

EDITORS' COLUMN

I am coming to think of Basic Writing as like a voice in oscillation, a swash line indicating the past of ecologies interacting, a marker both reflective of influences—narratives and counternarratives—and perhaps something in itself. Yet that something, if waveforms or swash lines are any indication, cannot be known except for the interactions (not long staying present) within their frame. How to define that frame?

As *JBW* readers will verify, a good many Editors' Columns of recent years have spun around the theme of definition and transitions in Basic Writing. A set of courses in a department's line-up of courses; a pile of referrals to the writing center for help with students' language use; advisement focused on remedial placement—all redundant signs and practices attesting to some version of Basic Writing in the room. As departments shift support for basic writers toward accelerated writing, mainstreaming, and other means, the "where" and "how" of Basic Writing grow less defined. Rightly, calls for equity and social justice in writing programs have dimmed the narrative of equal opportunity as founding principle for skills acquisition, no neutral project, under open admissions. We are sounding new waves of realization and change to amplify access and justice. *Where we are now* among the markers of BW history may be notes to study and collect only as we go. We might see Basic Writing history, in other words, as still being written.

The articles of this issue approach the task of defining Basic Writing by spotlighting acts of investment that, in the *doing* of Basic Writing, create experiences and interactions for exemplifying Basic Writing still on the move. New pedagogies; affective and antiracist priorities; the circularity of student narratives; and creative convergences among a unique set of BW stakeholders in a large urban university: this issue's topics reflect the work of instructors filling Basic Writing spaces to reflect what *more* they want Basic Writing to bring or to be. In our first article, "Dada and Surrealism in the Composition Classroom: A Transgenre Approach to Basic Writing Pedagogy," Kristin LaFollette lays down an immensely rich, theorized arts pedagogy in her Basic Writing classroom. This pedagogy is all about possibility and transformation: Taking the Dada artists and the Surrealists as the base for students opening themselves broadly to writing, LaFollette links theories and methodologies of multimodalism, interdisciplinarity, and Sirc-ian "box logic" to reinvest the Basic Writing courses she teaches with value for transfer and personal renewal. Conceiving writing as so embrace helps LaFollette to engender a "transgenre" writing theory, after transgenre artist and scholar Ames

Hawkins, whose work LaFollette puts into conversation with the Dadaists—now for a new era. The result is a several-semester self-study of LaFollette’s teaching toward a transgenre writing-arts practice across three Basic Writing classes, shared here along with stunning samples of students’ artwork. (For full color renderings, please view the article online.)

Our second article, “Affect, Fear, and Openness in an Antiracist Writing Classroom,” by Amy D. Williams, Sarah Kate Johnson, Anika Shumway, and Dennis L. Eggett, widens the arena of Basic Writing research by focusing on a high school seniors’ Language Arts classroom where, pivotally, writing identities and dispositions are still forming. Following Kevin Roozen’s own expansive approach into Basic Writing research in crediting students’ diverse and generative literate histories—this, as a key to understanding so-called basic writers—Williams and coauthors identify fear and affect as subtexts of writing instruction at a time when many instructors have felt compelled to revise their curriculums for antiracism. While the coauthors anticipated at the start of their project that the effects of fear and affect would reveal themselves as endemic to this—as to many other—high school Language Arts classroom(s), they did not expect they would be studying an antiracist curriculum and pedagogy taking shape in the moment. Noting a “high school writing curriculum and pedagogy designed to help students recognize, resist, and oppose racist structures and practices,” the coauthors scrutinize key elements of an antiracist writing classroom in motion. This endeavor is one of starts and stops, marking the power of openness to decrease students’ fear about writing as well as the risk of a White habitus arising to “blind[] [teachers] to the full affective ecology of their classrooms.” In all these senses, readers discern an affective, antiracist pedagogy for Basic Writing as a critical investment in teaching.

At the same time instructors can be found to invest Basic Writing spaces with pedagogies that foster openness and possibility, we must guard against a certain *overinvesting* of these spaces, as what can likely emerge may be less revelatory of our students and more reflective of our own presumptions as well as those of our policies and institutions. Our third article, “When Bootstraps Break: Re-examining Assumptions about the Symbolic Capital of Immigrant Students’ Persistence Narratives,” by Emily K. Suh, Barrie E. McGee, and Sam Owens, speaks caution to this point of how academic authority can sometimes overtake students’ narratives, derailing the flexibility students need to shape and reshape these narratives toward goals students define for themselves. The article charts the progress of two students of immigrant backgrounds whose narratives of persistence, even trauma, acquire

a certain academic—or, after Pierre Bourdieu, *symbolic*—capital, presumptively fitted to instructors’ and tutors’ independent sense of these students. These attachments are found to impress student identities, and, following Helen Oughton’s investment theory, “impose [certain] cultural arbitrariness in deciding what ‘counts’ as funds of knowledge” (Oughton), or, as Suh et al. add, “how to value students’ experiences.” Ultimately, one student of the study, Labiba, becomes discouraged about her prospects for college success, wanting to drop out; she feels her narrative now dissociated from earlier affirmations of enduring hardships as a refugee. Another student, Olan, attributes his competence in English to innate talent and diligence, having “studied British language in school. . . I read and work and just practice.” Apparently, for a Yazidi who served as a US Army interpreter in Iraq, a narrative of natural language talent is too facile. His instructors and tutors are disposed to prompt the telling and retelling of his *persistence* through war and relocation instead. In both cases, theories of investment around student language competence help to highlight not only the experiences students bring to their learning, but also how those experiences *qua* narrative can be used up, skewed, or ignored.

Finally, our fourth article, “Encouraging Student Voices: Toward a Voice-Based and Antiracist Culture from the MA Program to Basic Writing,” by Elizabeth Baez and Rosanne Carlo, takes voice as both metaphor and statement for wide-ranging change within a large urban English department, at College of Staten Island CUNY, that includes Basic Writing. Baez and Carlo set out the problem of voice in writing programs for undergraduates, where students may receive limited latitude for expression through code-switching, and in graduate programs as potential sites for redrawing the lines of professional culture and community. They link shortfalls of justice in writing programs to an inability and unwillingness to embrace the range of students’ voices, an experience that Baez recounts first-hand as a former undergraduate and graduate student. Baez’s thesis project for her MA in English at CSI, guided by Carlo as program director, forms the base of the article and highlights Baez and Carlo’s many collaborations. Their renewed vision for their department encompasses a great deal: social justice-oriented professional development led or supported by MA students for all faculty; MA students mentored in composition who serve as instructors of basic writers; and reading and working groups now hosted on a regular basis. Change, says Baez and Carlo, is happening: “Readers might wish for some sort of proclamation, or wide-sweeping evidence, that the CSI Writing Program has changed, that we now have persuaded faculty to value students’ voices, their rights to

their own language, and to work against deficit stances in their thinking.” But, they urge, “that’s not the case.” Rather the change they see “is in the conversations we have with faculty,” broadened to include code-meshing and many equity issues. In all, Baez and Carlo point to the creative, impactful potential of investments laid down in BW space.

In this time of change for Basic Writing, we may find ourselves searching to identify what of Basic Writing are the keynotes for holding on to long-term—to help define Basic Writing and mark it as a thing in itself, a supportive presence in the room. As the articles of this issue suggest, going forward we may not so much be occupied by an entity as much as by a *doing*, a critical reinvestment of our teaching and professional spaces.

--Hope Parisi and Cheryl C. Smith