

EDITORS' COLUMN

The return of early morning birdsong in the spring always calls to mind one of Emily Dickinson's most recognizable lines: "Hope is the thing with feathers." If there was ever a time for finding hope in our everyday surroundings, it has been the spring of 2020, when the unfolding Covid-19 crisis threatened to overwhelm many of us. In March, we brought our courses online, midstream and in the midst of rising panic, and struggled to sustain scared and afflicted students and colleagues. In cities and towns where the coronavirus hit hardest, students went off the grid and teachers worried—not if students would complete their coursework, but if they were alive. We tried to reimagine the place for learning and teaching in an upended world. As of this writing, a few short months into this experiment, the future of higher education in that world remains unclear. Will we be teaching in person or online in fall 2020, or will we have to manage some unpredictable combination of these approaches? Will many of us even be teaching at all?

To strengthen the fragile threads of hope in an upended world, we remind ourselves that we have resources. We are not alone; we are not without support. In the awareness of this support, we can generate hope through our practice: anticipating or understanding students' needs, visualizing possibilities, and creating new resources, often through the sheer force of our collective imagination.

Hope, imagination, and the resources they generate are at the foundation of the field of Basic Writing. In the introduction to the second issue of this journal, published in Fall/Winter of 1976 with a focus on courses, Mina Shaughnessy notes the "diversity of purpose and method" across the courses featured in the issue. This diversity, however, does not suggest a muddled purpose; rather, Shaughnessy contends, it "reveals to us how variously we perceive the difficulties of students and how differently, therefore, we define 'basic.' It suggests, too, that while the remedial situation dictates that we reduce the universe of writing to 'basic' subskills, the skill of writing seems to defy such reduction." Our current crisis reminds us again of the dangers of reduction and the urgency attached to seeing the diverse needs of our students and with the many shades of their challenges. In seeing them as fully as possible, we are better positioned to generate further hope and resources, both in our students and within our profession.

Across our classrooms and scholarship, we have long worked to resist reductive notions of writing, our students, and our methods. Rather than reduce, we try to keep imagining new possibilities, buoyed by the resources

we create, gather, and share. As Shaughnessy goes on to say in her introduction to the second issue of *JBW*, the diversity of courses featured, “rather than urging us toward a uniform system of teaching basic writing, should encourage us to explore further this many-mansioned skill we are learning to teach, and to view the variety we find wherever skilled and imaginative teachers are at work as a *resource* rather than a *flaw*” (emphasis added).

In our current issue, we again highlight the diversity of resource creation and sharing at the heart of teaching and learning. And we remember that honoring imagination in our classrooms, programs, and scholarship is the foundational resource in our field. The authors included here explore resources variably—as material, spatial, social, educational, economic, institutional, and emotional. They unpack these resources in order to feed resilience and honor the role of self and identity in learning to write.

In our first article, “Subsidizing Basic Writers: Resources and Demands in Literacy Scholarship,” Ann C. Dean examines the foundational resources—time, space, and social support—that subsidize successful students. Dean looks at the nuances of these resources as they might apply to struggling students, both those who report specific challenges outside the classroom such as demanding work schedules or illness, and those who “need more” but whose needs are not entirely or immediately clear. To better understand the more abstract needs of the second group, Dean shifts her focus to outside forces that “contextualize students’ writing as a practice structured by larger social forces,” including the many everyday ways that students’ lives can interrupt learning. What are the material, educational, and temporal resources that subsidize their success? Knowing how certain resources are accessed (or not) to support students can impact many of the structures and opportunities we create, from classroom interventions and program models to the very policy decisions that can help ensure or deny access and retention support.

Next, Maureen McBride and Meghan A. Sweeney turn to one type of foundational resource we all bring to the classroom: emotion. In “Frustration and Hope: Understanding Students’ Emotional Responses to Reading,” McBride and Sweeney tap into the evolving scholarship on reading studies to explore how students’ emotional responses to class texts—including feelings such as pride, boredom, and anxiety—factor into students’ self-perceptions as readers. When McBride and Sweeney layer together the emotional and cognitive responses to reading that students describe, they find that many of their students have developed a debilitating sense of an ideal reader: someone whose reading practice and ability to absorb information are vastly

superior to their own. Their sense of distance from the ideal reader only grew as the students transitioned to college and were assigned more difficult texts. The students “expressed a sense of loss and longing in their relationship to reading,” which McBride and Sweeney situate alongside students’ resilient sense of hope about their growth and potential. Taken together, students’ affective responses to reading, ranging from loss to hope, offer a path toward new pedagogical approaches.

In “‘That’s Me on a Horse of Many Colors’: Native American College Students’ Self-Portraits as Academic Writers,” Barbara Z. Komlos draws our focus to Native American college students’ self-perceptions as writers, and the lessons they hold for instructors. By having students draw pictures of themselves as college writers, Komlos identifies six themes as representative of their writerly identities. She explores these themes to “illustrate students’ emerging identities as academic writers, and the role of culture in shaping their writing.” Once we acknowledge the relationship between culture and writing, and particularly once we see students’ own constructions of it in their self-portraits, we can begin to “ask ourselves how to recognize and draw upon students’ cultural assets, such as orality, relationality, connection to land and water, and respect for elders.” Komlos’ essay opens the way for greater cultural recognition and suggests directions for working with students across a variety of contexts.

Finally, Tessa Brown’s “Let the People Rap: Cultural Rhetorics Pedagogy and Practices Under CUNY’s Open Admissions, 1968-1978” keeps the focus on cultural resources while also turning back to our foundations as a field, to the variety of resources that teachers developed and drew from during Open Admissions. Brown shows how writing instructors working alongside Mina Shaughnessy and across CUNY campuses in the late 1960s created culturally and materially resourced writing, speech, and literacy classrooms for their Open Admissions students. These instructors, including June Jordan, Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, Addison Gayle, and Audre Lorde, took the students’ Black and Puerto Rican urban cultures as rich pedagogical resources that supported student engagement and learning. Brown herself uses hip-hop culture as a methodological resource for her project to draw attention to the multimodal rhetorical education that Open Admissions students received in the context of their wider education across disciplines from critical ethnic studies to sound engineering and media production.

Taken together, the articles in this issue illustrate that our resources and the paths we use to locate them are indeed varied. Diversity of purpose and method promotes creativity; it helps empower the imagination that we

need now, more than ever, as we work to create new spaces for our students to learn and become the ideal readers and writers *they* envision. The “many-mansioned skill” of writing calls upon us to continually build our resources and be more creative—and more expansive—at every turn.

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