

## EDITORS' COLUMN

Late August is an emotional time for teachers. We throw a longing glance back at summer before turning, with anticipation, to meet new groups of students and teach new or redesigned lessons and courses. Even through the haze of dread that comes with letting go of all that summer was or promised to be, there is hope. Most students feel the same way. A rising fifth grader we know dreamed in mid-August that he was at school on his first day, lost in the hallway of a suddenly unfamiliar building, searching for his new classroom—dreadful. But then—hope!—when he found his best friend and they continued the search together. College students, we may imagine, are more jaded than the average ten-year old. Still, it's worth asking: as they sit in new chairs in new classrooms on day one, what conflicting emotions are they feeling? What are their assumptions about their institutions, courses, and teachers? What are their goals and how would they design their own educational paths, spaces, identities, and purposes, if given the chance? This issue gets at some of these questions by looking at student experiences across a range of academic encounters with issues ranging from mastering writing style and reading difficult texts to navigating diverse languaging acts and the thorny landscape of academic honesty.

In “From a Whisper to a Voice: Sociocultural Style and Anti-Racist Pedagogy,” Sarah Stanley begins by imagining a scene we rarely see: a student receiving teacher feedback on a draft, specifically feedback on a style choice the student has made in the attempt to construct a meaning that her audience may or may not recognize. Stanley asks: *“if, given how the world surrounding my classroom operates, my students negotiate identity and conflict as they write, then what should be my response to this particular writer?”* In order to take into account the diverse cultural and racial identities at play in teaching and the feedback process, Stanley promotes awareness of racial realism, sociocultural style, and the need for democratic, collective feedback spaces. We have to consciously foreground race, she argues, because “racial friction around instructor feedback and student response is likely happening anyway, regardless of whether or not we name it as such.” To examine the workings of race and the power dynamics inherent in teaching and assessing writing, Stanley offers a case study from her own teaching history to showcase her development from “prioritize[ing] *my* pedagogical relationship” toward putting more emphasis on “the experiences of the people in the room” (italics in the original). Recognizing the value of “the people in the room” grounds her argument that “an impressionistic response that does not also include

democratic discussion with students about intentions will not only limit learning or growth, but I believe it will lead us further away from, as Asao Inoue puts it, ‘socially just futures.’”

Cheryl Hogue Smith also foregrounds the experience of all the people in her classroom as she theorizes an instructional approach designed to steer struggling students away from feelings of failure and inadequacy. In “Aesthetic Reading: Struggling Students Sensing Their Way to Academic Success,” Hogue Smith extends her arguments from an earlier *JBW* article (2012), where she showed how inexperienced readers, driven by the goal of finding correct answers in a text, often adopt a “deferent” stance, relying on “the smartest person in the room” to tell them what the text is about. But, as Hogue Smith demonstrates, “without engaging authentically in aesthetic reading, students are unlikely to find their transactions with difficult texts productive occasions for any kind of legitimate learning.” Rather, “struggling readers only hear the loud echoes that say they aren’t smart enough or good enough to understand a text,” an approach to reading she labels the “anesthetic” stance. To address this lost opportunity to engage and learn, and to counter the potential to experience reading as “emotionally defeating,” Hogue Smith presents the case of one student, Jackie, in a first-year writing class in a learning community at Kingsborough Community College. The instance of Jackie demonstrates how an “assignment. . . designed to avoid the anesthetic stance—and, thus, obliterate the deferent-anesthetic causal pair—can help students become successful readers and revisers.” In tracing Jackie’s progress toward more productive intellectual and emotional reading stances, Hogue Smith offers a method to help students navigate the complexity of the reading process, avoid “feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and imminent failure,” and ultimately “adopt the aesthetic stance that is crucial to their academic success.”

In “‘Languaging 101’: Translingual Practices for the Translingual Realities of the SEEK Composition Classroom,” Lucas Corcoran uses translingual theory to evolve an instructional approach for engaging students more meaningfully in their language and literacy development. Like Stanley and Hogue Smith, Corcoran foregrounds the people he encounters in his classroom, making room for student voice and experience in the development of a praxis-oriented scholarship. His project takes on the challenge of defining pedagogical, assessment, and curricular responses to the translingual turn that has shaped much scholarly discussion in the field for more than a decade, without adequately articulating a range of classroom approaches or assessment tools for practitioners to apply in their local contexts. As he

explores how instructors and institutions can rise to the challenge of a trans-lingual practice, Corcoran presents a case study of Genesis, a student in his SEEK writing class at John Jay College, to demonstrate how “university-level composition and rhetoric pedagogy should resist the tendency to abstract a singular language from the heterogeneous rhetorical acts that comprise students’ language lives.” Along the way, Corcoran advances the claim that “the ability to theorize and contextualize the ever-shifting contours of language and literacy is the critical skill that will serve students the most throughout their academic careers and their political lives.” By focusing not only on students’ academic experiences but also their political lives, Corcoran underscores the social urgency—and social justice—parameters of writing theory as it meets the complexity of writing practice.

In our last article, “Reworking the Policing of Plagiarism: Borrowings from Basic Writing, Authorship Studies, and the Citation Project,” Missy Watson tackles one of the stickiest questions of our profession: how do we define plagiarism? Her approach to academic dishonesty shifts the scholarly perspective by being more inclusive of student experience while also turning the critical lens away from students’ wrongdoing toward teachers’ assumptions. Because “source use is but one of many discursive features of academic writing to which we hold ideological and emotional attachments that may influence exclusionary perspectives and practices,” Watson insists that we must “examine our own values placed on source use, acknowledge these values as cultural rather than natural, and then work collaboratively with students to demystify and contest the very values we hold and expect students to also share and uphold.” This self-examination can be as fraught with emotion and prone to misstep as trying to account for the range of student voices and experiences in both our theoretical and practical approaches to the basic writing classroom. But Watson makes the case for why it’s worth the risk: “arguably more so in basic writing than in other enclaves of composition studies, scholars and teachers strive to develop self-reflection both in our students and in us,” she says. “Our willingness to develop consciousness-raising tactics that help us politicize, criticize, and re-envision our values and practices invites our pedagogies to transform and to be transformative.”

The self-reflective scholarship we feature in this issue shines a light on all the people in our classrooms. This work is not without some risk—it involves exposure of our gaps and failures as practitioners, and requires the thorny work of representing student experience honestly, ethically, and meaningfully. But the advancement of our scholarly agenda will stagnate

if we fail to continually develop fair, adequate, and even profound ways of bringing all the people in our classrooms into the theories and practices we evolve. Students, not unlike many teachers, have stress dreams about their first day of class, and they imagine their academic lives in ways we may not be accounting for. Our field was founded in the spirit of democratic approaches to the teaching of writing and to the social justice project of access to higher education. What will become of basic writing if we let access to our scholarship narrow, if the multitude of voices that shape our practice at every level is reduced to a single drone?

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