

Newsletter

Conference on Basic Writing

A special interest group of CCCC



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Notes from the 1997 CCCC's CBW Workshop

This year's workshop for the Conference on Basic Writing, entitled "Race, Class, and Culture in the Basic Writing Classroom," received enthusiastic reviews by workshop participants. One presenter said it was the only workshop he had ever attended in its entirety.

Opening up the discussion on class issues in and out of the academy were Gary Tate, John McMillan, and Elizabeth D. Woodworth of Texas Christian University, with their presentation, "Confronting Class In and Out of the Classroom." Gary Tate laid the groundwork for this by recapping the impact that Working Class Studies has had in recent years. Especially significant is the role that the Center for Working Class Studies at Youngstown State University has had in foregrounding the influence of class politics inside and out of academia. Tate emphasized the considerable impact that their Biennial Conference on Working Class Lives, held in June 1995, has had on the growth of class consciousness and on Working Class Studies in the field of Composition and Rhetoric. Their work, combined with recent publications by Janet Zandy (*Liberating Memory: Our Work and Our Working Class Consciousness*, Rutgers 1995; *Calling Home: Working Class Women's Writings*, Rutgers, 1990) and issues by *Radical Teacher* (Spring 1995, No. 46) and *Women's Studies Quarterly* (Spring/Summer 1995) devoted wholly to issues of the working class, investigate the need to understand our own class histories, to inquire into the stories we tell about

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Review Of Recent Books

When Sallyanne asked if I'd write a short piece about basic writing texts, I agreed, even though I wondered if it might not be a disheartening task. After I'd examined various texts, however, I was encouraged—not only about being able to devise some principles I thought should shape basic writing texts, but also about being able to recommend several texts that incorporated these principles. I'll discuss these principles first—I've categorized them into three areas; then I'll list the texts.

The first category is pedagogical. Under this heading, texts should appeal to different kinds of learners, all adult; thus, texts should sequence materials—creating a spiral in which students incorporate, review, and apply materials at increasingly more complicated levels. Always, the goal is for students to perform and produce, not just to recognize. This spiraling should be done within a text and within texts in a series. Finally, texts not only should inculcate interest and good study/writing skills in their basic approach, but also should use humor (I must admit this last "principle" is my hobby horse, but humor does help.)

The second category—our old familiar nemesis—is grammar/editing. Where possible, texts should present information inductively so that students can discern the rule, generalize it for themselves, (thus seeing its logic), and, of course, be able to repeat the process. Grammatical material, too, should be sequenced, moving from presentation

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ourselves, about where we belong and who we are within designated class systems whose boundaries are often blurred by competing and unconscious allegiances. McMillian and Woodworth followed this up with further discussion of the ways in which academic contexts present occasions for the erasing and effacing of narratives that would account for the ways in which class consciousness shapes our students' critical perspectives. Workshop participants were then asked to examine in writing how the stories we tell ourselves and others about ourselves and our class locations influence our teaching and our lives in the academy. The result was a rich blending of narratives from across a wide spectrum of class locations.

Jacqueline Jones Royster and Rebecca Taylor then led workshop participants in what Royster termed "the debunking of master narratives" by inviting attendees to identify their locations as teachers within institutional and regional contexts, thereby creating "a leverage point from which to reflect." Taylor then led the group in a consideration of how we as teachers can arrive at new solutions to the difficulties that class differences pose in basic writing classes, with the recovery of location as a factor in understanding our own roles and our students' difficulties.

After lunch, Jane Maher shared her findings from her newly published book, *Mina P. Shaughnessy: Reflections on Her Life And Work*. The focus of her talk, "Mina Shaughnessy on Race and Class," revisited the beginnings of the basic writing movement and the extraordinary intellectual energy and commitment to equal access that Shaughnessy brought to her work.

Victor Villanueva shared an exercise he conducts with his basic writing classes, creating word poems out of concepts and free writing that lead to unexpected exploratory texts. Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason from CUNY then introduced workshop participants to their 3-year FIPSE Pilot Project on mainstreaming. Their video of students' presentations of their writing together with the holistic evaluation session that they led with participants scoring writing samples from students' portfolios gave all of us an effective overview of the goals and theoretical underpinnings of their mainstreaming project.

Concluding the session, Ira Shor mesmerized us all with an historical account of the roots of the contradictory forces at work in the democratic

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CBW: A Recent History

As a national organization, the Conference on Basic Writing has had different forms in different time periods. Its original history needs to be written: its early story is very much the story of basic writing teachers, who sought some professional nexus, some forum for sharing the challenges and breakthroughs accompanying the teaching of basic writing as such programs proliferated nationally—well in advance of faculty training, publication of useful textbooks, and development of socially informed theories of the field.

The early programs of CBW shared with its current agenda the simple mission of providing some kind of network for basic writing instructors. The organization's activity level waxed, waned, and then revived in the mid-1980s through the efforts of major CBW supports Karen Uehling, Peter Dow Adams, and Carolyn Kirkpatrick. Peter and Carolyn, along with dedicated and long-time board members such as Karen, Sallyanne Fitzgerald, Suellynn Duffey, Bill Jones, and Sally Harrold, established the annual Special Interest Group meetings at CCCC, and produced an expanded version of the *CBW Newsletter*, a finely written resource for the CBW membership. Most importantly, these CBW leaders assumed responsibility for the National Conference on Basic Writing. Instituted and organized by Sallyanne Fitzgerald, the conference under CBW aegis became, for a short while, a bi-annual event.

The last freestanding national conference was held at the University of Maryland in 1992. The enormous effort involved in securing funding for the conference and then organizing it—and finding individuals willing and able to take on the job—led to yet another metamorphosis of the group. With Peter and Carolyn's departure—and with a shift in national interest away from basic writing, as budget cuts and other issues came to occupy the center—the organization and its activities were once again at a point of redefinition.

The next major phase was instituted by Karen Uehling and Geoff Sire, who designed and organized, in concert with Sylvia Holladay and Richard Friedrich, the first CBW Pre-Conference Workshop, "Exploring the Boundaries of Basic Writing," at the Milwaukee CCCC in 1996. Its success, and the energy provided by new CBW members like Gerri McNenny, led to a second proposal and second offering of a pre-conference

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of information, to applications of increasing difficulty, to production and editing of the student's own work. The material should promote active analysis of the student's own editing issues and production of writing of increasing variety and complexity, sometimes accomplished through sentence combining. Finally, grammar and editing should be an integral part of the writing process, not divorced from it and not substituted for it.

In terms of writing an introduction, the last category, texts should introduce and develop students' proficiency with the writing process, in part to promote fluency, but also to promote students' understanding of themselves as writers who can manipulate the writing process. Texts should help student writers gain awareness of audience, and, for academic audiences, the discourse conventions and strategies of different disciplines. Texts also should integrate reading instruction with writing instruction. Finally, students should work with whole structures of meaning (long paragraphs or essays), not small segments.

Now for my list of "good" texts. Finding and examining them was fun. Some, unfortunately, are not in print any longer; these I've noted with an *. I add them anyway, for they are good models. Add your own titles to the list; debate the criteria. Both the list and the criteria give me reasons to feel good—even at the end of the academic year—about possible texts in basic writing.

*Adams, Peter Dow. *Connections: A Guide to the Basics of Writing. Second Edition.* NY: HarperCollins, 1992.

Bartholomae, David, and Anthony Petrosky. *Reading the Lives of Others: A Sequence for Writers.* Boston: Bedford of St. Martin's, 1995.

Epes, Mary, Carolyn Kirkpatrick, and Michael Southwell. *Mastering Written English: The COMP-Lab Exercises Level 1. Fourth Edition.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993.

Epes, Mary and Carolyn Kirkpatrick. *Writing and Editing: The COMP-LAB Exercises Level 2, Second Edition.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993.

Fitzgerald, Sallyanne H. *Casting Light on Writing.* NY: Harper Collins, 1992.

*Fortune, Sarah D'Eloia, and Barbara Quint Gray. *Experience to Exposition: Patterns of Basic Writing.* NY: Harper and Row, 1984.

Gay, Pamela. *Developing Writers. A Dialogic Approach.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992.

McKoski, Martin M., and Lynne C. Hahn. *The Developing Writer: A Guide to Basic Skills. Fourth*

Edition. NY: HarperCollins, 1992.

Sternglass, Marilyn S. *Reading, Writing, and Reasoning: Focus 1,2,3.* NY: Macmillan, 1991, 1992, 1993, (I've grouped all three books in the series together here.)

Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Jerrold Nudelman. *Steps in Composition. Sixth Edition.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994.

Sally Harrold

Southwestern Oregon Community College

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impulse in education and policies for tracking in his talk, "Farewell to Educational Apartheid: Basic Writing and Cultural Democracy." Workshop attendants left energized, ready to carry on the discussion in the sessions that followed.

The Conference on Basic Writing will again sponsor a workshop at CCCC's, entitled "Rethinking Basic Writing: Ideas Whose Time Has Come." We hope CBW members will join us in discussions with Kathleen Blake Yancey, University of North Carolina-Charlotte on using portfolios in the basic writing classroom; Kate Mangelsdorf, the University of Texas at El Paso, on teaching second-language and second-dialect basic writers; Gary Tate Texas Christian University on introducing working class literature in the basic writing class, Terry Collins, University of Minnesota's General College, on representing basic writing programs to the public, and William Jones, Rutgers University, on reconceptualizing the various profiles of basic writers. We hope to see you there!

Gerri McNenny

University of Houston Downtown

Please note:

Next to your name on the mailing label is the year your CBW membership expires. If expired, please send \$5.00 to renew for one year to:

Sallyanne Fitzgerald

Dean, Language Arts

Chabot College

25555 Hesperian Blvd.

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(CBW: *A Recent History, continued*)

workshop, "Race, Class and Culture in the Basic Writing Classroom," held at this year's CCCC in Phoenix. Again, the format proved successful, with presenters Victor Villanueva, Jacqueline Jones Royster, and Ira Shor, among others, making the event an intellectually and emotionally powerful experience. The attempt to shift the national conference to the pre-conference site has thus far been a workable innovation.

Much of the recent resurgence in CBW activities, including the workshops and the volume being prepared by Gerri and Sallyanne, *The Politics of Basic Writing: Mainstreaming At-Risk College Students*, can be attributed to the foundational shift in the field represented by the mainstreaming movement. The national debate on this movement was, if not initiated, certainly brought to the fore at the 1992 National Conference on Basic Writing, in presentations by Peter Dow Adams and David Bartholomae. Such concerns on the mainstreaming issue have kept conversations going on the CBW listserv, created in 1995 by Terry Collins at the University of Minnesota. The listserv was followed

up this past year by the creation of the CBW web site, courtesy of Anne M. Parks, also of the University of Minnesota.

Like the field of basic writing itself, CBW has had periods of frenetic activity interspersed with lulls in the action. Even with the proliferation of other national groups and conferences, however, CBW remains a viable, valuable organization: it meets a continuing need for self-definition, self-assertion, and interconnection for those of us who consider basic writing a central part of our professional identity. The group has had a long history of uniting individuals from a spectrum of institutions and ranks, of differing professional experience and prominence—a history which predicts its continuation well into the future.

Jeanne Gunner
CBW Chair, 1995-97

