Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC

Volume 10, Number 1 Fall 1990

Toward Effective Assessment

A Critique of Current Approaches

Karen Greenberg

Basic writing instruction and assessment are intimately linked: Student writers receive the label "basic" on the basis of their performance on tests. And writing tests are everywhere. In America today, millions of secondary and postsecondary students undergo some sort of writing assessment, most often for the purpose of placing them into and exiting them from writing courses and programs, but often also in response to government mandates to certify students' writing competencies for retention and graduation. Writing assessment is such a large industry today that one would expect that most procedures and instruments would be fair, reliable, and educationally sound. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many assessment programs ignore recent research and classroom practices, and many students get labeled as "basic" or "remedial" on the basis of error-ridden evidence.

During the past seven years, I have examined hundreds of tests from schools across the nation and have come to believe that many current writing assessment efforts have serious problems, most of which stem from a lack of a common conceptual framework for both the teaching *and* the testing of writing. Teachers and test developers often ignore recent insights into the nature

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CBW Annual Meeting

Thursday, March 21, 1991
6:30-7:45 pm
Boston Marriott Copley Place
Salons A, B, C, & D

Kay Halasek, Bill Jones, & John Trimbur
Lead Discussions of
Race, Class, & Gender
in the Basic Writing Classroom

Wine & Cheese

Review of *Research in Basic Writing*

Jeanne Gunner

Michael G. Moran and Martin J. Jacobi, eds. *Research in Basic Writing: A Bibliographic Sourcebook*, 1990. Greenwood Press, Inc., 88 Post Road West, Westport, CT 06881. $49.00.

With the proliferation of scholarship in the field of composition and rhetoric, essay collections and bibliographic overviews have become especially appealing: The editors of these volumes do the valuable footwork of searching out, sifting through, and summarizing recent scholarly work. Those volumes with an historical perspective go a step further and provide (usually) both a chronological view of the work of the field and a critique, directly or indirectly, of the field as a whole, showing by inclusion or exclusion which works have held up over time and are thus now seen as "seminal." Such volumes, whether they search out and duplicate articles published elsewhere or review the research literature for bibliographic ends, in fact provide the canon-forming force that seems to be on the rise in composition at large and within basic writing in particular.

"Canon" is a word we have come to treat with a degree of suspicion, having been sensitized to its political implications. It is a word that this current volume of collected essays brings to mind, and one the editors use in their introduction. Like Theresa Enos's *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers*, which is a collection of canonical essays on basic writing, Moran and Jacobi's *Research in Basic Writing* is a kind of bibliographic canon, a list that refines our notion of the major research sources, winnowing out the less than absolutely central. The effect is an ultimate narrowing of the bibliography of basic writing research and establishment of the key texts–not because sources have been left out, but because

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From the Chairs

Executive Committee Nominations

It's the responsibility and pleasure of the chairs and executive committee to present CBW with an annual slate of three new executive committee members. This year we are naming Sally Harrold, formerly of Loyola U of Chicago and currently of Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay, Bill Jones of Rutgers U in Newark, New Jersey, and Mary Kay Tirrell, of U of California at Fullerton, all of whom have been active in CBW since its renewal; biographical notes appear opposite. We ask you to confirm them in office for two-year terms by returning the enclosed ballot.

Warm appreciation to executive committee members Suellynn Duffey, Jeanne Gunner, and Bob Roth, whose term of office will end at CCCC in Boston. The rejuvenation of CBW owes much to these three.

Surveying Our Members

One purpose of this newsletter is to explore the world of basic writing: the issues on which our concerns are united or divided, the settings in which our enterprise is carried on, and the conditions under which we work. To this end, we publish an occasional survey, which, however informal, may indicate our basic directions and experiences.

This issue focuses on assessment. Karen Greenberg (page 1) provides an overview of writing assessment nationwide, while Linda Stine (page 7) reviews several articles on the same topic. So it seems fitting that we survey how matters of assessment and placement are handled in members' schools. Please take a few minutes to read and return the enclosed questionnaire as a report on practices at your school–and annotate it (if appropriate) as a critique of those practices. We'll report the results in our next issue.

Framing the Questions

At CCCC last year several people said they'd had difficulty responding to the way some of the questions in last fall's survey were worded. We hope you'll respond to the surveys even when (or especially when) you think the questions are slightly off the mark.

It's hard to ask questions that will get at meaningful differences before one is sure what those differences are, and in respect to instructional issues some terms turn out to be "loaded" for one set of folks or another. But this is precisely what we all need to learn more about: Where do we in BW see the world in the same way, and where do we differ?

If you can't frame an answer in the terminology of the questions, write and tell us why not–and answer using your own vocabulary. There's space at the end of the survey insert for comments. And we'd also be interested in your responses to the Greenberg article or the Stine reviews. Even brief remarks can tell a lot.

As is well known to all, a response delayed gradually slips out of short-term memory and into the ether–so do complete and return your ballot and survey right away. We look forward to hearing from you.

Peter Dow Adams
Carolyn Kirkpatrick

The *CBW Newsletter* is published twice a year, in the fall and spring, by the Conference on Basic Writing, a special interest group of the Conference on College Communication and Composition. The editors are Peter Dow Adams & Carolyn Kirkpatrick. Opinions expressed in these pages are those of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the officers of CBW, CBW's Executive Committee, or CCCC.

Membership in the Conference on Basic Writing is $5 for 1 year, $9 for 2 years, and $12 for 3 years. Membership includes a subscription to the *CBW Newsletter*. Address: Peter Dow Adams, English Department, Essex Community College, Baltimore County, Maryland 21237.

Executive Committee Slate

Below appear brief bios of the three nominees for the executive committee; we thank them for their willingness to contribute their time and energy.

Sally Harrold is known to colleagues in basic writing as the compiler of the three fine bibliographies in *A Sourcebook for Basic Writing Teachers*; her 1986 dissertation at Texas Christian University was also an essay in bibliography, and she is a contributing bibliographer for the *CCC Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric*. She has this year moved to a teaching position at Southwestern Oregon Community College in Coos Bay, Oregon, after four years at Loyola University of Chicago. She hopes to see CBW consolidate and extend its activities, to work more closely with Writing Centers Associations, and to promote communication between those who teach developmental reading and developmental writing.

Bill Jones has long taught and served terms as department chair in the Academic Foundations Department of the Newark campus of Rutgers University. In the 1970s, he helped organize and coordinate six one-day composition conferences at Rutgers/Newark that are still remembered fondly by colleagues in the New York metropolitan area. A sabbatical leave last year produced an article on double-entry logs to generate expository commentary and to prompt revisions. Other professional interests include the linguistics of Black English and application of ESL techniques to basic writing.

Mary Kay Tirrell has served for the past six years as director of the Developmental Writing Program and the Writing Center at California State University/Fullerton, a setting where many students are second language learners from Southeast Asia. She has a special interest in composition theory and in the training of basic writing teachers. As a graduate student in the program in composition and rhetoric at USC, Tirrell was a founding board member of *The Writing Instructor*. Her most recent publication appeared in last May's CCC, "Re-Presenting James Britton: A Symposium," a group of papers which she edited and to which she contributed. The papers grew out of a 1988 NCTE panel that she organized in honor of James Britton (the subject of her dissertation) on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

CBW Meeting to Examine Race, Class, and Gender in Basic Writing Classrooms

On Thursday evening at CCCC in Boston, CBW invites you to meet other CBW members and join in a discussion of race, class, and gender in basic writing classrooms. At this session, Bill Jones (Rutgers/Newark), John Trimbur (Worcester Polytechnic Institute), and Kay Halasek (Ohio State) will each speak briefly to raise questions about the effect of race, class, and gender on basic writing students and teachers.

After each presentation, members will discuss the issues raised with others in small groups. By the end of the evening, we hope we all will have encountered both new ideas and new friends. Wine and cheese will be served.

Mina Shaughnessy Writing Award To be Presented at CBW

At the CBW meeting in Boston, editors Peter Miller and Bill Bernhardt of the *Journal of Basic Writing* will present the Mina Shaughnessy Writing Award to Kathleen Dixon. The $500 prize, endowed by an anonymous donor for the best *JBW* article every two years, has been awarded for her "Intellectual Development and the Place of Narrative in 'Basic' and Freshman Composition," which appeared in the spring 1989 issue. Kathleen Dixon is a doctoral candidate in English and Education at the University of Michigan and teaches at The Ohio State University at Lima.

Don't delay. Return your ballot and survey!

Assessment

continued from page 1.

of the writing process; they may give lip-service to the notion of writing as a complex cognitive and social activity, but they devote class time to "skills drills" and editing tests. Too little time is spent on the incubation stage of accessing and organizing ideas and experiences for writing. And too often, writing tasks–in class and on tests–are restricted to documentative discourse (e.g., taking notes, filling in answers to questions in workbooks) or to reportorial discourse (writing stories, descriptions, and reports). Students do not have enough opportunities to revise their ideas or to master the rhetorical skills related to the varied purposes and communicative contexts for writing.

Current writing tests reflect this gap between theory and practice. Few tests assess composing and revising skills across a variety of rhetorical situations; instead, most tests for which students actually write measure the ability to produce a single extemporaneous piece of writing in a timed situation. And the most widely-used writing tests in America today–standardized multiple-choice tests–don't require students to write at all, but ask them merely to identify and correct errors in contrived and often unnatural sentences.

> . . . many students get labeled as "basic" or "remedial" on the basis of error-ridden evidence.

Multiple-choice testing continues to dominate postsecondary writing assessment, probably because it is easy to score and it produces scores that are very "reliable." Reliability is an estimate of a test score's accuracy and consistency. Multiple-choice measures always produce higher reliability than do essay tests, in part because there is a far greater chance of raters (or machines) agreeing on whether something is correct or incorrect than there is of readers agreeing that something is superior or inferior. (It should, nevertheless, be noted that many writing assessment programs are able to achieve highly reliable ratings for scores on students' essay tests [i.e., inter-rater correlations of .85 and above].)

Some schools use multiple-choice tests in conjunction with an essay test to place students into writing courses, because the combination of these two types of tests often can predict grades in writing courses more accurately than can either type alone. However, this predictive relationship depends, to a great extent, on the nature of the writing course. If the processes and skills that are taught in a school's writing courses bear little resemblance to those that are assessed on the multiple-choice section of the placement test, then the predictive power of this test is weakened.

Further, in test makers' terms, multiple-choice tests are reliable, but not valid. The content-related validity of a writing test is the extent to which its tasks are representative of the skills and understandings taught and evaluated in most writing courses. Multiple-choice tests of writing have very little content-related validity because they cannot sample important aspects of the domain: they do not require test-takers to do any writing. And the consensus of our profession is that the capacity to detect errors or to fill in blanks in other people's writing has little to do with the capacity to find and develop an idea in language appropriate for a specific purpose and reader.

Furthermore, a recent study of the use of multiple-choice tests for placement into college writing courses indicated that they are less effective than are essay tests for placing "high-risk" students (Hilgers and Gearen). This study, conducted by members of the Manoa Writing Board of the University of Hawaii, revealed very low correlations between the SAT verbal subtest and the University's five-hour, two-sample essay test (.19) and between the Test of Standard Written English and this essay test (.20). The researchers concluded that accurate writing course placement for high-risk students could not be achieved through reliance on these multiple-choice tests.

In addition, a recent report by the National Commission on Testing and Public Policy condemned the extensive use of multiple-choice writing tests. The report noted that "current testing, primarily multiple-choice in format, is over-relied upon, lacks adequate public accountability, sometimes leads to unfairness in the allocation of opportunities, and too often undermines vital social policies." The report also concluded that "The more test scores disproportionately deny opportunities to minorities, the greater the need to show that the tests measure characteristics relevant to the opportunities being allocated."

Nevertheless, most postsecondary state-wide writing assessment programs still use multiple-choice tests in conjunction with a brief writing sample, particularly for placement purposes. One example is the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test (NJCBSPT), which is required of all students admitted to New Jersey's public universities and colleges. Several other states, including Florida and Texas, have mandated a two-part test (multiple-choice and writing sample) to certify students' competence at the

sophomore or junior level.

In contrast, for the past 12 years, the university where I teach–the City University of New York (CUNY)–has employed a holistically-scored writing sample without a multiple-choice component. All students admitted to any of the seventeen CUNY undergraduate colleges must write a fifty-minute essay that is holistically scored according to a six-point scale. They must pass the test (as well as tests in reading and math) prior to the completion of their sixtieth college-level credit hour. The CUNY faculty who developed our tests were adamant in their decision to exclude a multiple-choice section on the writing test. Currently, we are re-examining our writing test, and we have found that CUNY writing faculty want one or more additional writing samples on the test, to assess students' abilities to write in different rhetorical contexts.

One test that is currently under consideration as a model at CUNY is the Manoa Writing Placement Examination (MWP), which is used to place almost 2,000 students a year into four levels of writing courses at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. The MWP is a five-hour test, consisting of two essays, with directions for planning, drafting, and revising. One essay requires students to respond to a truism or a proverb with personal experiences, and the other requires them to analyze and present a point of view about a 500 to 800 word reading. Every essay is holistically scored by at least four faculty members. Members of the MWP Board, which oversees the test, are satisfied with the test, but they are currently examining the most interesting new development in large-scale writing assessment–portfolio assessment.

Portfolios–collections of written work selected and assembled by the writer–are currently being used to determine exit from a variety of postsecondary writing courses. (At least one school, Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, has begun requiring a portfolio from entering students in order to place them into appropriate writing courses.) Portfolio assessments can sample several discourse domains and can provide opportunities for students to revise their writing. Thus, because portfolio tests enable teachers to assess composing and revising across a wide range of communicative contests and tasks, they are probably the most valid means of assessing writing available to us today. Moreover, portfolio evaluation sends the message that "writing" means developing and revising extended pieces of discourse, *not* filling in blanks or selecting from multiple-choice options.

Portfolio evaluation is a relatively new assessment tool, and it has problems that need to be resolved. In a recent study of the use of portfolios for comparing student performance in different writing courses, conducted by the MWP Board at the University of Hawaii at Manoa (Despain and Hilgers), investigators found that (1) teachers-readers found it difficult to evaluate portfolios when they did not know the contexts of individual essays' production, (2) different types of writing within each portfolio triggered different reader biases, and (3) reader fatigue tended to undermine reader agreement.

Despite these problems, portfolio evaluation does seem to be the direction in which postsecondary writing assessment should move. Portfolio testing reminds us that we cannot–and should not–separate testing from teaching. Those of us who are committed to a process model of writing understand that we cannot use multiple-choice testing; we also understand that there is no need to create the "perfect" essay or portfolio test which will produce reliabilities equal to those of multiple-choice tests. Human readers will always differ in their judgments of the quality of a piece of writing; there is no one "right" judgment or "true score" for a person's writing ability. If we accept that writing is a multidimensional, situational construct that fluctuates across a wide variety of contexts, then we must also respect the complexity of teaching *and* testing it.

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A comprehensive and effective basic writing program requires accurate information about students' skills and abilities. Multiple-choice instruments cannot provide this–especially not for high-risk students. Holistically-scored essay tests serve our purposes reasonably well, but they do not sample (or encourage instruction in) a variety of rhetorical domains. What we need to improve our programs–a multidraft portfolio test that adequately represents writing for different purposes and for different discourse communities–is a vision many of us are beginning to share.

References for works cited can be found on page 10.

Karen L. Greenberg teaches English at Hunter College, CUNY and is director of the National Testing Network in Writing.

CCCC SESSIONS OF INTEREST

Thursday, March 21

10:15	am A13	Cultural Contexts for Basic Writing: How We Read Acts of Quotation in the BW's Text
10:15	am A18	Non-Native Writers, Mainstream Practices, and Expectations: Mutual Influences
noon	B1	Meeting Diverse Student Needs for the Writing Center Tutorial
noon	B7	Identification and Opposition in Basic Writing
noon	B12	Responding to Dialect in a Pluralistic Society
1:45	pm C2	How to Assess Rhetorical Strategies in ESL
1:45	pm C15	Basic Writing: Weighing Dialect and Other Language Imperatives
1:45	pm C17	Reorienting Writing Centers: Reconsidering the Generation, Application, and Testing of Theory through Research
3:25	pm D14	Model for Teacher Development in Two-Year Basic English
3:25	pm D22	Effective Basic Writing Pedagogy
5:00	pm E24	Reassessing Social Factors in the Development of Language Skills
6:30	**pm SIG**	**Conference on Basic Writing Meeting**

Friday, March 22

8:30	am F23	Computer Use in Basic Writing
10:15	am G4	"Educated" English in a Multicultural Society
10:15	am G5	Re-examining the Nature of Writing Center Tutoring vs. Classroom Teaching
10:15	am G23	New Directions in Programs and Instruction
noon	H7	Error, Dialectic, and Authentic Dialogue in the Basic Writing Class
noon	H23	Discourse Community and Processes of Writing in ESL
1:45	pm I13	Re-examining the Writing Center's Philosophy and Pedagogy
1:45	pm I19	Re-thinking Basic Writing
1:45	pm I20	Grammar Reconsidered: One More Time
3:25	pm J1	Sustaining the Ecology of Writing Centers
3:25	pm J15	Re-visions of Basic Writing
5:00	pm K1	Examining and Improving the Status of the Writing Center
5:00	pm K15	You Got to Want It: Academic Discourse in Basic Writing Programs

Saturday, March 23

10:00	am L7	Investigations into Second-Language Processes Old and New
10:00	am L12	Computers and Basic Writers: Results of a 5-Year Controlled Study
10:00	am L15	Course Design for Basic Writing
10:00	am L20	Error as a Social Phenomenon
10:00	am L22	The Summer School Enrichment Program: Cross-Cultural Collaboration for At-Risk College Students

Post-Conference Workshops on Saturday, March 23

1:30-5:30	SW6	Pedagogy and Community: Using Ethnography in Basic Writing Instruction (A "Why" and "How" Workshop)
1:30-5:30	SW11	Manual Applications of Computer Technology in Basic Writing

"Reviews," on the next page, is a regular column discussing recent journal articles of interest to teachers and researchers working with basic writers. If you've recently written or read an article of interest to basic writing teachers, please send a copy to Linda Stine, Master of Human Services Program, Lincoln University, PA 19352 for review.

R • E • V • I • E • W • S

Recent Articles on Basic Writing Assessment

Linda Stine

Assessment, a word laden with political and pedagogical overtones, is a special concern among basic writing teachers. Several recent publications explore aspects of this complicated issue.

White, Edward M. "Language and Reality in Writing Assessment." ***College Composition and Communication 41*** **(May, 1990): 187-200.** White examines the fundamental and surprising differences in language and world view between the approach to assessment taken by writing teachers/researchers and that of measurement specialists. He cautions that "the choice of an evaluator often means the selection of a unique set of assumptions and definitions that emerge out of the language of the evaluator's world; the implications of such a choice, particularly when made without much attention to this issue, can be profound, affecting the funding or even the survival of the program."

White discusses typical assumptions, commenting on implications behind interpretations of minority students' test results, the concept of the "true score," "value-added" assessment, and "value-free" assessment. The article ends with a call for us to become more aware of perceptual differences and attempt to overcome existing limitations.

Meeker, Linda H. "Pragmatic Politics: Using Assessment Tools to (Re)shape the Curriculum." ***Journal of Basic Writing 9*** **(Spring, 1990): 3-19.** In this article, Meeker explains how changes were made in assessment instruments for Ball State's developmental writing program to reflect changes in program philosophy and public image. She gives a thoughtful and detailed description of their method and rationale for change, describing the analysis of two and a half years of data which revealed that performance on an exit spelling examination and grades on essays produced in a student's developmental writing course predicted the student's future composition grades, but that performance on other language skill tests showed no significant correlation to later grades.

Although one might argue with her conclusion that formal grammar instruction is therefore unsound, many basic writing teachers will identify with the dilemma prompting Meeker's study: "Pedagogically, the formal grammar instruction was unsound. Publicly, we were perceived as teaching students to produce correct texts. Politically, then, we needed quantitative data both to demonstrate the irrelevance of formal grammar instruction to writing improvement and assessment and to shift the public perception of the course from 'remedial' to 'developmental.'" The article contains specific information on how changes made in student objectives, textbooks and competency assessment measures created a positive public acceptance of their new developmental program integrating listening, speaking, reading, thinking, and writing skills.

McAndrews, Donald A. "Handwriting Rate and Syntactic Fluency." ***Journal of Basic Writing 9*** **(Spring, 1990): 31-39.** McAndrews narrows the assessment theme to focus on one disadvantage many basic writers share as a result of the widespread use of timed, holistically-scored assessment tools: "As long as the mechanical processes involved in writing are themselves highly conscious, slow, or even labored, writers are not likely to have easy access to their thoughts." McAndrews' study found that basic writers were not necessarily characterized by slower handwriting speed, but they did write less and they wrote in less complex syntactic patterns.

McAndrews' assumption that the "labor" of the writing act interferes with the quality of the written product is open to question; Michael Heim, for instance, in *Electronic Language: A Philosophical Study of Word Processing* (Yale, 1987), sees potential harm in word processors precisely *because* they take away the conscious labor of writing which, he feels, gives thoughts time to develop to maturity. Heim suggests that electronic writing tends to encourage "fast-food" prose: fluent, but lacking in substance. McAndrews' article, nevertheless, raises some interesting questions about both teaching and assessment.

Greenberg, Karen & Ginny Slaughter (Eds.). ***Notes from the National Testing Network in Writing XIX*** **(March, 1990). New York: CUNY.** Finally, teachers interested in any aspect of assessment, from evaluation of individual papers to program assessment, will find last March's edition of *NTNW Notes* a useful resource. These abstracts from the 1989 NTNW Conference in Montreal, while necessarily brief, highlight important issues and provide names for further reference on such topics as the maintenance of scoring standards in large-scale writing assessments, portfolio assessments, construct validity, peer and self evaluation, writing program evaluations, and evaluation of individual student efforts. Available from the Instructional Resource Center, City University of New York, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

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Research in Basic Writing

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we begin to see, by the end of the book's first section, that the references in the individual essays become repetitive, the same well-known titles popping up from one bibliographic essay to the next. Not surprisingly then, the most valuable essays in this volume are those on topics for which previous bibliographic collections have done little to establish the touchstone texts.

Research in Basic Writing organizes the field according to three major categories–"Social Science Perspectives," "Linguistic Perspectives," "Pedagogical Perspectives,"–plus a "Selective Bibliography of Basic Writing Textbooks." The first three essays of the book form its strongest section. Andrea Lunsford and Patricia A. Sullivan's "Who Are Basic Writers?" is a direct and clearly written analysis of why and how we have grappled with the definition of our basic unit of meaning, the basic writer himself, herself, or itself (as the reification camp has had it). Discussion of the definition is organized according to four sub-questions on basic writers' backgrounds, writing strategies and processes, prose characteristics, and situation in higher education. The authors' treatment of this last topic, the status of basic writers within the academy, is especially strong in charting the major thought on literacy and the socialization process. The section on error analysis research is valuable for an informed view of error; it details the evolving assumptions, objections and current thinking on the issue. The reference list accompanying the article is an excellent guide to the basics of basic writing research.

Such volumes . . . provide a canon-forming force

Donna Haisty Winchell has contributed an interesting and useful overview of developmental psychology and basic writing. In addition to explaining basic premises and discussing major research, she provides a careful review of recent critiques of how the Piagetian model has been (mis)applied to basic writing; the section on Patricia Bizzell's critique of cognitive assumptions is especially well done. The reference list is thorough without being overwhelming; it lists the works most directly relevant to basic writing study, and these in turn would provide detailed bibliographies of the extensive psychological literature for anyone interested in pursuing the topic in greater depth.

Perhaps most valuable in its comprehensiveness, currency of thought, and critical commentary is Mariolina Salvatori and Glynda Hull's "Literacy Theory and Basic Writing." So much has been done in this field, so much is new, that the Salvatori/Hull guide is a blessing as well as a model for other bibliographic essays. Moving from a review of definitions of literacy and critique of their politico-cultural foundation, the authors challenge us as teachers (read: replicators) of a set of cultural values. Along with Lunsford and Sullivan's discussion of student diversity, the Salvatori/Hull essay is among the most important contributions of the book.

Salvatori and Hull discuss how basic writing theory itself affects definitions of literacy in addition to how literacy theory can inform basic writing pedagogy. The authors classify the literacy literature according to two opposite perspectives, the causal and the enabling. Causalists (Vygotsky, Luria) see literacy as a prerequisite for abstract reasoning (and the authors argue it is this perspective which has undergone the reductive reinterpretation that claims a cause/effect tie between writing and advanced cognitive skills, leading by implication to the exclusion of basic writers from the academy). This section includes a fascinating discussion of current critiques of literacy programs like those sponsored by UNESCO versus those with a liberationist intent put to work in countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, and the Sudan.

Unlike causalists, enablers are more interested in the forces that can foster or hinder literacy's *potential* to bring about change; literacy, for the enabler, must be defined in relation to social context. Enablers embrace an expanded view of literacy, rejecting the narrow notion of literacy as a matter of receiving formal schooling in a particular technology of reading and writing. Major research in this camp includes the work of Resnick and Resnick, Scribner and Cole, Shirley Brice Heath, Mike Rose, and Ann Berthoff. Salvatori and Hull close their essay with a final caution: What they have attempted is to "[enact] a method of investigation rather than [cover] all available material," though their six-page reference list seems impressive nevertheless. Their writing is engaging, as well.

After this compelling opening section, the ensuing sections return to more familiar and already well-covered territory. The essays in the first section are more effective in providing theoretical frameworks for their bibliographic surveys than are the essays in either "Linguistic Perspectives" or "Pedagogical Perspectives." In these, we get definitions and descriptions without discussion of implications–sociological or

pedagogical.

Sue Render's "TESL Research and Basic Writing" is a very good essay for the non-specialist in ESL, offering an historical perspective on language acquisition theory and highlighting current thought. The real heart of the essay, however, comes out when the author speaks well, though briefly, on pedagogic approaches (the essay as a whole seems mainly teacher-oriented). She focuses on specific theories, such as Stephen Krashen's distinctions between language acquisition and language learning, but avoids discussion of the social context of language acquisition and its implications for ESL courses and teachers.

Two separate essays on modern grammar and dialects offer little that is new and suffer from opposite problems: Ronald F. Lunsford's "Modern Grammar and Basic Writers" is a surface overview of traditional, structural, and transformational grammar and discourse theory, probably too abbreviated for someone unfamiliar with the material and too general for those who have done reading in the field. Michael Montgomery's "Dialects and the Basic Writer" is ambitious in its attempt "both to summarize and synthesize," covering the linguistic, pedagogical, and political perspectives, with the result that the essay seems oddly dense and cursory at the same time, and more author-centered than bibliographic.

The section devoted to pedagogical perspectives has a "catch all" flavor, with essays on basic writing courses, programs, computers, writing labs, and teacher preparation. Perhaps we should take this as a sign that it's time for serious research on pedagogy from the various theoretical perspectives that have been applied to basic writing more generally. The essay on "Basic Writing Courses and Programs" seems locked in the 1970s, particularly in the section on course design; some studies performed in the early 1980s are discussed, though the essay leaves one wondering whether there can really be such a gap in our collective attention to this fundamental area. The author makes one very valuable point whose implications bear spelling out when he notes that basic writing programs are often seen as peripheral to the college/university agenda and so need to demonstrate their worth and effectiveness. This political issue needs greater attention not just within the structure of the academy but within our profession as well.

"Computers and Writing Instruction," by Stephen A. Bernhardt and Patricia G. Wojahn, is, as its title implies, not strictly devoted to basic writing and computers. It chronicles the shift from CAI, or the machine as tutor, to word processing and a more writer-centered view of the machine as tool. The authors provide a detailed summary of the major case and experimental studies, comparing the results and ultimately showing that the results are inconclusive if not contradictory. In an interesting final section, they discuss how computer use affects instruction and the social context of the classroom. The reference list seems a thorough overview of available instructional software and the best articles on computers and teaching; more theoretical studies are not within the article's domain.

. . . it's time for serious research on pedagogy from the various theoretical perspectives that have been applied to basic writing more generally.

This practical bent continues with Donna Beth Nelson's "Writing Laboratories and Basic Writing." The author reviews the approaches to writing lab organization and philosophy, cautioning that no single formula is appropriate for all settings. Her vision of the ideal lab is one that is comprehensive in its clientele base and devoted to one-on-one instruction. She gives hands-on advice for lab organization and training, with specific recommendations for what tutors should have read. How one evaluates writing labs is a topic that has apparently gone unresearched, or else the research has gone unexamined.

Richard A. Filloy in "Preparing Teachers of Basic Writing" cites what might have been an excellent outline for the editors of this volume in the form of Joseph Comprone's six subject areas for basic writing teachers: the composing process, rhetorical theory/practice, linguistics, cognitive psychology, reading theory/practice, literary theory/practice, and basic learning patterns in disciplines other than English. Unlike the rest of this collection, Filloy's essay touches on the topic of professional attention to reading instruction. He also touches, albeit very briefly, on the sensitive issue of part-time instructors in basic writing.

The pedagogy section skimps on classroom methodology; little attention is given to collaborative approaches, for example, while the grammar battle continues to take up more pages than it probably deserves. Mary Sue Ply's "Selective Bibliography of Basic Writing Textbooks" offers an annotated list of texts broken into six categories (according to how much attention is given to grammar, from "only" to "no"). No book can keep

Continued on next page.

Research in Basic Writing

continued from page 9.

pace with textbook authors and publishers, so the appendix will be of value for a limited time only. And its presence perpetuates the notion that textbooks are the sole route to basic writing instruction, or the sole source of instruction in a given course–the only issue being how grammar-oriented they should be. Perhaps the appendix on textbooks would be more useful if it had been included in a fourth section focused on publishing practices and how they have affected basic writing pedagogy and research.

What *Research in Basic Writing* does not cover in significant detail is reading theory, pedagogy for BW/ESL, and testing/evaluation (a good thing, in one sense, though a review of its apparent falling out of favor would be an interesting and provocative topic). Ideally, a book reflecting the major topics of basic writing would devote a whole section to the political and economic issues that we in the field face, though our traditionally narrow definition of the basic writing field perhaps prevents collection of the relevant articles.

For whom is this a useful book? Some of the chapters could be fruitfully used as groundwork for researching a specific issue or for developing a means of addressing a particular classroom problem; the book would also be useful as a newcomer's introduction to the field of basic writing. Still, its total cost of about $52 may make it more appealing to some as a library reference rather than as a must-buy work for home use. How does it compare to other bibliographic collections, particularly to Sally Harrold's bibliographies in the Enos book? Harrold's bibliographic work is much more detailed, better organized for more convenient use in actual research, and more helpfully annotated. It's hard to compete with her achievements.

A final thought: Might using a basic writing bibliography lead to isolationist thought?–does it encourage us to restrict the field to certain issues, to see it from increasingly narrow perspectives, such as cognitive theory, or to focus on increasingly isolated issues, such as grammar instruction and dialect interference debates? Why is it that some of Comprone's six topics, especially rhetorical theory, literary theory, and WAC, remain so foreign to our thinking and work in basic writing, at least as this collection represents both? Works such as *Research in Basic Writing* offer not only a useful review of what has been done, but also a key to where we should go next.

Jeanne Gunner teaches in the writing programs at UCLA.

Lisa Delpit Awarded MacArthur Fellowship

Those who attended last year's CBW session at CCCC will be delighted to learn that Lisa Delpit, one of the panelists at that session, has been awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur fellowship of $245,000 over the next five years. These awards, which are given with no strings attached, are designed to allow talented and creative thinkers to pursue their work without worrying about finances.

Delpit, who currently is affiliated with the Institute of Urban Research at Morgan State University in Baltimore, MD, plans to continue her investigations of effective classroom practices with culturally diverse students. She also hopes to bring groups of scholars together to discuss issues such as whether allowing parents to choose their children's schools will improve public education.

References on Assessment

These references include citations from Karen Greenberg's article beginning on page 1.

Despain, N. LaRene, and Thomas L. Hilgers. "Assessing Writers by Assessing Portfolios: How Raters respond." Honolulu, HI: Manoa Writing Board, in press. (Their address is University of Hawaii, Manoa Writing Program, Webster Hall 302A, 2528 The Mall, Honolulu, HI 96822.)

Elbow, Peter, and Pat Belanoff. "Portfolios as Substitutes for Proficiency Examinations." *College Composition and Communication* 37 (October 1987): 336-339.

Faigley, Lester et al. *Assessing Writers' Knowledge and Processes of Composing*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1985.

Hilgers, Thomas L., and Barbara Gearen. *Not All That Weak, Not All That Ready*. Manoa Writing Program Technical Report #3. Honolulu, HI: Manoa Writing Program, Spring 1990.

National Commission on Testing and Public Policy. *From Gatekeeper to Gateway: Transforming Testing in America*. Boston: National Commission on Testing and Public Policy, 1990. (Address is Boston College, McGuinn 529, Boston, MA 02167.)

Lucas, Catharine Keech. "Recontextualizing Literacy Assessment." *The Quarterly* 10 (April 1988): 4-10.

Ruth, Leo, and Sandra Murphy. *Designing Tasks for the Assessment of Writing*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1988.

BULLETIN BOARD

The 1991 **Conference on College Composition and Communication** will be held this year in Boston, MA, on March 21-23. Write Membership Service Representative, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801 or call (217) 328-3870.

The 14th Annual Symposium of the **New York College Learning Skills Association** will convene in Ithaca, NY, on April 7-9, 1991. Contact Carl Wahlstrom, Genessee Community College, 1 College Road, Batavia, NY, 14020 or call him at (716) 343-0055 X305.

The **Southeastern Writing Center Association** will hold its 11th annual meeting in Birmingham, AL, on April 11-13, 1991. Contact David Chapman, Samford U, Box 2207, Birmingham, AL 35229 or call him at (205) 870-2964.

Biloxi, Mississippi, will be the site of the year's **Conference on Computers and Writing** on May 24-26, 1991. Contact Julie Chaplin, USM Division of Life Long Learning, Southern Station Box 5037, U of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5037.

Martha's Vineyard Summer Workshops. Session I (July 1-14) considers celebrating literature and creativity, writing nonfiction, teaching grades 9-13, reading-writing-responding, writing children's literature, and assessment. Session II (July 16-29) investigates teaching whole language, individual writing projects, theory of teaching writing, and case study design and analysis. Contact Edward Jossens, 406 Holmes Hall, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115 or call him at (617) 437-3637.

The Council of **Writing Program Administrators (WPA)** is a national organization that fosters communication and community among writing program administrators. It provides colleges and universities with consultant-evaluators to assess writing programs, and it sponsors a wide variety of professional activities to assist new and experienced writing program administrators and to bring together writing administrators from all parts of the country. For membership information, write Don Daiker, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, OH 45056.

The Part-Time Faculty Forum of CCCC is pleased to announce the publication of its newsletter, *Forum*. Dedicated to issues related to part-time teachers of composition, the editors seek articles, stories, research, news items, pertinent data, and announcements about part-time working conditions in your college. Submissions should be 500-1250 words (double-spaced). Send an original plus two copies with your name, title, institution, home and institutional addresses and phone numbers. Send items or subscribe by writing Professor Teresa Purvis, 12-Communication Department, Lansing Community College, P.O. Box 40010, Lansing, MI 48901-7210.

The ***Journal of Basic Writing*** invites submissions related to all aspects of basic writing. Of particular interest are accounts of teaching under unusual or difficult circumstances, cross-cultural reports, experiences with the new technologies, and articles taking a fresh approach to their topic. Write editors Peter Miller and Bill Bernhardt, *Journal of Basic Writing*, 535 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10021.

Beginning with the spring 1991 issue, the ***Writing Center Journal*** will be edited by Diana George, Nancy Grimm, and Ed Lottos. Send four copies of manuscripts to George and Grimm at Department of the Humanities, Michigan Tech U, Houghton, MI 49931; inquiries about book reviews should be addressed to Ed Lotto, Learning Center, Lehigh U, Bethlehem, PA 18015. Congratulations to retiring editors **Jeanette Harris and Joyce Kinkaid** on their long and fruitful term.

The ***Writing Lab Newsletter*** is an informal means of exchanging information among those who work in writing labs and language skills centers. Brief articles describing labs, their instructional methods and materials, goals, programs, budgets, staffing, services, etc. are invited. Those wishing to subscribe are requested to make a donation of $7.50 per year, checks payable to Purdue University. Submissions and memberships should be sent to Muriel Harris, Editor, Writing Lab Newsletter, Department of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907.

CBW Newsletter *is happy to print in the "Bulletin Board" announcements that are likely to be of interest to its readers. Send such announcements to the editors by October 15 for the fall issue and April 1 for the spring issue.*

CBW Survey #2: Assessment

Because we are curious (and we suspect readers are too) about who CBW members are and under what conditions they teach basic writing, we published a brief, informal survey in the fall 89 newsletter about number of basic writing courses offered and their emphases; the results appeared in the spring 90 issue. Though certainly neither scientific nor conclusive, they suggested considerable differences in practice between 2-year and 4-year colleges.

This time we are asking a series of questions about assessment and placement at your institution. We've kept the questions brief, so it will take only a minute to respond to them. However, we welcome elaboration and comments in the blank spaces or on an extra sheet of paper.

1. Do you teach in a ❑ two-year institution ❑ four-year institution ❑ other

2. How are students placed into your basic writing course(s)? (Check *all* that apply.)

   ❑ self-referral
   ❑ the ETS Test of Standard Written English (TSWE)
   ❑ ACT or SAT scores
   ❑ writing sample (with how much time allowed? _____)
   ❑ other (please describe)

3. If you have more than one basic (developmental) writing course, how do you decide (who decides?) when a student is ready to move from one level to the next within the sequence? (Check *all* that apply.)

   ❑ not applicable; only one level of basic writing
   ❑ improved performance on the original multiple choice assessment
   ❑ improved performance on a writing sample equivalent to the original one
   ❑ a different style essay exam evaluated by someone other than student's instructor
   ❑ instructor evaluation of work in the course
   ❑ other (please describe)

4. On what basis do students "exit" the *basic writing* program? (Check *all* that apply.)

   ❑ improved performance on the original multiple choice assessment
   ❑ improved performance on a writing sample equivalent to the original one
   ❑ a different style essay exam evaluated by someone other than student's instructor
   ❑ instructor evaluation of work in the course
   ❑ other (please describe)

5. In your *personal* opinion, how well do these procedures work in your setting?

   a. **for initial placement**
      ❑ very reliably
      ❑ adequately
      ❑ sometimes capriciously
      ❑ often capriciously

   b. **for advancement from one basic writing course to the next**
      ❑ very reliably
      ❑ adequately
      ❑ sometimes capriciously
      ❑ often capriciously

   c. **for "exiting" the basic writing program**
      ❑ very reliably
      ❑ adequately
      ❑ sometimes capriciously
      ❑ often capriciously

Comments:

Conference on Basic Writing

This insert includes two important pieces of business: a ballot for the election of CBW officers and an informal survey. Please take a few minutes to complete these right now. (We all know that a response delayed sinks to the bottom of the heap.) You can fold and tape this sheet to return it to the address below, but we do need your stamp.

Ballot for Executive Committee

Executive committee members serve for two years, and three members are elected to the committee each year. Biographical notes on the nominees appear on page 3 of this newsletter.

This slate was prepared by the chair and associate chair with the advice of the executive committee in accordance with the By-Laws of the Conference on Basic Writing. Please indicate your approval or disapproval by marking the appropriate box below.

Executive Committee: Sally Harrold (Southwestern Oregon Community College)
Bill Jones (Rutgers University/Newark)
Mary Kay Tirrell (California State University/Fullerton)

❑ I approve of the slate as listed.

❑ I disapprove of the slate as listed.

Comments/Suggestions: _____

_____

_____

Post Office will not deliver without stamp

TO: Peter Adams
English Department
Essex Community College
Baltimore, MD 21237

Conference on Basic Writing
c/o Peter Dow Adams
English Department
Essex Community College
Baltimore County, Maryland 21237

TO: