specifically, reviewed by the original committee, recommended by the Deans, approved by the Advisory Council, and approved by the [Board of] Regents. (1)

Bainbridge's interpretation certainly seems justified, since it was approved up the chain of command. In fact, it could be argued that the college's interpretation is more beneficial to students. When students are allowed to take some credit courses as they meet their Developmental Studies requirements, the students generally feel more connected to the college or university and more positive about their progress.

The reluctance of the auditors to allow interpretations (or institutional reformulations) of state policy to benefit students was most evident in the audit of Albany State College. The auditors cited the institution for forty-eight instances of allowing students more than four attempts to complete their Developmental Studies course work. Albany State's President Black responded:

> The institution's practice has been that of allowing students more than four attempts only when the students have made significant progress in their course work and the instructor of record feels the student's progress is significant enough to warrant an addi-

tional attempt. In the cases where these exceptions have been granted, the success rate of students is more than 85%. (2)

This kind of violation of policy can hardly be placed in the same class as allowing athletes an extra attempt or two so that they can remain eligible to play football.

Although the real story was not reported in the press, the audits verified that the kind of corruption that Kemp denounced at the University of Georgia was not statewide. All but five or six of the state's thirty-four institutions were (in the auditor's own words) "in general compliance." Given the ambiguous quality of the audits, it is questionable that even five or six institutions were truly "not in general compliance."

NEW REGULATIONS

Even though the auditor's reports indicated that the events that led to the Kemp trial were unique to a specific period of a particular administration at the University of Georgia, the Board of Regents moved to establish additional policies to regulate Developmental Studies Programs. When a draft of the new policies appeared on July 11, 1986, each institution was allowed to respond. The institutions complained that some of the policies would not work on their campus, that some policies restricted the professional role of the faculty, and that other policies placed students in Catch-22 snafu's. Personnel at the Board of Regents reviewed the responses and made some revisions, but the majority of the new policies stood. The Board of Regents felt that too many of the institutions' complaints about new policies argued against each other and, therefore, could not be resolved. The Board did not choose another interpretation. If the responses from the state's thirty-four institutions argued against each other, then perhaps these new policies were too restrictive to work on all campuses. Perhaps, the Board of Regents was trying to solve, with statewide policies, problems indigenous to one or two institutions.

With the new regulations, Georgia's Developmental Studies Programs were faced with, by my count, thirteen new points of policy. Furthermore, the programs were given less than a quarter to implement them. And few of the policies seemed either necessary or constructive.

I will cite one example in detail. Before the Kemp trial, the Board of Regents had already established a "thirty-hour" rule. Students were required to complete all of their Developmental Studies courses before they accumulated thirty hours of coursework, and advisors were given the responsibility of seeing that the rule was followed. The auditors discovered that some students were registering for Developmental Studies courses along with credit courses to appease their advisors. The students then would drop their Developmental Studies courses and remain in Political Science, Sociology, or History. Some students, thus, were clearly circumventing the system. But how many? By my count, about two per institution during the three-year period under audit. Most of these were concentrated at institutions that had poor record-keeping procedures. It was not so much that the "thirty-hour" rule was not working as it was that some institutions needed to monitor the rule more closely.

Yet, the Board of Regents created two new policies to plug a fairly minor loophole in the "thirty-hour" rule. One new policy requires students to register for their Developmental Studies requirements before they register for core curriculum courses. The other new policy keeps students from dropping those Developmental Studies courses for which they have registered:

> Students enrolled in both Developmental Studies and credit courses may not withdraw from Developmental Studies courses unless they also withdraw from credit courses. (Developmental Studies Procedures)

Thus, students who chose to withdraw from Developmental Studies courses (or are withdrawn by their instructor because of violations of attendance policy) are to be withdrawn from all other courses in which they are currently enrolled.

These new policies may seem harmless enough on the surface, but they could have disastrous effects for students. For example, if a student enrolled in a Developmental Studies composition class and a core curriculum history class violates the attendance policy of the former, then he or she will be dropped from both classes. If the student is dropped after mid-term, that student will receive a "Withdrawn Failing" for the history class, which is averaged into the GPA as an "F". For a marginal student (who may not have the academic resources to recover from an "F"), a single violation of an attendance policy may lead to probation or expulsion from the university.

Thus, the Board of Regents added two new policies that are at best superfluous and at worst counterproductive. Similarly, it is difficult to determine what bit of evidence presented at the Kemp trial or what data collected in the audit of Developmental Studies Programs was used to justify the other new policies.

The Tower Commission Report on the Iran scandal offers an interesting contrast. The Tower Report attempted to determine what went wrong with the National Security Council (NSC). The committee concluded that the Iran scandal developed because the leaders—not the policies—of the NSC were flawed. They recommended no changes in the structure of the NSC because this, they felt, would place counterproductive limits on the Presidency (94). A similar report could have been written about Georgia's Developmental Studies Programs. The Board of Regents could have concluded that the structure of Developmental Studies Programs was not flawed, for it was working at most institutions, but that the administrators at some institutions were flawed. They could have asked each institution to address the problems unique to that institution in a way that would work for that institution. Then, perhaps, problems could have been solved without new rules, without further restricting the academic freedom of faculty, and without making students feel like the system is "out to get them."

IMPLICATIONS

When we speak of the politics of basic writing programs, it is important to realize that the structure of the program will affect the kinds of political issues that come forth in and around that structure. When a basic writing program is established as part of a statewide program, as an independent division within the university structure, it may seem to gain some independence from literary critics or secondary educational specialists, but the basic writing program also will lose some independence to a state bureaucracy that will tend to view the programs as so many peas in a pod. In the aftermath of the Kemp trial, we can see that events in the University of Georgia's Developmental Studies Program seemed to affect how programs throughout the state were perceived. Once a crisis was perceived, real or not, the bureaucracy moved to establish statewide policies, as if each program at each institution was identical.

There are also inherent dangers in being ruled or directed by bureaucrats who have not, as Paulo Freire advocates, entered into a "communion" with those who need to be educated (47). The policies of high-level bureaucrats often have unforeseen ramifications for the curriculum. For example, some of the new policies established by the Board of Regents in Georgia have increased the importance of a statewide objective grammar test which students must pass to exit Developmental Studies. Thus, instructors are indirectly encouraged to spend more class time coaching students to pass a grammar test, which could, as George Hillocks' meta-analysis shows, have a negative effect on the quality of the students' writing (134-141, 225-227). As regulations proliferate, competent professionals can, in Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux's words, be reduced to "high-level clerks implementing the orders of others" (24). Developmental Studies specialists may be forced to follow policies that they have had little voice in formulating.

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