

Editors' Column

Events for the purpose of publicizing and facilitating academic publishing have proliferated recently. *JBW* is certainly not unique in receiving frequent invitations to participate in panels and workshops on writing for publication, hosted by particular colleges and professional organizations. In common with the professoriate as a whole, teachers of basic writing are concerned with scholarly publication as never before.

Publication in refereed journals is increasingly the primary basis for reappointment, tenure, and promotion in American colleges and universities. To basic writing instructors staggering under the burden of frequent classes with ever-increasing enrollments, not to mention the task of reading and marking student writing, the demand to publish often seems arbitrary and unfair—all the more so when journals in our field, including *JBW*, are not always considered of equal weight in comparison to scholarly publications in literature. However, it is a foolhardy instructor who chooses righteous indignation over writing up one's latest classroom innovations and submitting them to *JBW* or a competing journal. The fact is that, for most of us, "publish or perish," is no less a reality than for our colleagues in more prestigious academic specialities.

As acknowledged experts in encouraging reluctant writers, teachers of basic writing should perhaps view the need to publish as an opportunity rather than as an imposition. Who better than we, ourselves, can find ways to energize and encourage ourselves and each other as writers? Who better than we, ourselves, can find ways to analyze the task and design practical strategies to complete it?

We hope that colleagues in programs, departments, and meetings, such as the National Conference on Basic Writing, to be held at the University of Maryland next October, will take seriously our need as professionals to develop a range of activities and structures to support and encourage scholarly publication. Certainly

JBW considers one of its primary roles to provide feedback on submitted manuscripts that will help colleagues meet the demands of publication with confidence and realism.

Having said this, we now turn to a brief description of the articles appearing in the current issue. Overall, the essays take to task some of the cherished metaphors and assumptions behind our conception of basic writers and the teaching of basic writing, and offer an enlarged view informed by a broad awareness of cultural and historical difference.

In the first article, Carol Severino shows how the principle metaphors used to describe cultural literacy (the melting pot, the salad bowl) and those used to acquire academic literacy (the bridge, the gap, the journey to join the literacy club), fail to acknowledge any common ground between the two. She proposes cultivating this common ground as a basis for students to expand their abilities to comprehend the arguments and experiences of others. Moreover, instead of trying to “transport” students to academic culture, teachers would orchestrate the sharing of knowledge, perception, and experience.

Starting from Polanyi’s premise that “we can know more than we can tell,” Harvey Wiener considers nontraditional (remedial/basic) students as enabled learners, endowed with “sentient literacy,” and possessing considerable knowledge in using *inference* in countless nonverbal and visual situations in their own lives. Wiener suggests numerous ways to build on this wealth of experience in the teaching of inference in reading and writing classes.

Marilyn Middendorf offers various innovations to create effective writing classrooms inspired by the ideas of M. M. Bakhtin about the dialogic nature of human discourse. Starting with the question “What is good writing?” Middendorf has students move away from their initially fixed, abstract, standardized, monologic definitions toward an awareness of the dialogic nature of discourse, which is inherently relative, ongoing, multivoiced, and interactive. Students move on to discover the primacy of this dialogic discourse in shaping the reality of our lives.

John Mayher critiques the commonly accepted metaphors of “skills” and “remediation” which lie behind much of the thought and practice taking place in writing and skills centers today. He goes on to offer *uncommon sense* alternatives, fundamentally holistic, constructivist, and transactional, where the primary activity would be having students learn how to learn.

Beverly Benson, Mary Deming, Debra Denzer, and Maria Valeri-Gold present a study which questions the effectiveness of

bringing basic writing and ESL students together in the same class. Despite showing that some similarities exist in composing techniques and patterns of error, the study suggests that it is better for the two groups to be taught by instructors suitably trained in each area, using materials appropriate to their separate needs.

Genevieve Patthey-Chavez and Constance Gergen propose taking advantage of the growing influx of students in writing classrooms from diverse ethnic backgrounds by analyzing cultural and historical differences through a problem-posing framework. Starting with the questions “What is a good essay?” and “How is print culture valuable?” the class embarks on an exploration that ends with a recognition of the uses of literature and some of the traditional rhetorical modes of expression in college writing.

Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller