

EDITORS' COLUMN

Since the 2016 presidential election, many Americans have become more immersed in politics, news, and activism. As a result, many of us also have become more distracted and unable to focus on work and other responsibilities. Although this issue of *JBW* began to take shape well before the election, it offers insight into the value of meaningful connections at work that can sustain us in difficult times. Collectively, the authors chart a course into ways of knowing and cultivating relationships, programs, and pedagogies. They model how to advocate for what matters in our classrooms and institutions, reminding us to maintain some focus on the challenges and pleasures of this work despite the worldly woes that may dog us.

Edward M. White and William DeGenaro start us off by thinking big about the discipline as a whole. In “Basic Writing and Disciplinary Maturation: How Chance Conversations Continue to Shape the Field,” they return to a question they explored in the pages of this journal over fifteen years ago: what dynamics shape the development of Basic Writing? Previously, they argued that the field had failed to reach “professional consensus” and disciplinary maturity because scholars weren’t engaging in conversation with one another’s research. Times have changed. Enriched by developments including the WPA Outcomes Statement (OS), the field no longer lacks a sense of professional consensus. “Optimistically,” White and DeGenaro assert, “we have become more inclined to listen to one another in productive ways—perhaps freed from the constraints of searching for mythic consensus, perhaps empowered by the OS, perhaps compelled by the body of scholarship.” In light of this optimistic framing of Basic Writing, they celebrate “small moments” of connection, collaboration, and mentorship as foundational to the field. Right now seems like a particularly fine time for both optimism and the celebration of what White and DeGenaro call our “smallness,” that local, grassroots quality deep in the soil of Basic Writing that continues to feed it.

In “From Falling Through the Cracks to Pulling Through: Moving from a Traditional Remediation Model toward a Multi-Layered Support Model for Basic Writing,” Lori Ostergaard and Elizabeth G. Allan take us from a broad consideration of the discipline to look at the evolution of one basic writing curriculum. The curricular redesign they describe, while local to Oakland University, is familiar to many of us; it reflects our programs and courses, our students and teachers laboring under similar institutional and political constraints. Ostergaard and Allan argue that meaningful curricular revision

is possible, as long as it is both “grounded in current best practices in the field” and informed by local reality, broadly conceived. They demonstrate the value of not only confronting Oakland’s “troubling history” and prevailing attitudes toward basic writers, but also tapping the pedagogical expertise of program teachers. The course revisions that Ostergaard and Allan describe attest to the community and history that power change locally and connect us globally. As the authors note, “our worries [about the future of basic writing on our campus] are doubtlessly shared by many readers of this journal,” underscoring the common experiences that draw us into those small moments of cooperative spirit that shape and define our field.

Jon Balzotti continues to sharpen the focus and pull us further into the classroom with his study of multimodal composing and the resilient question of transfer. In “Storyboarding for Invention: Layering Modes for More Effective Transfer in a Multimodal Composition Classroom,” he pursues an increasingly urgent question: How do we help students see connections between their writing in new media modes and their writing in more traditional modes? To explore this question, Balzotti targets the stage of invention and its role in the transfer of experiential knowledge. While his findings are immediately relevant to teachers and programs developing curricula around multimodal composition, the implications have greater potential to touch our identity as scholars and teachers. Balzotti notes, “Perhaps the most valuable lesson drawn from our observation of students using storyboarding in the basic writing class is the emphasis placed on sequencing and play, a discursive practice that stresses change and creativity.” Not surprisingly, play and creativity yield positive results: “Collectively,” Balzotti argues, “the students’ work in [the study] builds an optimistic perspective on both invention and transfer.” There is something serendipitous and unplanned about play and its relationship to change and creativity. Like the small moments of professional connection highlighted by White and DeGenaro, the generative potential of play constructs an optimistic portal into our work and its meaning.

This portal must orient us in the direction of students and their experiences: in the classroom our work has its most immediate impact. But how much do we really know about students’ perspectives on their own experiences? In “Self/Portrait of a Basic Writer: Broadening the Scope of Research on College Remediation,” Emily Schnee and Jamil Shakoor “expand the borders of authority and authorship in scholarship on basic writing to include students.” Professor Schnee teams up with her student, Shakoor, to narrate and reflect on one basic writer’s journey “as he moves from the

lowest level of developmental English at a community college to graduate with a Bachelor's degree." This powerful portrait of student experience, mentorship, and collaboration forces us to confront not only what matters in our practice, but also what often eludes our scholarship: the diversity of voices that testify to multiple lived realities, voices that extend knowledge by challenging or reframing it. Together, Schnee and Shakoor demonstrate "a commitment to the nuance of individual lives, the power of stories to create meaning, and the urgency of engaging research participants in constructing knowledge for social change." What emerges from this collaboration is a sobering reminder that all our small interactions, including and perhaps especially those we share with students, seed our intellectual work. And in the seeding of this ground we find the deep satisfaction of connection that sustains our field.

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We may be in unusual times, but navigating the work-life balance is always a challenge. This period of political struggle will evolve into the next, hopefully less troubling, time. Along the way, our work is nourished by the relationships we cultivate with one another, in our classrooms and conferences, over coffee or across the pages of our professional journals. As we write this column in preparation for that most gratifying moment in journal editorship—the publication of a long-awaited issue—we reflect on the history and relationships that have brought us to this moment. We believe JBW's history, emerging out of open admissions and Mina Shaughnessy's creative, intellectual advocacy, is special; we also suspect, however, that many editorial teams share similar beliefs that motivate their work, and further, this intersection between belief and work offers a microcosm of how action and change-making happen across the field. We, Hope and Cheryl, may be colleagues at CUNY, but we work at distant ends of a system so sprawling that we struggle to see one another more than annually at CCCC. Although we mostly communicate virtually and asynchronously, we touch base regularly—in stolen moments before sleep or just after waking, or over holiday weekends once our grading is done. In this way, our work enters our most personal space. And, in the same continually intimate way, we communicate with prospective authors, valued reviewers, and the scholars whose work we help cultivate toward publication. Finally, we bring all their insights into our own classrooms and programs, into our scholarship and assignments and conferences with students.

We are grateful for our authors' insight and perseverance and for you, our readers. In taking up this issue, perhaps as a last act before sleep, you

enact your own commitment to finding stolen moments for the conversations of our field.

—**Cheryl C. Smith** and **Hope Parisi**