

3 Practices and Pedagogies

Basic writing began as an effort to give access to college writing to students who had not had access before, and early efforts grew out of the existing field of composition. The first BW teachers were, for the most part, people whose experience was in teaching college writing. Serving as both a threshold to as well as a proving ground for first-year composition, basic writing always had rich ways of mirroring aspects of the so-called mainstream. So it's important to see that such instruction began as something more like a branching tributary than an utterly new and distinct stream.

From the start, Mina Shaughnessy saw the task of “re-purposing” existing writing instruction as the fundamental charge for basic writing. She said as much in her introduction to the second issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing (JBW)*, the new journal created for the new field, a themed issue called simply “Courses”:

Indeed, what begins to appear to be the major “innovative” task in basic writing is to determine (1) what of the available knowledge about the teaching of writing can be put to use in basic writing and (2) how that knowledge and the methods it has generated can be adapted to the needs of basic writing students. (2–3)

This issue of *JBW* was built around extended course descriptions submitted by those teaching in the new trenches. Their courses (see Desy, Campbell and Miller, Ponsot, Mills, Petrie, and Pierog) were indeed constructed around full visions, not just particular methods; they covered everything from reasoning soundly to accessing feelings as well as thoughts. Shaughnessy found the most impressive thing about the course descriptions was their “diversity of purpose and method” (3). Looking at these descriptions over the stretch of decades is instruc-

tive, raising the question of how much writing instruction has really changed—or, for that matter, how much it should.

In many cases, early leaders of BW rooted their research in the classroom, advocating the “scholarship of teaching” before that became a buzz phrase designed to reanimate pedagogy in a host of fields. In the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, for instance, that is how Mina Shaughnessy cast the work of her coeditors, “who after several years of talking together about their experiences in the classroom decided to prepare short papers for their meetings so that their ideas might be more carefully explored. This first issue of the *Journal of Basic Writing* grows out of that exchange . . .” (3).

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* (1987), Stephen North points to Shaughnessy as the prime example of what he calls Practitioners, those identified primarily as teachers rather than researchers or theorists. North calls the body of knowledge generated by Practitioners “lore,” something distinct from research and scholarship, even when it appears as research or scholarship (22–24). Lore, according to North, is “the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned and taught” (22). A miscellaneous catch-all of “what works” rather than a unified codification, lore is important to Patricia Harkin for that very reason. In “The Postdisciplinary Politics of Lore” (1991), she shows how Shaughnessy, untrammelled by adherence to a particular method or theory, could bring sociological, psychological, and cognitive explanations to bear on the same passage of student writing. For Harkin, “lore,” especially as exemplified by Shaughnessy, can bridge disparate fields and suspend apparent oppositions, developing experiential explanations of instructional issues that would elude work constrained by a rigorous theory or method.

Harkin demonstrates this by countering John Rouse’s charge (in “The Politics of Composition” [1979]) that Shaughnessy misunderstood and misapplied the rules for linguistic socialization with the consequence that she was not only wrong in her thinking but also oppressive in her practice. Harkin’s analysis shows Rouse to be at least as afflicted by inconsistencies and extra-theoretical imperatives as he finds Shaughnessy to be. Ultimately, Harkin sees Rouse’s presumed rigor (which he thinks places his work on a different plane than Shaughnessy’s) as an instance of the academic fallacy Stanley Fish calls “theory hope,” the supposedly false belief that there is anything to jus-

tify practice besides contingent, context-bound preferences (Fish 355; Harkin 132–33).

These days, we needn't accept Fish's dismissal of theory to see it as scarcely less contingent than practice. Both seem operable more as fashions or trends than immutable rules or guidelines. Yet practice has had an oddly enduring impact in basic writing, confirming North's remarks on the durability of "lore," from which, he says, "nothing can ever be dropped" (24). Granted, perspectives on practice keep shifting—from an emphasis on sentence skills to one on cognitive development to one on discourse communities, from the preoccupation with the BW student as nontraditional or "other" to an insistence on that student's integration into the mainstream or an acceptance of the hybrid nature of academic communities. But the practices themselves seem to persist beneath the changed perspectives.

In this chapter, we review BW practices and pedagogies over the years by focusing on three pivotal points of concern: *error*, *assessment*, and *teaching*.

ERROR

What gave basic writing a focus at the outset was a strong sense of what BW students did—or did not do—as writers. And what primarily distinguished them from their peers was the preponderance of errors in their writing. Addressing those errors became the first order of business. That is why, with the proviso that basic writing was always about much more, the story of its practices has to begin with approaches to error.

The archives of the *Journal of Basic Writing* attest to this early focus on error. The first issue, published in 1975, bore the one-word theme "Error," and the third, from 1977, dealt with "Uses of Grammar." As Shaughnessy recounted in the Preface to *Errors and Expectations*, the crystallizing moment for her was when she sat alone in her office at City College and began to read the first set of papers from the students enrolled in the SEEK Program, her oft-quoted encounter with "writing [that] was so stunningly unskilled that I could not begin to define the task nor even sort out the difficulties" (vii). Of course, the work she was prefacing was compelling evidence that she had defined (and risen to) the task—and had defined it primarily in terms of an engagement with error. No one would ever again develop such a gift for "observ-

ing [students' errors] fruitfully" as Shaughnessy put it in introducing the first issue of *JBW*. But even such prodigious gifts of observation as Shaughnessy's do not necessarily translate into practice. Problems persist because they are not solved. Ultimately, *Errors and Expectations* gave hope, not solutions.

The explanatory power of that work notwithstanding, it has remarkably little to say about what to *do* about error—not understand or appreciate, not reason through, but *do*. For example, the book has one sustained exercise: fifteen pages devoted to what has come to be known as the “double-s rule,” a rule for avoiding subject-verb agreement problems. Basically, the idea is that, since nouns form the plural by adding an *s* and present-tense verbs in the third person show singularity the same way, adding an *s* to both (or to neither) is likely to be a problem. But the rule is naturally not without exceptions, so that “using the -s-form of the verb” is, for Shaughnessy, not one rule but many (given here as they are in her book but without the intervening discussion, duly numbered and uppercased just as they appear—as if the imperative form were not enough):

1. DO NOT USE THE -S-FORM WHEN A SUBJECT IS PLURAL.
2. DO NOT USE THE -S-FORM WHEN A SUBJECT IS *I* OR *YOU*.
3. DO NOT USE THE -S-FORM WHEN YOU ARE WRITING IN THE SIMPLE PAST TENSE.
4. DO NOT USE THE -S-FORM OF ANY VERB THAT FOLLOWS AN AUXILIARY VERB.
5. DO NOT USE THE -S-FORM OF THE VERB WITH THE INFINITIVE. (146–50)

These exceptions (significantly, all “shalt nots”) have their own exceptions. For instance, the one about the simple past tense notes the exception that “*was* is the only -s-verb in the past tense” (148). So what begins as a simple lesson for subject-verb agreement ultimately entails grammar lessons in number, person, and tense as well as in a variety of verbal forms (including irregular as well as infinitive and auxiliary forms).

Teaching Complication 1: The Need for Complexity

Typically, Shaughnessy is aware of the complexities she is opening up. She even resolves to make them a selling point, a difference in the way the basic writer must be taught:

This lesson, lengthy and involved as it must seem to anyone who has taught this inflection the conventional way—with a definition of *person* and *present tense* and a few exercises—is nonetheless but an introduction to the -s-form. No attempt has been made to introduce the subjunctive, which raises special problems not only because it requires a plural verb with a singular subject (if he *were* . . .) but because it uses *be* as a finite form (I move that he *be* . . .), as BEV does, though with a different meaning (*I move that he be* . . . recommends something that has not happened, whereas *He be sick* speaks of a condition that is constant or continuing). The use of relatively simple subjects is an even more important limitation of the lesson, requiring a subsequent lesson on the location of complex subjects (inverted subjects in questions and in *there is, are* patterns; noun clauses and infinitive-phrase subjects; subjects separated from verbs by long modifiers, etc.) and on the conventions for counting subjects (compound subjects, *either-or* subjects, *each-everyone-everybody* subjects, units of measure subjects, collective noun subjects, and several others). (*Errors* 152–53)

The complexities for the teacher (to say nothing of the students) may overwhelm, but Shaughnessy does not want to oversimplify. Lying back of her discussion of subject-verb agreement (as the abbreviation BEV—for Black English Vernacular—announces) is some sophisticated work in sociolinguistics, which had achieved significant advances well before Shaughnessy's landmark work on error. For instance, the decade prior to the publication of *Errors and Expectations* had seen the publication of half a dozen major works from the Center for Applied Linguistics collectively titled the "Urban Language Series" under the general editorship of Roger Shuy and featuring works by William Labov and Walter Wolfram as well as Shuy himself. The

chief revelation, apparent in titles like *The Social Stratification of English in New York City* (Labov [1966]) and *A Sociolinguistic Description of Detroit Negro Speech* (Wolfram [1969]), was that English was subject to wide variations attributable to racial and social differences. These variations were not, moreover, something to be homogenized out of existence. Recognition of language difference throughout the series was accompanied by the principled position that, as Ralph Fasold and Roger Shuy's preface to *Teaching Standard English in the Inner City* (1970) puts it, "the teacher's job is not to eradicate playground English—or any other kind. Instead, teachers should help children to make the switch comfortably from one setting to another" (xi).

Teaching Complication 2: The Need for Tolerance

The call for tolerance had been codified in 1974 as "Students' Right to Their Own Language," a position statement of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). This statement, which provided teachers with "suggestions for ways of dealing with linguistic variety" and urged that students be exposed to "the variety of dialects that comprise our multiregional, multiethnic, and multicultural society, so that they too will understand the nature of American English and come to respect all its dialects," inspired controversy from the first. But it remains a position statement of the NCTE to this day (see the organization's current website).

Although the position statement was controversial, it had a good deal of research on its side, which was marshaled in a special issue of *College Composition and Communication* (25.3 [1974]) in an annotated bibliography of 129 entries. In "Grammar, Grammars, and the Teaching of Grammar," an overview of this research as well as that of the subsequent decade, Patrick Hartwell would go so far as to say that such research

makes the question of socially non-standard dialects, always implicit in discussions of formal grammar, into a non-issue. Native speakers of English, regardless of dialect, show tacit mastery of the conventions of Standard English, and that mastery seems to transfer into abstract orthographic knowledge through interaction with print. Developing writers show the same patterning of errors, regardless of dialect. Studies of reading and of writing suggest that surface features

of spoken dialect are simply irrelevant to mastering print literacy. (123)

In some ways the logical outcome of the NCTE position statement, Hartwell's oft-cited overview explicitly allows for a laissez-faire approach to error.

Teaching Complication 3: The Need (Still) for Correctness

But if a council proposes, then the teaching force disposes, and teachers remained upright about error. In actual practice, most teachers neither stopped championing standard English nor did they, in the language of the position statement, cease to characterize "nonstandard dialects as corrupt, inferior, or distorted forms of standard English." Some of the blame for teachers' continued focus on error has been laid at Shaughnessy's door. Errors, by definition, mean things are wrong, not just different, and she had highlighted the term in a work written to show basic writing teachers the way. This was to a certain extent an essential strategy for her time and place. As Robert Lyons observed in his 1980 memorial essay, Shaughnessy was in no position to ignore errors: "It was clear from several essays on Open Admissions and from several letters to the *Times* that examples of unskilled writing by non-traditional students were considered a powerful weapon by those opposed to the broadening of higher education" ("Mina Shaughnessy and the Teaching of Writing" 5). Shaughnessy used *Errors and Expectations* to show that examples of student work were not arguments against educating their authors; they represented instead wholly explicable linguistic challenges and teaching opportunities, above all in the errors they presented.

What's more, throughout that work she had attempted to redefine the term "errors" even as she used it to stake out her primary focus; for instance, in the chapter on "Common Errors," Shaughnessy held that errors "are the result not of carelessness or irrationality but of *thinking*" (105). This avowal that errors were not so much mistakes as salutary missteps critical to the learning process put her well to the left of center, even and especially as someone upholding the standard. But her position was also a demanding one, in some ways more demanding than the call for tolerance. As Marcia Farr and Harvey Daniels noted in *Language Diversity and Writing Instruction* (1986), "While most writing teachers would undoubtedly endorse Shaughnessy's sympathetic view of their students' predicament, they also feel a strong professional

obligation to attend closely to student errors” (44). Shaughnessy’s way was enormously burdensome—not just sympathetic but empathetic, and accompanied by all the apparatus of traditional grammar instruction. Fortunately (at least for a time, for it would ultimately prove no less complex or demanding), another avenue was open to BW teachers: error analysis.

Imported from English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, error analysis had its most influential formulation in Barry Kroll and John Schafer’s “Error-Analysis and the Teaching of Composition,” first printed in 1978 in *College Composition and Communication* and reprinted in 1987 in *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* (Enos). Error analysts were less interested in analyzing errors per se than in analyzing why they occurred. Kroll and Schafer, both with experience as ESL teachers, emphasized the importance of analyzing the processes of which the error was only the end result. They stressed two processes in particular: interference from another language and intermediate steps in language learning (so-called “interlanguage”). In her own way, Shaughnessy had stressed both as well while work in applied linguistics, endorsed by professional organizations like the NCTE, had acknowledged the importance of recognizing systemic language differences within English. In other words, making the connection between a phenomenon like “interlanguage” in bilingualism and the same phenomenon in bidialectalism was no great stretch.

Teaching Complication 4: The Need for Process Analysis

Even more important, quite possibly, was the explicit connection error analysis had to other important movements in writing instruction. The fact that it was process-oriented made it that much more timely and palatable. The process movement, advanced by research like Janet Emig’s *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971) and textbooks like Susan Miller’s *Writing: Process and Product* (1976), had settled in as the new orthodoxy. Writing teachers who wanted to be au courant knew the general themes if not the details of the process approach. When Kroll and Schafer wrote that the work on error they were drawing from ESL represented the culmination of a “general movement from approaches emphasizing the *product* (the error itself) to approaches focusing on the underlying *process* (why the error was made)” (243), they were using language that basic writing teachers would understand and appreciate, even relish, for its “process” orientation.

Scarcely less significant was their identification with another movement: cognitivism. “Error-analysts are cognitivists . . .” wrote Kroll and Schafer; this meant they understand that “errors help the teacher identify the cognitive strategies that the learner is using to process information” (“Error-Analysis” 244). Very much in the spirit of Shaughnessy’s dictum that “errors are the result . . . of *thinking*,” the invocation of cognitivism gave the patina of high-powered theorizing to error analysis in an article that invoked Freud as well as Shaughnessy.

What error analysis lacked was clear application. Just how would this approach to student error play out in the classroom? Kroll and Schafer were by no means indifferent to this concern, but they had not mapped out a workable method. What they had been clear about was that an instance of a single error could be worth sustained study—study focused more on the why than the what. Multiplied across multiple assignments and many students, error analysis seemed a formidable undertaking, especially so for classroom teachers.

Teaching Complication 5: The Need for Interpretation

What makes the difficulty of error analysis particularly clear was highlighted in an article titled simply “The Study of Error.” That title might bespeak something much more general, but David Bartholomae’s 1980 article focused on a single essay by a single student. He showed how, in having the student read the piece aloud and then answer questions, the instructor can uncover at least seven categories of reasons errors happen—complete with clues to how serious or systematic such errors are. These range from errors open to overt correction (mistakes the student acknowledges and corrects) to those caused by overcorrection (mistakes the student makes by misapplying “rules,” for instance, writing “childrens” because of a misapplication of the rule for forming plurals). Is a particular error a problem with verb forms, syntax, or knowledge of conventions? Bartholomae’s article effectively demonstrated that this question couldn’t be answered simply by looking at the error. In fact, the error couldn’t even be defined until there was some sense of intention and context. A sustained interview with the student was in order, its centerpiece the student’s reading of his or her own writing.

Andrea Lunsford’s 1986 “Basic Writing Update” (of Shaughnessy’s 1976 bibliographic essay “Basic Writing”) singled out this “thoughtful and provocative” article by Bartholomae as the most significant work since Shaughnessy’s on analyzing student error. But her citations

made it clear that “The Study of Error” had not mapped an easy path to follow:

Starting with the theory that “allows us to see errors as evidence of choice or strategy among a range of possible choices or strategies” (p. 257) and a definition of error analysis as “the double perspective of text and reconstructed text [which] seeks to explain the difference between the two on the basis of whatever can be inferred about the meaning of the text and the process of creating it,” Bartholomae argues that studying students’ oral reconstructions of their own texts will provide “a diagnostic tool, . . . a means of instruction, . . . [and a way to] chart stages of growth in basic writers” (p. 267). (213–14)

Unquestionably, Bartholomae’s honing of error analysis had given BW an important method. But it was fraught with cautions about what real knowledge of errors and their origins required. Its “double perspective of text and reconstructed text” (“The Study of Error” 267) meant there could be no easy assumptions based on surface evidence. There had to be careful reconstructions of student intentions (often ultimately unknowable), tracings of the multiple paths that might lead to a single mistake. Small wonder, then, that Lunsford concluded the section of her “Basic Writing Update” devoted to error by saying, “In practice, meanwhile, my sense is that many, many basic writing classes depend primarily on grammar workbooks for their class structure and ‘lessons’” (215).

A colleague of Bartholomae at the University of Pittsburgh, Glynda Hull, wrote what is arguably the best account of the pedagogical application of error analysis (and particularly the rich investigative approach to it) in her contribution to *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfactuals* (Bartholomae and Petrosky, eds.). She made the method palatable not by simplifying it but by making it an inviting experiment. Her piece, aptly called “Acts of Wonderment,” began with the challenge to find the pattern in a series of mistakes made in basic addition problems. Moving from examining mathematics mistakes to mapping language errors, Hull made the latter seem fascinating but also doable detective work. It was indeed work, often collaborative work with students

involving interviews and talk-aloud protocols. Hull's accomplishment was to make all this effort seem worthwhile despite its complexity.

"Computer-Adjusted Errors and Expectations" (Otte [1991]) ratcheted up the complexity with computerized error analysis, generating information on patterns of error (error frequency and error distribution by type) that teachers would never have time to map in such detail. Results across a single class showed a significant range in kinds and proportions of error. Computerized error analysis demonstrated more than ever that errors varied from one student to the next; why errors happened seemed to depend on a unique configuration of apparently incalculable variables in individualized writing processes, literacy backgrounds, and language behaviors.

If teachers were intimidated by the complexities invoked by such methods, then publishers were all but completely confounded. How could they possibly develop textbooks that took this seemingly infinite variety into account? In pedagogy-focused research, errors were looking ever less susceptible to mechanical approaches. Error analysis, evolving into a method that gave special attention to social contexts and cognitive processes, was a means of dealing with error that defied any kind of packaged approach. It required personalized and detailed detection, something a fill-in-the-blanks workbook could never accomplish.

Teaching Complication 6: The Need for Negotiation

Finding effective and practical approaches to dealing with error even defied those who would circumvent the textbooks. Bruce Horner's "Rethinking the 'Sociality' of Error: Teaching Editing as Negotiation," confronts the problem that students do not see errors as their teachers do, so they "correct" what isn't an instance of error while leaving actual errors uncorrected. But the problem defined by Horner remains a general one. As Susanmarie Harrington and Linda Adler-Kassner point out, "Horner outlines a pedagogy for teaching error as negotiation between readers and writers, but does not look at the work of individual writers as he does so. While we know something about which errors occur, we know very little about what students do as they revise to correct error" ("The Dilemma That Still Counts" 19). Horner's work is not dismissed out of hand, of course, and the real problem may lie elsewhere; the acts of negotiation he outlines, like the feats of interpretation delineated in Bartholomae's "Study of Error," seem to demand

such time and effort that the prospect is too challenging for BW instructors, with their heavy teaching loads, to take on.

Writing in 1998, Harrington and Adler-Kassner describe the focus on error as fading from teaching practice, effectively stymied by the complexities it has turned up. Because “errors are far and away the most likely dimension of writing that will mark basic writers” (particularly but not exclusively in placement and exit assessments), they call for increasingly sophisticated forms of research, from “cognitively-based work” to “culturally-based work,” yet that sophistication comes with a cost, even a loss:

As attention has shifted from a close focus on correctness to more rhetorical views of error, research attention has shifted away from error analysis towards generic conventions and other rhetorical matters. And while we fully support a move away from mindless correctness to a rhetorical integration of language and form, we contend that the move away from an oversimplified view of correctness has led to a reduction of interest in language use. (“The Dilemma” 17)

The redirection of attention is also, in the absence of an easy fix, a turning away from the problem of error.

Teaching Complication 7: The Need for (and Lack of) Consensus

The problem that error represents for basic writing and basic writers remains. Though Harrington and Adler-Kassner are right to applaud the move away from oversimplification, they are just as right to see its downside: a discomfiting, even paralyzing, complexity that suppresses interest in the problem even as it overwhelms practice. Since errors were the identifying stigmata of basic writers, they figured importantly in assessments, and how they were viewed helped define assessments as well. Their causes and cures, rooted in writing and thinking processes as well as in matters of social context, also led basic writing instructors to issues ranging from cognitive development to social identity. Even technology came in, as a possible fix, or at least the medium for one. In all of these ways of addressing the problem, however, things quickly became much more complicated than they first appeared. No simple or single method or model emerged to guide practice; no consensus settled on the field to define procedure. On the contrary, competing

and complicating discoveries in each of these subfields made teaching practice harder to negotiate, the challenges more formidable, and the research more intricate and elaborate. All the while, the field and the student at its center became more vulnerable. For better or worse, lore proved the first as well as the last resort for many basic writing instructors. For so many of them who were part-timers or neophytes, grad students pressed into service or adjuncts hired at the last minute, there wasn't time to get trained in more enlightened approaches to error or to delve into the thickets of research. But there was always the grammar workbook, the durable stand-by, the living fossil of BW instruction.

ASSESSMENT

One area in which lore has had an especially powerful effect on teaching practice is in the assessment of student writing. An early snapshot of the state of affairs in writing assessment, particularly as it related to basic writing, is the lead-off piece in the issue of *JBW* with the theme "Evaluation" (Spring/Summer 1978). Rexford Brown, then director of publications for the National Assessment of Educational Progress, began by noting that writing evaluation generally varies enormously if not chaotically: "We are all very careful to respect each other's right to a private grading system, even if it is arbitrary, wrong-headed, nasty, or capricious" ("What We Know Now" 1). The need to respect one another's values presumably explains the popularity of holistic scoring (the judgment that need not pronounce on anything specifically) with organizations like the Educational Testing Service (ETS), but Brown stressed that holistic assessment is "incapable of establishing proficiency in any concrete sense" and is "a very unsatisfactory system for the evaluation of growth" (2). Problematic as they are, holistically scored tests (using actual samples of student writing) represent "a luxury only the rich could afford anyway"; multiple-choice tests are "cheaper and easier to score," but have "glaring weaknesses" (3). Almost the only good thing Brown could say for either kind of test was that "the proliferation of such tests over the years has softened the profession up just a bit more to the idea of measurement and the possibility that there are some shared units of quality upon which to build more accurate and useful systems of evaluation" (4). He then went on to sketch a utopian "ideal instrument" combining student writing and objective items, the

scoring of which would rely on computerized textual analysis, cross-checked against holistic and criterion-based systems, all based on more careful definitions and stronger consensus than heretofore achieved.

The reality for BW assessment was that multiple-choice, machine-read tests would continue to proliferate, while more well-meaning and/or well-off programs would engage in holistic scoring. Because holistic scores, in Brown's opinion, are "entirely relativist and value-free," they could tell teachers little about how to proceed with instruction, particularly in individual cases. He found multiple-choice tests rather more informative but even more insidious for that very reason: ". . . since the approach of many such tests is to emphasize difference between standard and nonstandard usages, writing courses all too often become, unintentionally, cultural programming laboratories" (4).

Teaching to the Test

The common assumption, as Brown had suggested, is that assessments functioned as constraints on teaching, shaping expectations and even curricula. In 1991, though much had changed, Brown would say that he found "an enormous amount of teaching to the test" ("Schooling and Thoughtfulness" 6). But firsthand accounts of the effect of assessment on teaching are rare. One example, from the 1978 "Evaluation" issue of *JBW*, was Rosemary Hake's "With No Apology: Teaching to the Test." It quickly became clear that Hake was no test-led sheep. Her article was really a detailed account of the thinking that went into the design of the writing test in use at Chicago State, a test developed carefully and collaboratively, tapping the best available research. Ultimately, as she confronted "the humanistic antipathy generated by competency testing," she concluded that "we can only ask two questions":

If there are valuable writing performances which cannot be defined and therefore measured, should we not still insist upon identifying and measuring those that can be and finding better ways to teach them? As we isolate performances which resist precise statement and measurement, may we not, even so, find better ways to state, measure, and teach them? (55)

These did seem to be the right questions, and answering them seemed the right thing to do—even, as Hake concluded, an appropriate focus of what “universities are supposed to do” (55).

Primarily under the auspices of the Instructional Resource Center (IRC) founded by Mina Shaughnessy, the City University of New York (CUNY) had already attempted to address these questions by encouraging faculty involvement in the assessment of writing. Marie Jean Lederman’s “Evolution of an Instructional Resource Center: The CUNY Experience” (1985) describes the IRC’s role in the “development, implementation, and monitoring” of the CUNY Writing Assessment Test (WAT) (45). After the initial implementation of the WAT, a 1981–1982 review of the exam “involved more than one hundred faculty members from the university and from other colleges” and led to refinements in the scoring scale (45). Faculty involvement was the hallmark, in fact, with the IRC acting as the conduit for faculty-led audits of test scoring, surveys of student and faculty attitudes, and faculty-authored monographs and bibliographies. All this activity created a sense of CUNY leadership in assessment (Lederman notes citations of IRC monographs in *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*), but it was actually more important in creating a sense of faculty ownership of assessment.

An exception to this benign view of CUNY’s faculty-developed writing assessment—one that addressed the student’s point of view—was Judith Fishman’s “Do You Agree or Disagree: The Epistemology of the CUNY Writing Assessment Test.” This piece, which appeared in *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, was a scathing criticism of the WAT, especially the bald choices it invited students to make with its “agree or disagree” prompt. Recounting the complaints of students discomfited by the apparent demand to choose a stance on things like the role of religious faith in people’s lives, Fishman argued for writing situations that gave more flexibility and also more context. She cited success, for instance, with a prompt that had students imagine the imminent end of the world and write about what mattered most to them.

Harvey Wiener, the editor of *WPA*, invited Lynn Quitman Troyka to respond, and she did in the same issue with “The Phenomenon of Impact: The CUNY Writing Assessment Test.” She countered the anecdotes of students’ negative experiences with the “big picture”: the WAT was proving a reliable instrument, both in terms of inter-reader reliability and tracked placements. She also averred that the end-of-

the-world scenario seemed hardly less discomfiting to students than the “agree or disagree” prompt. Above all, she noted that the WAT was an evolving instrument, that a large task force of faculty led by Troyka had refined the scale and design, and that there would no doubt be further improvements.

CUNY’s work in assessment had inspired not only its own faculty but had also led to two grants to the IRC from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), one to establish the National Testing Network in Writing (NTNW) and the other to establish the College Assessment Program Evaluation (CAPE). Both grants were designed to extend work in assessment (including training and support) to other institutions.

This level of funding and activity could not be maintained indefinitely, and it wasn’t. After six years as the director of the IRC, Marie Jean Lederman left for a deanship at one of the CUNY colleges. The review and refinement of the WAT done under Lynn Quitman Troyka in the early 1980s was the last such ever done. Troyka (and Shaughnessy before her) had insisted that ongoing re-evaluation of the WAT was essential, but it hadn’t happened. Before the 1990s were over, CAPE and NTNW were defunct organizations; the IRC and the WAT were no more.

The demise of the WAT did not, however, signal the end of institutionally imposed testing at CUNY. In the fall of 1999, the University’s Board of Trustees, under pressure from New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani, voted to require “nationally standardized” tests in reading, writing, and mathematics (Arenson). The WAT was replaced by the ACT writing test, an exam in which students were given sixty minutes to respond to a tightly controlled prompt in letter form. The sample prompt given by the Borough of Manhattan Community College on its website was typical of this test: “The Parks Board has received a donation to improve the appearance of the city. It is considering two options: (1) planting more flowers in the parks and expanding recreational areas or (2) planting more flowers and trees along city streets. Write a letter to the Parks Board explaining which option you favor and why” (BMCC). ACT writing exams were assessed at borough-wide centers by specially trained CUNY faculty members who were paid for this work.

Many CUNY faculty members were unhappy with the ACT exam. They questioned whether this nationally normed exam developed by a

testing company in Iowa provided a better measure of the readiness of students in New York City for “college-level writing” than the faculty-developed WAT, which it replaced. Eventually this dissatisfaction led to the formation of a CUNY-wide writing task force that worked to develop a more appropriate exam. The resulting test asks students to write, not a letter, but an essay in which they respond to a brief reading passage. While some issues are not yet resolved, the plan as this book goes to press is for the new exam to replace the ACT in October 2010. At this point a variety of indicators may be used to determine a student’s readiness to enter first-year composition—and thus to attain entry into a four-year CUNY college—passing scores on the CUNY placement tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, SAT scores, or scores on the New York State Regents exams.

Teacher Resistance to Institutionally Imposed Testing

While many in politics and the press were demanding “standardized” tests of writing competence, faculty were increasingly questioning the validity of such tests. In the 1980s, a voice like Judith Fishman’s, railing against the CUNY Writing Assessment Test (WAT), could be cast as out of tune with a larger chorus of support. In the 1990s, a full chorus of faculty voices was raised against such assessments. An early critic was Pat Belanoff, once a CUNY professor who went on to teach at SUNY Stony Brook; in 1990, Belanoff, in speaking to an organization of ESL teachers (wrestling with the explosive growth of that subpopulation of students), predicted that the WAT would be gone by 2000 (and it was—replaced by other, nationally recognized tests). Her argument, especially as it bore on ESL students, was an especially dramatic instance of what would be heard over and over again: students were simply too different and diverse to be effectively evaluated by standardized assessments, particularly when their touted reliability and validity seemed (or so Belanoff held) largely a fiction (“The Myths of Assessment”). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Belanoff had worked to develop and implement portfolio assessment as an alternative to standardized testing of writing (see, for example, Belanoff and Elbow; Belanoff and Dickson).

Case studies supplemented and substantiated Belanoff’s charges against standardized assessment. In “Failure: The Student’s or the Assessment’s?” (1996), Kay Harley and Sally Cannon gave an account of one such failure, the case of a nontraditional, African American stu-

dent whose differences were rendered strikes against her by assessment practices not designed to reckon with them. Barbara Gleason was still more emphatic, not least of all in her title “When the Writing Test Fails: Assessing Assessment at an Urban College” (1997). Gleason used three case studies of students’ experiences to suggest the inefficacy and unfairness of the “CUNY Writing Assessment Test [which] has commanded national attention and served as a model for testing at many other colleges and universities” (309). Consistently, such case studies represented institutionalized assessment as an external imposition, a preemptive strike on the teacher’s own ability to make evaluations and decide curriculum. The general idea was that teachers and their students were being steamrolled by a vast testing apparatus. As Deborah Mutnick would say in *Writing in an Alien World: Basic Writing and the Struggle for Equality in Higher Education* (1996), “The disempowerment of Basic Writing teachers has the same socioeconomic roots as the alienation and despair of many Basic Writing students” (29).

All these studies placed assessment in a context of complicating circumstances, showing that cookie-cutter assessments could never do justice—and would frequently do injustice—to the complexity of students’ lives. These students’ disempowered teachers, bristling at the unresponsiveness of mass assessments, were understandably giving vent to their frustration. Ultimately, such accounts underscored the need for a new agnosticism about assessment. If tests did so little good, and could do so much harm, then who needed them? Kurt Spellmeyer put the point compellingly in “Testing as Surveillance” (1996):

Who benefits from the testing boom? Ideally, the answer is everyone—the students, the teachers, the institutions, the big-hearted funding agencies. But who really benefits? In New Jersey, where I live and teach, fourteen years of high school proficiency exams and college-level basic-skills entry tests have failed to produce any change in the performance of the state’s students. But if assessment has done nothing to improve the performance of our students, it has helped to create a substantial new bureaucracy. . . . While standardized testing has many possible uses—and while some of them might be consistent with a democratic culture—college-level testing in my state has primarily served to intimidate the masses of adjunct

instructors who get “stuck” with the job of remediation. (177)

In the middle of the decade, the Conference on College Composition and Communication issued a Position Statement on Assessment (1995). One member of the drafting committee, Thomas Hilgers, summed up its potential impact by noting (in “Basic Writing Curricula and Good Assessment Practices”) how far current practices were from those recommended by the Position Statement:

Tens of thousands of college-bound students are “placed” into writing classes on the basis of an assessment of something other than writing. Even those schools that use direct measures of writing typically employ 30- to 40-minute samples of impromptu writing. The Position Statement indicts most of these current practices. It must make us rethink our placement practices. It has already been a force for change at my school, the University of Hawai’i, where incoming students draft and revise two essays during five hours. The CCCC Statement has made us consider the inclusion of writing samples created under different circumstances and for different audiences. . . . (72)

Hilgers underscored how the Position Statement confronted those doing assessments with stipulations few programs could meet—particularly in urging programs not to rely on a single assessment instrument or a single administration.

Spurred by teacher discontent with existing assessments and by the 1995 CCCC Position Statement, there was a new interest in alternatives and changes in strategy. By the end of the 1990s, assessment expert Kathleen Blake Yancey stressed that questions about assessment were wide open. Methods shouldn’t be considered till there was a thorough analysis of context and purpose, a reading of what she called “the rhetorical situation” of assessment (“Outcomes Assessment and Basic Writing”).

A dramatic shift had taken place in the space of a dozen years. In 1986, Richard Lloyd-Jones introduced his bibliographic essay on writing assessments by saying, “The assessment of writing abilities is essentially a managerial task. It represents an effort to record quanti-

tatively the quality of writing or writing skills of a group of people so that administrators can make policies about educational programs” (155). But the disputations and experiments of the 1990s brought assessment much more closely into alignment with specific curricula and teaching goals. Alternative assessments such as portfolios had almost become commonplace.

By the time the next CCCC Position Statement on Assessment was approved in 2006, it was clear that, at least in the minds of the leaders of the field, assessment was far more than a mere managerial task. This statement highlights the complexity of good assessment practices and emphasizes the need for assessments to be tailored for specific student populations and educational purposes. If the purpose was to place students in the appropriate writing course, then the assessment of a writing sample should be done by trained instructors, never a computer program, and many factors should be considered: “Decision-makers should carefully weigh the educational costs and benefits of timed tests, portfolios, directed self-placement, etc. In the minds of those assessed, each of these methods implicitly establishes its value over that of the others, so the first cost is likely to be what students come to believe about writing” (Conference on College Composition and Communication, “Writing Assessment: A Position Statement”). But at the same time that leaders of CCCC were articulating these lofty goals, wholesale assessment was occurring in the United States in ways that were far from the best practices set out in the Position Statement.

State-Mandated Testing

The focus of screening and placement during the 1990s had shifted from basic writing programs to high school exit examinations, with more than half of the states following a program of mandated assessments set out by the National Governors Association (Otte, “High Schools as Crucibles of College Prep” 109). In the most extensive study of this state-mandated testing, *The Testing Trap* (2002), George Hillocks concludes that the consequences are, for the most part, counterproductive, especially given the way test preparation cuts into learning time “to prepare students for tests that do more harm than good” (207). The overall impact of these assessments remains a question. According to Gary Orfield and Johanna Wald, “High-stakes tests attached to grade promotion and high school graduation lead to increased dropout rates, particularly for minority students” (39).

That determination, made in 2000, seems supported by more recent developments.

In 2002, then president George W. Bush signed into law the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which requires states to administer regular standards-based tests in order to qualify for federal education funding. The effects of this widespread testing, however, continue to cause concern, particularly among those who work with BW students. A study released in August 2004 by the Center on Education Policy acknowledges that “few states can really say how many students do not receive diplomas because they failed an exit exam” but sees

new evidence of negative impacts of exit exams, such as dampening some students’ motivation to try harder, encouraging some students to pursue a general educational development (GED) certificate instead of a regular diploma, and creating incentives for educators to hold back students in non-tested grades. Some of the research suggests that these effects are significantly greater for certain groups of students, such as minorities, English language learners, and poor students. (*State High School Exit Exams* 10)

Even those students who manage to graduate from high school are still often at a disadvantage. In her 2004 article “Teaching and Learning in Texas: Accountability Testing, Language, Race, and Place,” Susan Naomi Bernstein describes the effects of the Texas system of standardized testing on the students who were later placed in her basic writing course at an open admissions college in Houston. Students who in their earlier educations had been drilled in writing to pass the required tests were ill-prepared for “the intellectual inquiry demanded in college reading and writing courses” (9).

Not all the effects of this testing boom have been negative. The power of high school exit exams has spawned collaborations between colleges and high schools in such states as New York and California (Otte, “High Schools as Crucibles”; Crouch and McNenny, “Looking Back, Looking Forward”). That many students still arrive in college needing BW instruction has helped Royer and Gilles’s work with directed self-placement at Grand Valley State University in Michigan to find adoptions elsewhere (“Basic Writing and Directed Self-Placement”). And mainstreaming experiments have produced any number

of carefully tailored assessments, a fact nicely summed up in the title of Sallyanne Fitzgerald's concluding summary in McNenny's *Mainstreaming Basic Writers*, "The Context Determines Our Choice." Redesigning assessments (particularly as tailored, locally designed alternatives) will no doubt go on among teachers and program administrators but not as a panacea, not even a local one. Too many critical assessments and decisions are now visited on students before they leave high school. Of those who go on to college, too many still need basic writing instruction without believing they do.

TEACHING

Given all the things Shaughnessy knew a basic writing teacher had to consider, the teaching program she laid out in detail focused on something fairly limited (and presumably more manageable): the basic writer's writing. Initially stunned by the prevalence of error in her students' writing and knowing that others would be no less so, she understandably chose to focus on error first and foremost. This was nevertheless a process-oriented stance. Looking for patterns, uncovering the logic of error, she found herself focusing on processes of writing and of thought itself. The focus on error has been considered earlier in this chapter but not the attention, in Shaughnessy's approach, that it gave to process. An especially impressive example is the opening of Chapter 3 of *Errors and Expectations*, the chapter on syntax. Shaughnessy begins with a detailed description of "a practiced writer" composing a sentence, working rapidly through "almost an infinite number of ways of saying what he has to say," constrained but also directed by the choices made, moving "with increasing predictability in the directions that idiom, syntax, and semantics leave open" (44). The passage as a whole conveys a rich sense of possibilities but also difficulties since the practiced writer does struggle—though the struggling is "for aptness and meaning, not merely correctness" (44). Then Shaughnessy turns to the basic writing student for whom the process is in some ways more complicated for being more impoverished in its possibilities and choices:

BW students at the beginning of their apprenticeship seldom enjoy this kind of ease with formal written sentences. For them, as for the foreign-language student, the question is rarely "How can I make this

sentence better?” but “How can I make this sentence right?” Their concern is with the syntax of competence, not of style, for they lack a sure sense of what the written code will allow. Much of this uneasiness, for the native speaker at least, can be blamed on the writing process itself, which, because it involves different coordinations from those of speech, creates a code-consciousness that can inhibit the writer from doing what he is in fact able to do in the more spontaneous situation of talk. (44–45)

These are, of course, only the preliminaries before Shaughnessy gets to the particulars, but even here—not least of all in the nod to second-language acquisition and the footnote to indicate that the phrase “syntax of competence” does not mean what “competence” means in Chomskyan linguistics—there is a rich attention to process.

The Importance of Process

Attention to process came to be central in the next stages of mapping out a teaching program for basic writing. The seminal work here was done by Sondra Perl, more or less contemporaneously with Shaughnessy’s own work on *Errors and Expectations*. In a study done in 1975–1976 and inspired to some extent by Janet Emig’s work with twelfth graders, Perl discovered that BW students did indeed have complex writing processes. She also confirmed, from another perspective, that errors were the great problem, in part by confirming Shaughnessy’s sense that concern over error was as debilitating as error itself. Perl showed through “composing aloud” protocols that BW students tended to disrupt the composing process with editing concerns, often resulting in additional errors and hypercorrections. Even if the goal was error control, error had to be put in its place. But doing that could be extraordinarily difficult, Perl noted, and for an important reason that teachers of BW students may not have adequately taken into account:

These unskilled college writers are not beginners in a *tabula rasa* sense, and teachers err in assuming they are. The results of this study suggest that teachers may first need to identify which characteristic components of each student’s process facilitate writing and

which inhibit it before further teaching takes place. If they do not, teachers of unskilled writers may continue to place themselves in a defeating position: imposing another method of writing instruction upon the students' already internalized processes without first helping students to extricate themselves from the knots and tangles in those processes. ("Composing Processes of Unskilled College Writers" 436)

The idea that what BW students bring with them may be as much of a challenge as what they have to learn was extraordinarily important. But it would take some time before this concept was fully explored, partly because it concerned so much more than the students' internalized writing processes; it was ultimately a matter of their identities. For the time being, as the 1970s became the 1980s, the consensus was that basic writers' approaches to writing were really the first order of diagnostic business. Perl's work, valuable as it was, provided a general diagnosis only in a limited sense; in fact, what made her work so valuable was that she was wary of easy generalizations. Even her general recommendations warned against oversimplified, step-by-step approaches to the writing process. In "A Look at Basic Writers in the Process of Composing" (1980), for example, she highlighted four aspects of the writing process (essentially invention, flow, voice, and audience) but stressed that her model's features were not sequential: "As features, rather than steps or stages, the four are interwoven or alternating strands of the overall process itself" (31).

Cognitive Schemes and Their Limitations

Perl's concept of "interwoven or alternating strands" of complex, individualized writing processes was difficult for teachers to put into practice. Instead, many of them wanted maps. Writing teacher Linda Flower's partnership with cognitive psychologist John Hayes gave them what they wanted. Flower and Hayes's early work together, notably "The Cognition of Discovery" (1980) and "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" (1981), yoked a particular strand of developmental psychology to models of the writing process. Part of a larger research project, which merits treatment as such in chapter 4, this work offered the outlines of teaching programs as well. Ultimately, however, research on cognitive theory and the writing process failed to produce effective teaching methods for the very reasons these mapping projects

were so attractive initially: they were generic, schematic, and transplantable from one context to the next—but not sufficiently attuned to individual differences.

Initially, though, cognitive development seemed to have a fair amount of explanatory power—a suggestive but not exhaustive way of explaining difficulties BW students had with abstract thinking, the consideration of audience, and other supposed requisites of academic discourse. A focus on cognitive development freed basic writing instruction from fixating too closely on error while still retaining an attention to language. It was, in fact, derived primarily from two thinkers who were attentive to language formulation: Jean Piaget (especially in *Language and Thought of a Child*) and Lev Vygotsky (in *Thought and Language*). Both, importantly, focused on childhood development, though Vygotsky was more attentive to context (and also, for that reason, less schematic and easy to apply). Whole BW programs—e.g., Anna Berg and Gerald Coleman’s at Passaic County Community College, Andrea Lunsford’s at Ohio State, and Robert Fuller’s at the University of Nebraska—would use testing to track and Piagetian schema to structure BW instruction. Much about this cognitive approach to instruction was salutary. For example, work with challenging concepts and readings was sanctioned by the special place that concept formation occupied in Piaget’s framework. But, ultimately, the problems with cognitivism, all traceable to root premises, made the framework unattractive to teachers as well as researchers.

These problems were effectively summed up at the outset by Shaughnessy’s caveat in her “Basic Writing” bibliography about the need “to determine how accurately the developmental model Piaget describes for children fits the experience of the young adult learning to write for college” (166). As teachers and researchers began to react against deficit definitions of BW students that focused on inadequacies rather than potential, the cognitive model came to seem an extreme example of deficit definition. Researchers using cognitive approaches tended to focus not merely on students’ tendency to make mistakes but on their inability to think, at least at the college level—as when Andrea Lunsford observed in “Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer” (1979) that “basic writing students are most often characterized by the inability to analyze and synthesize” (40). This was compounded by an infantilization of the BW student, as if this young adult were somehow unable to proceed beyond thought structures

characteristic of children between the ages of six and eleven. Finally, pedagogy itself was a problem. Piaget held that intelligence came from the progressive growth of embedded structures for thinking and that cognitive development was a maturation process rather than a teaching project. Developing a cognitive approach to teaching basic writing meant superimpositions and graftings much more than it meant applications and derivations of cognitive theory.

One more major problem with cognitivism and early representations of the writing process was the insensitivity of such models to context. Absent even when its importance was acknowledged, context could not be manifested in generalized schemes. Flower and Hayes, for instance, would often represent the writing process as a flow chart. The process could be represented as recursive—"flow" arrows need not suggest unilateral direction—but the whole thing was abstracted from any specific setting. Such abstraction effectively excluded rhetorical imperatives like purpose and audience except in the form of abstract exhortations.

Attention to processes of thought and writing had given BW instruction the outlines of a teaching program, but it was one with many (perhaps too many) blanks to fill in. And there were other causes for concern. From a present-day perspective, emphasis on cognitive processes had resulted in an approach to BW instruction that, however provisional, was also politically incorrect. BW students were defined as students whose writing processes were impoverished and entangled, whose thought processes were substandard and immature. There had to be better ways to define the teaching project. And there were, of course, but none seemed to have the capacity to galvanize and structure a full program the way cognitivism or process approaches had done, at least for a time.

A Grab Bag of Instructional Strategies

In the early days of basic writing, most teaching ventures and proposals discussed in journals and at conferences focused on specific strategies, collectively amounting to a kind of grab bag. Telling examples can be found in the issue of *JBW* with the theme "Applications: Theory into Practice" (1978). It contained pieces by Andrea Lunsford on Aristotelian rhetoric, Thomas Farrell on Walter Ong's orality/literacy distinction, Louise Yelin on Marxist literary theory, and Marilyn Schauer Samuels on Norman Holland's psychology of reading.

Lunsford and Samuels turned out to be advocating different kinds of role-playing. Farrell recommended a whole set of techniques, including journal writing, summarizing, novel reading, sentence combining, and “oral-imitation” (a kind of role-playing). Yelin concluded that “as we teach our students the codes and structures of Standard English and acquaint them with the values and practices of academic life, we must also offer them . . . a way of understanding that inscribed within each act of signification, within each social process and practice, is a whole structure of social relations” (29).

It is not hard to imagine that many BW teachers welcomed all these specific suggestions. The attention to role-playing in particular seemed encouraging. The invitation, for both the teacher and the student, was not only to focus on grammar but also to psych out the whole rhetorical situation. So there were alternatives to “skills” approaches (or, as in the case of Yelin’s Marxist analysis, critically conscious takes on such approaches). Above all, there was plenty to suggest that basic writing instruction could be seen not only in terms of traditional approaches to teaching writing but also in terms of communicative competencies and forms of comprehension (orality, literacy). Not that traditional approaches were neglected. The “Strategies” section of the *Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers* (Enos [1987]), a section that runs to nearly 350 pages, includes treatments of vocabulary, grammar, the writing process, classical rhetoric, invention, personal as well as expository prose, revision, correction, collaboration (including peer critiquing), and the use of computers.

This list of “strategies” from the *Sourcebook* looks like a fairly exhaustive inventory of what writing instruction concerned itself with in the 1980s. In fact, with the demise of cognitive approaches, the question for the next stage was what remained to make BW instruction special. If its students were not cognitively immature, then were they at least distinctive in some way? What was there about BW instruction that distinguished it from writing instruction in general? It was a fair question answered in one way when *The Random House Guide to Basic Writing*, coauthored by Sandra Schor and Judith Fishman and published in 1978, was reissued in 1981 as *The Random House Guide to Writing*. In fact, Laura Gray-Rosendale notes that in the 1980s “the question ‘Who is the Basic Writer?’ had shifted within certain circles to ‘Who isn’t the Basic Writer?’” (*Rethinking* 9).

For some teachers, understandably, this was a problem. The most important statement to that effect was Lynn Quitman Troyka's "Defining Basic Writing in Context" (1987), which featured the results of a national sampling of the writing of BW students. The samples revealed such heterogeneity as to raise concerns, at least for Troyka. Given such concerns, it may seem odd that Troyka would seek not to tighten the definition but to broaden it; however, it is not uncommon for those contesting the definition of BW instruction or the BW student to find the definition too narrow as well as too broad. In Troyka's case, the focus on writing, however heterogeneous, was at the expense of a broader and more salutary focus on literacy, specifically on reading.

Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: *A Redefined Teaching Project*

The book that would reshape basic writing to answer Troyka's call for a broader focus on literacy was *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts: Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course* (Bartholomae and Petrosky [1986]). The teaching program had its roots much earlier than its publication date suggests in David Bartholomae's "Teaching Basic Writing: An Alternative to Basic Skills," one of several BW programs featured in the special issue of *JBW* devoted to "Programs" (1979). At that time at the University of Pittsburgh, Basic Reading and Writing was a special six-hour, bottom-rung course developed for students with the lowest level of placement ("Teaching Basic Writing" 99–100). Even here, reading was not the only and perhaps not the chief issue. The key point was implied in Bartholomae's 1979 subtitle: this was an alternative to a skills approach. Cognitive approaches had also offered an alternative, but their appeal was complicated by the need for appropriate testing and tracking, shared (even mandated) curriculum design, and a need to spend serious time getting acquainted with some sectors of psychological research. That approach might (and did) appeal to program administrators, but it was beyond the scope of the typical teacher. Bartholomae spoke of more familiar things, things dear to an English teacher's heart: not only the importance of reading but also academic conventions, acts of interpretation, modes of discourse (rather than modes of thought), and the rituals of college life.

Bartholomae got to this broadened approach eventually and with considerable help from his colleagues. Back in 1979, he was better at saying what his "alternative to basic skills" *was not* than at saying what

it *was*. In explaining why the Pittsburgh program eschewed a “study skills approach,” he wrote,

Our goal was to offer reading as a basic intellectual activity, a way of collecting and shaping information. As such, we were offering reading as an activity similar, if not identical, to writing. The skills we were seeking to develop were not skills intrinsic to “encoding” or “decoding;” that is, they were not basic or constituent skills, like word attack skills, vocabulary skills or the ability to recognize paragraph patterns.

We wanted to design a pedagogy to replace those that define reading as the accurate reception of information fixed in a text, and fixed at the level of the sentence or paragraph, since that representation of reading reflects our students’ mistaken sense of what it means to read. (“Teaching Basic Writing” 101)

But what did it mean to “offer reading as a basic intellectual activity”? That is less than clear, and Bartholomae didn’t help matters by explaining where answers were sought: “We reviewed the recent work in psycholinguistics and reading, work which defines comprehension in terms of the processing of syntax, where general fluency and comprehension can be developed through activities like sentence-combining” (102).

As an “alternative to basic skills,” Bartholomae’s 1979 article seems a baby step, whereas *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*, published just seven years later, was a mighty leap. Some of this is due to the passage of time, and some of it, admittedly, is a matter of packaging. But the chief reason the program came to seem such an advance may have most to do with where Bartholomae and his cohorts went looking for answers to the question of how to define reading and writing as intellectual activities. The title for their book is derived from George Steiner’s *After Babel*, specifically where he resists the idea that discourse is chiefly about information transfer and affirms its capacity for the “counterfactuality” of interpretive freedom. Steiner is only the first in an array of literary theorists whose names are dropped in Bartholomae and Petrosky’s introductory essay as they invoke various fields of study: these include Jonathan Culler (deconstruction), Stanley Fish (reader-response theory), Hans-Georg Gadamer (herme-

neutics), Frank Kermode (narratology), and Edward Said (cultural studies). Heretofore, English teachers or graduate students in English had more often than not consulted work in the social sciences for insights into their own teaching. Now what they were seeing in *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* was the affirmation that their own discipline—English—could offer useful and exciting ways of approaching their work with BW students.

Basically, Bartholomae and Petrosky were saying that the real reason why basic writing students, presented with a reading, would so often fail (or claim to fail) to “get it” was that this is what reading meant for these students: a mere (but also impossible) matter of “getting it,” an exercise in total comprehension. The problem was that, especially from the student’s perspective, reading was viewed as a flat matter of right or wrong, success or failure. The solution, according to Bartholomae and Petrosky, was not to aid and abet the quest for complete comprehension. That was impossible because, as literary theorists showed from a dazzling array of angles, reading was a constructive, meaning-making, *interpretive* act. This was the thing to get at, and the best way to drive home the constructive nature of reading was to make responding to reading a matter of writing. This gave the act of writing a purpose and focus and gave the act of reading a visibility and accountability. The conjunction of reading and writing was undergirded by the conviction that “students can learn to transform materials, structures and situations that seem fixed or inevitable, and that in doing so they can move from the margins of the university to establish a place for themselves on the inside” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 41).

In laying out this vision, Bartholomae and Petrosky expressed concern that they were making students more the objects than the agents of transformation: “we seem to be saying that they cannot imagine what they say as anything else but a version of the words of their teachers. There is a distinction to be made here, however, one that defines the relation of the student and the institution as a dialectical relationship, that makes reading and writing simultaneously an imitative act and an individual performance” (40). What the students are offered, in other words, is “a way of seeing themselves at work within the institutional structures that make that work possible” (40).

There was much more to this book subtitled *Theory and Method for a Reading and Writing Course*, but these general outlines and statements help to explain why Peter Dow Adams, in reviewing it for the

newsletter of the Conference on Basic Writing in 1988, declared it “a revolutionary book that proposes major breaks with past approaches and deserves to have a significant effect on how all of us teach basic writing in the future” (3). *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* enfranchised teachers trained as scholars in literary/critical methods to bring those methods to bear on their teaching. It not only made a place for context in its pedagogy (and a central place at that) but made the role of context explicitly dynamic. It did not “dumb down” either the learning or the learners; on the contrary, BW students were challenged with difficult texts and assignments. And all this could be had just from the introductory essay. What followed were detailed assignment sequences as well as essays on pedagogy, student authority, error, revision, and the interrelations of reading and writing.

Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts seemed almost ideal as a teaching program to many, but there were some nagging questions. One problem was that everything about the course really made as much sense for traditional students as for basic writing students. In fact, the textbook that Bartholomae and Petrosky developed out of this program, *Ways of Reading* (which has gone through many subsequent editions), was—and is—used primarily in first-year composition, not in basic writing. As assignment sequences and even specific assignments were appropriated for “regular” writing courses, it was fair to ask in what ways this program was specifically about and for BW students.

Back in 1979, Bartholomae had been frank enough to say that much of what passed for definition actually came from the vagaries of assessment: “It’s hard to know how to describe the students who take our basic writing courses beyond saying that they are the students who take our courses” (“Teaching” 106). To show he wasn’t being flip, he gave specifics about placement at his school (mostly a reliance on SAT verbal scores) and then elaborated:

Those of us working with basic writing programs ought to be concerned about our general inability to talk about basic writing beyond our own institutions, at least as basic writing is a phenomenon rather than a source. We know that we give tests and teach courses and we know that this is done at other schools, but we know little else since there is no generally accepted index for identifying basic writing. (106)

Ultimately, this line of thinking would take him to the things he said in his keynote at the 1992 National Conference on Basic Writing, in which he questioned the whole BW enterprise (this address was subsequently published as “The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum”).

Another strand of thinking in Bartholomae’s discussions of pedagogy provided a strong answer to the question of what was distinctive about basic writing. Even if Bartholomae saw his BW students as accidents of assessment, they had been judged and found wanting—not by him but by his institution. The avowed goal of *Facts* was to allow such students to “move from the margins of the university to establish a place for themselves on the inside” (Bartholomae and Petrosky 41). Either the institution had to accommodate them, or they had to accommodate to the institution. As this idea was expressed in the introductory essay to *Facts*, “The student has to appropriate or be appropriated by a specialized discourse, and he has to do this as though he were easily and comfortably one with his audience, as though he were a member of the academy. And, of course, he is not” (8). In this explanation of why a change must take place, that added bit makes it very clear what (or rather who) must change. The teaching program outlined in *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts* is not just about teaching students but about initiating them, even assimilating them, into an unfamiliar world.

Initiation isn’t automatically negative—a rite of passage doesn’t have to be an act of conversion—but there were those who raised objections, most notably Peter Elbow, who argued against Bartholomae’s position in a series of debates at conferences and in journal articles. In Elbow’s view, there was nothing so very homogeneous and coherent as the academy or academic discourse to be initiated into; he felt that the argument for initiation was really an argument for the suppression of the personal, the individual. In their published form, Elbow’s views are best represented by their earlier (and more moderate) expression in “Reflections on Academic Discourse” (1991) and a more adamant take in “Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic: A Conflict in Goals” (published in 1995 in *College Composition and Communication* along with Bartholomae’s “Writing with Teachers: A Conversation with Peter Elbow”).

But this issue of initiation was much more than a dispute between two views or two respected compositionists. It marked a point in the

road where some turned off for reasons that looked and felt as much like a generational shift as a matter of diverging viewpoints. Though Elbow was older than Bartholomae, his views were shared and amplified by a new crop of teachers and scholars coming to the fore as the eighties became the nineties, people who had special reasons to be wary of initiation and assimilation. Composition scholars such as Victor Villanueva, Keith Gilyard, and Min-Zhan Lu would argue for multiculturalism and against the tendency of the dominant culture's institutions to strip away racial and ethnic loyalties—and the linguistic and cultural resources that came with them (for a more detailed discussion of these sources, see chapters 1 and 2). In “Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence” (1991), Lu took Shaughnessy to task for cutting off students from the ways “they might resist various pressures academic discourse exercises on their existing points of view” (35). Though the “essentialist view of language” critiqued in this article is Shaughnessy's, the assimilationist tendencies Lu ascribed to it had, by the 1990s, reached well beyond her, all the way to Lu's thesis advisor, David Bartholomae.

The Politics of Identity

In a field where questions of identification were always paramount, the politics of identity was bound to emerge as a focus. If the texts of BW students had been a challenge to parse, that challenge paled before the task of duly acknowledging their identities. This was so complex an undertaking that a new form came to the fore, both as scholarship and classroom practice: the literacy narrative. The one sure thing when grappling with the complexity of identity was that labels and assessments and placements couldn't begin to do it justice, which is to say that the focus—in the form of a harsh spotlight—was very much on the institution, the source of such reductive labels and simplifications.

Not everyone in BW could shed such light from the perspective of a Villanueva or a Gilyard or a Lu, of course, but their works were preceded by a still more important precedent. In 1989, Mike Rose published *Lives on the Boundary*, an autobiographical account in which he describes how, through a mix-up in test scores and a suspect demographic profile (an Italian-American from South L.A.), he had been slotted into the dead-end voc-ed track in high school, escaping it largely by luck (the good sort countering the bad luck that landed him there

in the first place). The perspective struck many as a revelation—crystallizing both the consequential complexities of getting stuck with the remedial label and the stark injustice of it.

Autobiography could do justice to both the complexities and the injustice. Writing from the perspective of a student but also describing the struggles and successes of the basic writers he worked with at UCLA, Rose had shown what students themselves could do. The personal narrative could become a powerful teaching tool. It had to be reconfigured a bit, made to focus on encounters with literacy and language. But those adjustments had their built-in justifications, and they brought an added advantage: the BW student, speaking from and about her situation, was acknowledging her situatedness. She was doing this not only for herself but also for her teacher, offering a bracing corrective to the tendency to underthink and overgeneralize where each student was coming from. Framing all this was a sense that education had been insufficiently democratic, its advantages as unevenly distributed as wealth. Just as theorists from I. A. Richards to Stanley Fish had inspired a sense of the complexity of discursive constructions, whether of texts read or texts written, another set of theorists helped to galvanize and direct the political dimension of the emergent teaching program. First and foremost among them were John Dewey and Paulo Freire, both emphasizing (albeit in different ways and from different contexts) the importance of experience-based democratic approaches.

This was not, of course, a sudden displacement of an earlier assimilationist agenda by a newly politicized pedagogy. Rose had long advocated a Deweyan vision. And Freire, in particular, had been building in influence throughout the 1980s, not only in the work of Patricia Bizzell (who recounted Freire's pervasive influence on her work in *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*) and Ann Berthoff (who wrote the foreword to Freire's *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*) but also in practice-centered work like *Freire for the Classroom: A Sourcebook for Liberatory Teaching*, edited by Ira Shor. In the 1990s, Freirean pedagogy came to the fore as a means of challenging ways of teaching that had begun to seem, for a new generation of teachers, too settled and accommodationist. A wonderful expression of this new resolve to let the students speak for themselves and begin to change their world is to be found in the preface to *An Unquiet Pedagogy: Transforming Practice in the English Classroom* (1991) by Eleanor Kutz and Hephzibah Roskelly. Just a page or two after the brief foreword by

Freire, Kutz and Roskelly explain that their book is “about how teachers can build on the language and knowledge and social experience that their students bring to their classrooms” as they give voice to the beliefs that animate their project:

We recognize that connections between words and actions, between teaching and learning, are not apolitical. Although we may have avoided direct political statement in the book, the call for change is nonetheless clear. We believe that attitudes that cause cultural difference to be seen as deficiency must change. We believe institutional structures that assign—and consign—people to levels of ability based on prejudicial evaluation must be altered. Institutional change begins with individuals in conversation—learning from one another, mutually reinforcing, challenging, and reshaping thought and action. It’s talk that nurtures change, talk that moves outside to change the listener or the classroom or the society and inside to change the mind. (xii)

There’s more than a hint here of the delicate balance that must be struck: between advocating political change and propounding a political program, between having a sense of direction and being so directive as to seem preemptory. It was a challenge Freire himself saw as a political necessity, as he noted in his “Letter to North American Teachers”:

The teacher who is critical of the current power in society needs to lessen the distance between the speeches he or she makes to describe political options and what she/he does in the classroom. In other words, to realize alternatives or choices, in the day-to-day classroom, the progressive teacher attempts to build coherence and consistency as a virtue. It is contradictory to proclaim progressive politics and then to practice authoritarianism or opportunism in the classroom. A progressive position requires democratic practice where authority never becomes authoritarianism, and where authority is never so reduced that it

disappears in a climate of irresponsibility and license.
(Shor, *Freire* 212)

This idea that the writing classroom needs to be decentered (but not anarchic), revolving less and less around the teacher's authority, has its necessary complement; there must be ways of investing authority in the students, authorizing and valuing what they have to say. Increasingly in the 1990s, critical pedagogy was seen as a way of decentering authority in the classroom and democratizing education (see Shor, *Empowering*).

One way of enacting critical pedagogy in some classrooms relied on asking students to write literacy narratives. The use of personal narratives, even those that focused on literacy specifically, was hardly new, as instanced, for example, by Margaret Byrd Boegeman in "Lives and Literacy: Autobiography in Freshman Composition" (1980). What was new was making the students' literacy narratives do much of the work formerly done by the teacher—exploding stereotypes (as in Vincent Piro's "Renaming Ourselves" and Mary Soliday's "Translating the Self and Difference through Literacy Narratives"), exploring connections between orality and literacy (Akua Duku Anokye's "Oral Connections to Literacy: The Narrative"), acknowledging difficulty (Min-Zhan Lu's "From Silence to Words: Writing as Struggle"), even exploring and/or resisting connections to published writing (Stuart Greene's "Composing Oneself through the Narratives of Others" and J. Blake Scott's "The Literacy Narrative as Production Pedagogy"). Whatever purpose, precisely, the literacy narrative was asked to serve, it consistently had one ineluctable effect: focusing attention on individual difference.

Issues of identity and self (and the ways in which they are socially constructed) were coming to the fore in teaching even as the writing subject (as a theoretical as well as pedagogical concern) was highlighted in books like Susan Miller's *Rescuing the Subject: A Critical Introduction to Rhetoric and the Writer* (1989) and Lester Faigley's *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition* (1994). It was almost as if a diversity within was confronting a diversity without, a fragmented self confronting a heterogeneous classroom or educational institution or society. The challenges, both for the BW student and the BW teacher, were formidable. Managing this diversity became the subject of pedagogical inquiries and narratives, with success stories (*The Discovery of Competence: Teaching and Learning with Diverse*

Student Writers [1993] by Eleanor Kutz, Suzy Q. Groden, and Vivian Zamel) as well as stories of struggle (*A Kind of Passport: A Basic Writing Adjunct Program and the Challenge of Student Diversity* [1993] by Anne DiPardo).

Literacy as a Social Practice

In her influential chair's address at the 2004 Conference on College Composition and Communication titled "Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key," Kathleen Blake Yancey emphasized just how diverse the entire field of composition had become by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Writing was experiencing what she described as "a tectonic change" (298) as new technologies became widely available and widely used. Nearly all of this new writing, as Yancey pointed out, was self-sponsored, done willingly outside of school and without the intervention of teachers. Basic writers as well, once considered to be on the wrong side of "the digital divide," were participating in various types of digital composing from instant messaging and email to blogging and social networking. How have basic writing programs and instructors responded to these momentous changes? It's impossible to know just how many BW classrooms have been transformed. But the pages of the *Journal of Basic Writing* soon began to describe pedagogy that reflected changes that were happening outside the classroom.

In an article titled "Redefining Literacy as Social Practice" in the Fall 2006 issue of *JBW*, which celebrated the journal's twenty-fifth volume, Shannon Carter articulated a pedagogical approach that works against what Brian V. Street has termed the "autonomous model of literacy" on which standards testing is based. According to Street, an ideological model of literacy, in contrast to an autonomous model, "posits . . . that literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (Street 2, qtd. in Carter 97). In this article and in her book on the same subject (*The Way Literacy Lives: Rhetorical Dexterity and Basic Writing Instruction*), Carter documents an approach, developed for teaching basic writing at her home institution, Texas A&M University at Commerce. In a carefully sequenced series of assignments, basic writers are helped to develop "rhetorical dexterity" as they "read, understand, manipulate, and negotiate the cultural and linguistic codes of a new community of practice [aca-

democratic discourse] based on a relatively accurate assessment of another, more familiar one” (“Redefining” 94) such as a specific workplace or recreational pursuit. Rather than equipping students with a set of easily transportable “literate strategies,” this pedagogical approach, according to Carter, helps students to “redefine literacy for themselves in more productive ways” (119). As they work toward achieving rhetorical dexterity, students begin to develop a meta-awareness of how what they know about one discourse community in which they are highly competent can help them to achieve competence in a new academic discourse community.

Hannah Ashley, like Carter, emphasizes the multiple and shifting discourses that surround us. In “The Art of Queering Voices: A Fugue” (2007), Ashley writes: “Part of the work that we accomplish in our writing courses should focus on the general principle of discourse as unprincipled. An always unstable, contingent performance, reflecting and affecting relations of power” (8). Using the lenses of Bakhtinian and queer theory to highlight the importance of reported speech in academic writing, Ashley shows how writers can use these voices “in earnest, or queered: performing a voice in part, or out of context, or juxtaposed alongside other voices, in order to poke fun at it, pervert it, break down the reverence for it” (13). Her teaching goal, as expressed in this article and an earlier one, coauthored with Katy Lynn (“Ventriloquism”), is to help students see how these different voices interact with one another and gain more control in using them to achieve their own ends as writers—in other words, to work toward rhetorical dexterity.

Other articles published in the *Journal of Basic Writing* since 2000 explore ways of encouraging alternate discourses and rhetorical dexterity in basic writing classrooms. For example, in “Represent, Representin’, Representation: The Efficacy of Hybrid Texts in the Writing Classroom,” Donald McCrary draws upon his own recent teaching. In working with basic writers in Brooklyn, he assigns readings that include hybrid discourse using Black English or other languages. He then gives students the option of employing hybrid discourse in their own writing. His goal is “to awaken students to their multiple literacies, as they dismantle the barriers—linguistic, cultural, psychological—erected by standard English supremacy” (89).

Jeffrey Maxson (“Government of da Peeps, for da Peeps, and by da Peeps’: Revisiting the Contact Zone”) asks students to understand

language use by playing with it in assignments where they use parody and translation to rewrite passages of academic prose in less formal idioms. And Chris Leary (“‘When We Remix . . . We Remake!!!’: Reflections on Collaborative Ethnography, The New Digital Ethic, and Test Prep”) describes a project in which he and his BW students read texts on composition theory and, working collaboratively, “remixed” these other writers’ texts to “enter the conversations that those texts are a part of” (91). At the same time, since students were faced with the need to pass the ACT writing exam at the end of the course, they used playful techniques, sometimes involving remix, to prepare for the test. As Leary concludes: “In this environment, even test prep can be unmoored and resituated. Just as we do with texts, images, and materials, we can keep recontextualizing test prep until we like what it means and what it does” (102). Drawing creatively on new technology that is now widely available, teachers across the U.S. are incorporating digital technology and new media in their BW classrooms (see, for example, “Technologies for Transcending a Focus on Error: Blogs and Democratic Aspirations in First-Year Composition” by Cheryl C. Smith and “New Worlds of Errors and Expectations: Basic Writers and Digital Assumptions” by Marisa A. Klages and J. Elizabeth Clark).

The indisputable fact is that basic writing, as a pedagogical challenge, has never been more complex—or more exciting. While wrestling with the problems of social injustice and the complexities of social construction, it has all the old problems to deal with as well—error, assessment, tracking, and institutional marginalization. But it also has many opportunities afforded by new approaches and new technologies. The downside is that teachers and students may feel overwhelmed by all that is being asked of them. The conservatory function of lore and the inertia of institutions pretty much ensures that literacy narratives, liberatory pedagogy, and the recognition of multiple literacies and hybrid discourses will not supplant grammar instruction or externally imposed assessments but will instead be added to the instructional mix, often in the same program. Whether the teaching focus is on Shaughnessy’s reading of error or Perl’s attention to process, Lunsford’s gauging of development or Bartholomae’s acquisition of academic literacy, Ashley’s emphasis on queering voices or Carter’s call for rhetorical dexterity, the logical consequence of any of these approaches is to emphasize a pedagogical approach that is intensely individualized, unique for each student. If a difference has emerged in recent

years, it is that the pull toward individualization has reached a kind of tipping point, one that threatens to undo the underlying rationale for basic writing: the notion that BW students need a special form or level of support. If these students are all so different, then what form would or could that special support take? And if they are all so unique, then what makes them different from (and thus necessitates their separation from) the “regular” or “mainstream” student?

Experiments in Mainstreaming

As originally conceived, mainstreaming was predicated on providing a special kind of support even as it merged students into the mainstream. For Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason of CUNY’s City College, this special support was “enrichment” meant to benefit mainstream students as well as those with BW placement. For Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson of the University of South Carolina, it was the provision of “studio” sections for weaker students running concurrently with regular writing classes. For Gregory Glau and the students of the “Stretch Program” at Arizona State University, support took the form of more time to complete the work of the regular English curriculum. In each instance, however, the students continued to be defined as special cases; “mainstreaming” wasn’t meaningful unless it worked for students demonstrably outside the mainstream. In consequence, mainstreaming programs had the effect of reifying BW students and BW instruction even as they suggested that all students could and should be merged into the mainstream.

To some extent, the title Grego and Thompson gave to the article describing their project was all too apt. Experiments in mainstreaming were at least as much about “Repositioning Remediation” as eliminating it. This realization was confirmed in the titles of later articles about successful mainstreaming experiments at SUNY New Paltz (“Re-Modeling Basic Writing” by Rachel Rigolino and Penny Freel) and at the University of Tennessee at Martin (“It’s Not Remedial: Re-envisioning Pre-First-Year College Writing” by Heidi Huse, Jenna Wright, Anna Clark, and Tim Hacker). But as John Paul Tassoni and Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson point out in “Not Just Anywhere, Anywhen: Mapping Change through Studio Work,” whenever remediation is “repositioned,” it involves “incursion into an institutional landscape that . . . [is] not transparent, unclaimed, or uncontested. . . .

[T]hus remaking an institutional landscape involves issues of power and colonization” (68).

Yet seen from another angle, these “experiments” in mainstreaming were extremely important for the whole field of composition. For one thing, the mainstreaming experiments recognized that in approaches to academic literacy not only the students but also the institution would have to adapt. And, as the term “mainstreaming” signified, the students could be made to feel a part of the institution, if only provisionally and by grace of special support. Whether BW students had been so thoroughly segregated as to justify Shor’s use of the term “apartheid,” there is no question that their placement in special BW courses and programs had separated them from the flow of college life. But in mainstreaming experiments, the idea that such students were not yet ready to engage in college instruction was held in abeyance if not eliminated entirely.

The Fragmentation of the Teaching Enterprise

Mary Soliday devoted the fourth of five chapters in her important book *The Politics of Remediation* (“Representing Remediation: The Politics of Agency, 1985–2000”) to the causes and consequences of the move against remedial programs and remedial students in the late 1990s. Tracing much of the impetus for these attacks on remediation to significant cutbacks in state and federal funding for public higher education in the 1980s and to (often related) increases in tuition, Soliday notes that coping with such losses of revenue meant shifting “the burden to students, so that a substantial part of the costs for higher education was privatized” (114). Though another means of coping was to “downsize or abolish remediation and equal opportunity programs” (115), this shifting of costs to the students was also highly significant since not all students could bear that shifted burden. At baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities, percentages of students from wealthier families increased, while those from poorer families decreased. Consequently, both remedial programs and students likely to be placed in them shifted downward to community colleges. Soliday has a one-word term for the result—stratification:

Stratification is the strategic management tool that institutions use to respond to crises in growth. Strategies include privatizing the costs of education, tightening admissions, and downsizing selected

tiers. Remediation's shifting attachment to various segments plays one powerful role in this complex process. The downward movement of remedial education reflects a parallel movement of students by class, ethnic, and racial background. (115)

The movement of basic writing out of four-year schools and into community colleges is a trend that has intensified in recent years (see Lavin and Hyllegard, Greene and McAlexander). One consequence of this downward movement is to make it less likely that those still teaching "remedial writing" have access to the research or even the "lore" that could support such teaching. In a paper originally given at the Conference on Replacing Remediation in Higher Education (held at Stanford University in 1998), then revised and published in web-accessible form in 2000, W. Norton Grubb notes that "educators in two- and four-year colleges have virtually no contact with one another; even though there are journals and associations to which the two groups might contribute, like *College Composition and Communication*, in practice these are dominated by four-year colleges" (5). Relegating basic writing instruction to community colleges exacerbates the problems that have always affected it; community colleges tend to have higher faculty workloads, less demand for and reliance on scholarship, and more part-time instructors—all things that mean less recourse to the knowledge base about BW teaching methods and programs. Noting as much, Grubb does not say that "skills-oriented remediation" necessarily dominates, but he does say that "the appearance of more student- and meaning-centered teaching seems random and idiosyncratic, because the odyssey . . . is usually one that instructors make on their own, through trial and error, with at best a little help from their friends. In most community colleges, there are few institutional resources to help instructors make this transition . . ." (11).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, teaching basic writing seems more context-bound and more various than ever before. As Laura Gray-Rosendale wrote in 2006, "During the last seven years the notion of the basic writer's identity as in situ—or context dependent—has emerged more fully than I ever could have anticipated" (9). Latter-day BW instruction is not one thing but many and serves different student constituencies. Depending on where a BW program is located, it may be primarily for African-Americans (as in Keith Gilyard and Elaine Richardson's "Students' Right to Possibility: Basic Writing and

African American Rhetoric” [2001]) or for Latinos (as in Raul Ybarra’s “Cultural Dissonance in Basic Writing Courses” [2001]) or for Native Americans (as in Laura Gray-Rosendale, Loyola K. Bird, and Judith F. Bullock’s “Rethinking the Basic Writing Frontier: Native American Students’ Challenge to Our Histories” [2003]), primarily a construction of class (as in Carolyn Boiarsky’s “Working Class Students in the Academy” [2003]) or largely an urban phenomenon (as in Patrick Bruch’s “Moving to the City: Redefining Literacy in the Post-Civil Rights Era” [2003]). It may also involve an institutional adjustment (as in Mark McBeth’s “Arrested Development: Revising Remediation at John Jay College of Criminal Justice” [2006]). On the other hand, the diversity of the BW student population and the dispersal of instructional sites can loom as a teaching challenge pervading the curriculum (as in Stephen Fishman and Lucille McCarthy’s *Whose Goals, Whose Aspirations? Learning to Teach Underprepared Writers Across the Curriculum* [2002] or Vivian Zamel and Ruth Spack’s “Teaching Multicultural Learners: Beyond the ESOL Classroom and Back Again” [2006]).

Issues of basic writing’s definition, of teaching methods and approaches, have never seemed more complicated, never less susceptible to the direction and definition of BW teachers. Legislative mandates and admission restrictions seem to have taken over decisions about who BW students are (or even whether such students exist). Yet such radical redefinitions of circumstance, like those that led to the beginning of open admissions and basic writing, are also opportunities for rethinking and innovation. Mainstreaming is an excellent example of this kind of productive redefinition. Rhonda Grego and Nancy Thompson devised their “studio” approach in response to the decision of South Carolina’s Commission on Higher Education to discontinue credit for basic writing. Redefining both assessment and instruction, Grego and Thompson responded by creating special support for students who might find regular composition tough going without it. The small-group approach they developed was, for them, an improvement on the institutionally subverted status quo for BW students and not just a substitute for it. Those small groups provided students with mutual support while they worked on actual college-level assignments rather than simply preparing for some future time when they might be called on to do such work. Grego and Thompson’s project has served as a model for what basic writing can become in the crucible of the

new pressures on the field and its students: an opportunity for rethinking and restructuring, an application of new methods and alternative pedagogies (for descriptions of other innovative models, see Tassoni and Lewiecki-Wilson, Huse et al., Rigolino and Freel, Glau, “*Stretch at 10*,” and Adams et al.).

That challenges to the existence of basic writing can also be opportunities is what Deborah Mutnick concludes in her overview of basic writing pedagogy (“On the Academic Margins” [2001]), but she stresses that such opportunities are not easily seized. Redefining BW pedagogy in effective ways requires the kind of knowledge making and sharing that the straitened situations of BW teachers militate against. It means making sound, informed decisions when in a position to make them, and it necessarily means scrambling for the leverage to make decisions at all. The onus, writes Mutnick, is

to know the history of remedial instruction if we are to deal with the larger implications of current trends in higher education, not only the elimination of remedial courses but also attacks on affirmative action and other equal opportunity programs designed to give masses of people access to higher education. We will need to understand linguistic theories of error, the relationship between language and meaning, and approaches to teaching and learning in diverse cultural contexts. And we will need to continue to research literacy acquisition and the writing process of adult writers, a project that, as numerous scholars have suggested, illuminates the complexities of written language for us all. But we will also, I believe, have to become more savvy, more politically astute and active, if we are to be the ones to decide which courses best serve the students we teach. (198)

That’s a tall order, and a big “if.” But it certainly underscores the way research needs to inform teaching, which is the subject of the next chapter.