

# EDITORS' COLUMN

As many of you told us during last year's national review of *JBW*, we are a journal providing a much-needed forum for a field that is itself a perennial site of conflict. In this issue we are again made intensely aware of the complex issues our field faces in enabling "border" students to enter the academy, assessing these students, helping them to respect their own "ways with words," and finding ways to ensure the future of our programs and students in higher education. Reviewing the essays in this issue, we were struck by how class, race, and gender emerge as prevailing concerns, as they were in our special spring issue. But here these themes are consistently presented from the viewpoint of teacher as researcher. Our authors have made this an issue in which theory and practice come together to bear fruitful insights to inform curricula and program decisions.

In her essay, "When Working Class Students 'Do' The Academy: How We Negotiate with Alternative Literacies" Martha Marinara problematizes what she sees as a one-sided negotiation in which working class students are expected to alter their perspectives to enter an unchanging academy. Marinara's aim in developing her course is to foster two-sided interaction in which both the student and the university change, allowing the student to retain a sense of identity and worth.

The power of culture and identity play a major role in "Some Effects of Culture-Referenced Topics on the Writing Performance of African American Students" by Nathaniel Norment, Jr. Norment describes a long-term, large-scale collaborative project involving Temple University and four Philadelphia high schools, studying the effects of essay prompts that incorporate values, attitudes, and information relevant to African American culture. The project entailed testing 711 eleventh and twelfth graders using both standard and culture-referenced prompts and analytical as well as holistic assessment.

In "A Story about Grammar and Power," Lynn Briggs and Ann Watts Pailliotet look at what occurs when a Writing Center Director is told to create a grammar exam for gauging pre-service teachers' awareness of grammar patterns. Briggs and Pailliotet worked together to develop a test that would enable mostly female future teachers not only to assess but also to write about grammar and conventionality. Reviewing test responses they thought would give the two of them insights into problems with the process/product dichotomy, they came to see their – and our – own culpability in using grammar to maintain power relations, especially in uncertain, devalued academic situations.

If Briggs and Pailliotet examine how grammar may be used to maintain power relations and disempower student writers, Mary

Soliday's "Towards a Consciousness of Language: A Language Pedagogy for Multicultural Classrooms" offers its antithesis, how language study can be used to empower students and encourage respect for the "languages" of their communities. Soliday describes the Language Research Project at CCNY in which students examine local language use and learn to write a literacy narrative. In guiding students through the steps of doing on-site research, students develop awareness of text, of subtext, of context—above all, of language's complexity.

Mary (Molly) Hurley Moran of the University of Georgia presents a detailed description of her research process as well as her results in "Connections between Reading and Successful Revision." What began with the observation of one student in a writing center led Moran to study whether reading strategies enable students to become better revisers of their writing. As descriptions of the teacher/research paradigm, both Moran's and Briggs and Pailliotet's articles enable us to trace the trajectory from initial assignment or question and the development of a research project to the findings of the project and the intricacy of interpreting the findings, just as Soliday's article shows us how far students can go in doing these very things themselves.

Because we believe that articles are not ends in themselves, that they are to be valued for the light they shed and especially the thoughts they provoke, we are pleased to present the last two essays in this issue, responses from two major scholars in our field to Ira Shor's "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality," which appeared in the Spring 1997 issue of *JBW*. Karen L. Greenberg is professor of English at Hunter College, former co-editor of *JBW*, and former director of the Developmental English Program at Hunter College. Greenberg, editor of *Writing Assessment: Issues and Strategies* (Longman, 1986), is a frequent writer and presenter on assessment issues. The second respondent is Terence G. Collins, Director of Academic Affairs and Curriculum at the General College and also the Morse-Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Writing and Literature at the University of Minnesota. Collins often presents and writes on issues bearing on basic writing in higher education.

We said at the outset that our field is a perennial site of conflict. Greenberg and Collins remind us—as Shor did in provoking these responses—that it is a field whose future, whose very existence, is in question. Sobering as such reminders are, we are grateful for them, as we are for the ways the other authors in this issue convince us that the field is vital, critically aware of its challenges, determined to press knowledge forward for the sakes of the students it serves.

—Trudy Smoke and George Otte