

EDITORS' COLUMN

We live in an era of unprecedented data compression and automation. AI systems seek out and incorporate data in slices of time so miniscule that we struggle to recognize distinct steps of the process. While data expands and transforms in the deep wells of machine learning, the tangible outcomes of cultural work and the professions seem to grow at further distances from anyone's actual doing of them. This absorption swallows, likewise, an intimacy of process that carried messages we relied on, reminders of efficacy and purpose. We watch the distances simultaneously shorten and lengthen between goals and endpoints, the possibilities now endless. It can feel like we are spending more time managing, less time making.

But instructors are makers: We create structures for learning, course outcomes, assignment sequences, and critical frameworks for reading. We create relationships to sustain student learning through a semester, a program, or a college career. We create communities. A challenge of increasingly product-oriented technology has always been how to adapt so that we continue to identify with the processes that define us. The entre of ChatGPT and AI into writing classrooms is a radical moment for freshly recognizing technology's power to reshape distances between teachers, students, and texts. And yet writing instruction has always been about these distances. Each of the articles of this issue prioritizes radical connections among instructors and students and support for spaces that are fully embodied by both.

In our first article, "Ungrading the Composition Classroom: Affect, Metacognition, and Qualitative Learning," Austin Bailey and Caroline Wilkinson acknowledge the teetering effects of traditional grading in writing instruction, as per grades' "tendency to dehumanize and mechanize the learning process, while drawing attention away from actual learning." Taking their lead from notable critics of standard grading practices, Bailey and Wilkinson ground their approach to alternative assessment, or ungrading, on values that return learning to its relational base, pedagogies "requir[ing] humility, flexibility, open-mindedness, and experimentation, even as they need not shy away from certain key commitments." These values are not new to this moment, but feel more current, and certainly more urgent, since COVID-19's own overturn of real-time, present learning. Ungrading aptly recognizes and transforms the many negative effects associated with grades, by which "student identities tie to grades" and map along an "axis of affect" that students bear with them through all interactions of the writing classroom. Narrative Self-Evaluations, or NSEs, become a distinct feature

here; NSEs invite students “to conceptualize themselves as individuals,” share their writing histories and learning goals for the semester, and shape their own “metacognitive framework for student self-assessment,” yielding a highly qualitative, affect-sensitive approach. And as they embody students’ voices situated within a much wider dialogue, NSEs help “attend [...] to the affective underpinnings circulating within assessment processes, and [...] reorient those affects” away from “the desiring economies (of precarious self-worth and institution-contingent approval),” toward validation and care.

In our second article, “Terms and Conditions: Working with (and in Spite of) Our Multilingual Student Frameworks,” Charissa Che tackles another route by which students bear the effects and impacts of language systems that inscribe identity across students’ own authority for claiming who they are. Like Bailey and Wilkinson’s qualitative take on ungrading, Che’s project is another systemic digging out—from entrenched layers of labeling students of multilingual backgrounds, in a word, “ESL.” Acknowledging that the term has been contested for quite some time, Che insists on a fully translanguaging approach “to how we place, instruct, and refer to our linguistically diverse students.” To engender students’ “agency to linguistically self-identify, to flout conventional academic structures, and to mobilize their diverse language repertoires in their meaning-making” is the goal. To this end, Che’s study probes the effects of “ESL” among those directly limited by it. In surveys and interviews, Che queries students’ multilingual backgrounds and how students feel themselves positioned in the classroom and institution. Students also gauge their “ESL” association against what they understand to be their own linguistic competence, which makes space for students to recommend improvements to their programs and offerings of multilingual support. Instructors as well describe how the “ESL” identifier functions within their own teaching and how they regard the term, as they share key understandings of the “writing competences of . . . multilingual students, including the linguistic and cultural assets they bring to the classroom.” Not surprisingly, often what instructors notice of student competence belies the labels they at once acknowledge and problematize. Just like their students’, instructors’ perspectives prompt valuable suggestions for reform and additional support.

In our third article, “Explicit Language Instruction: Developing Writers Metalinguistic Awareness to Facilitate Transfer,” Tom Slagle calls out the ways in which writing instruction needlessly distances the first-year writer from grasping the purposes of academic discourse through insufficient approaches to writing for transfer. While Slagle acknowledges that Teaching for Transfer

and Writing About Writing pedagogies have moved the needle on making knowledge about writing itself a critical writing topic, he argues that students need more attention to what may be called “language-level choices, which may present additional barriers to transfer.” Slagle identifies our field’s lack of attention to language-level choices generally, “since postsecondary writing instruction . . . often precludes explicit instruction in the language-level features that characterize genres and likewise students’ awareness of these characteristic features.” Not only English Language Learners, accustomed to more fine-grained language instruction, but also native speakers and learners of English, might benefit from a functional language approach. Following Laura Aull and Anne Ruggles Gere et al. on building generic understandings, Slagle provides a set of lessons meant to foster metalinguistic awareness about sentence-level choices that convey expressions of conviction, concession, open-mindedness, problematization, and more. Discerning local discursive patterns, students build a metalanguage for describing the “connections between conventional language-level features and the related socio-cultural practices of academic discourse.” Slagle bases his research on 14 interviews of students enrolled in stretch and corequisite courses at two four-year institutions who took part in his functional grammar approach. Ultimately, these interviews substantiate that “By raising students’ awareness of the connections between language-level features and macro-rhetorical concepts, functional approaches to language instruction can also potentially aid students’ understanding of the ‘often tacit assumptions’ [citing Aull] of academic writing.” In brief, Slagle’s research pushes back on a variation of automation in writing instruction that is hardly new—the tendency to perceive good writing as standard and writing practices as universal.

Finally, in our fourth article, “Promising but Struggling Multilinguals: A One-on-One Intervention for Getting on Track in First-Year Composition,” Misun Dokko elaborates the need to widen our capacities for seeing students and our own teaching purposes more clearly. An individualized pedagogy honed especially for “promising but struggling” students, such as her own student Nico, responds directly to the distances we may feel arising in our classrooms in a “writing processed” era. Dokko first intuits, then observes, a “small but ever-present contingent” of students who “attend regularly, submit work somewhat consistently, and engage with potential.” But “their reticence is palpable,” as it manifests incomplete work, low participation, misunderstandings of assignments, and ultimately, students’ withdrawing from, failing, or hardly passing the class. Dokko determines such students could benefit from individualized instruction, though not through standard

options, such as tutoring or academic coaching, as generally made available by trained personnel apart from the classroom. Dokko ventures to provide an individualized intervention herself, modeled on a thorough review of approaches, such as English for Academic Purposes, appropriate to multilinguals but not “promising but struggling” students, and on individualization for primary and secondary students supporting rich dialogue and connection. Student Nico agrees and, in the course of their six week-long, biweekly 30-minute sessions, achieves more confidence, less struggle. Together Dokko and Nico brave the distance between Nico’s reticence and conventional tutoring. Dokko “encourage[s] Nico to feel confident and comfortable through conversations about his interests, use[s] a yellow legal pad to visualize concepts, point[s] at areas of text, number[s] key words, punctuate[s] lessons with Spanish, clarify[s] concepts that [Dokko had taken] for granted, and restrain[s] [her]self from interrupting.” Further, Dokko becomes part of her own research to discover a true kinship with Nico and other multilinguals leading from her own language learning history. “In [these] ways,” Dokko writes, even “10-minutes of conversation” can effectively “develop rapport and highlight Nico’s funds of knowledge.” Their partnership models a uniquely personalized, and humanized, bridge to success.

Certainly we are not alone among users, makers, and professionals questioning the distances we see arising among ourselves across tables (and desks) where the eyes of “the other” were once more visible. Our current era signals little to assure us that we can always know whose voice we are actually meeting on the page or our devices for much longer, and soon students may even come to doubt the voices they meet in their feedback from us, or in our emails. We must assure them it is really us and find ways and “time to know them” as Marilyn Sternglass presaged in a quite different time. The articles of this issue remind us that this endeavor is—and will be—the one that continues to define us.

--Hope Parisi and Cheryl C. Smith

A Note of Acknowledgement from *JBW*'s Incoming Editors

We did not want to conclude this Editors' Column, the last by Hope Parisi and Cheryl C. Smith as *JBW*'s Editors, without acknowledging their exceptional stewardship and longstanding leadership. Hope stepped into her position as *JBW* editor in 2008, taking over for Bonne August, her colleague at Kingsborough Community College (CUNY), and sharing the editor's role with Rebecca Mlynarczyk. In 2011, Cheryl took over the editorship from Rebecca. Together, Hope and Cheryl have been galvanizing and guiding the conversation on basic writing for well over the decade through a period that has been defined by critical shifts and developments in attitudes towards "basic writing" as a field.

Careful studies of students and faculty, of pedagogy and policy, are a hallmark of *JBW*. As editors, Hope and Cheryl have approached each manuscript as a conversation in progress, a line of questioning to be nurtured. They have showcased authors, both new and established, who tell the stories of basic writing faculty, students, and programs with respect and attention to detail. They are well known by authors in the journal and in the field as meticulous, careful editors who prioritize mentoring up-and-coming faculty and graduate students.

The solid foundation laid by Hope and Cheryl has allowed *JBW* to take on new challenges and possibilities. New co-editors Dominique Zino and Lisa Blankenship, along with the rest of the editorial team, have been re-imagining what this historic journal has to offer as the concept of "basic writing" evolves and shifts in our current chapter. Dominique and Lisa will continue to prioritize collaboration within the journal while also diversifying and enlarging the editorial team in the coming year. As we look forward to *JBW*'s 50th anniversary in 2025, this is a moment to recognize how far Hope and Cheryl have taken the journal and the field, to conceptualize the values inherent in this concept we have known as "basic writing," and to carry those values into our future work.