

Editor's Introduction:

Scratch Beyond Scratch

As the articles in this issue of *Open Words* were undergoing review, I was transitioning out of a five-year term in an administrative position, served primarily at my school's main campus. During this administrative stint, I still worked with students at my home campus, one of Miami University's open-access sites, but I taught exclusively studio writing workshops. Studios rely on students to set the curriculum; in other words, I had no role in planning a course calendar. I also had little to revise in terms of course policies from semester to semester. This past fall, my university was generous enough to award me with a Faculty Improvement Leave, for which I understood my goal was to learn how to teach (again). I had to prepare for three courses that I had not taught in ten years. My previous syllabi talked of things like "floppy disks." Just reproducing the old curricula didn't seem like an ethical option: even if there had been no developments in the fields that these courses represented or developments in technology (Youtube and Facebook were nonexistent the last time I tinkered with these syllabi; I doubt I even owned a cell phone), I just couldn't quite be sure why certain assignments, exercises, grading scales, policies were present on the old syllabi, let alone confidently decipher how they might all speak to one another to produce a coherent learning experience for students.

One thing I (re)learned quickly during my leave was just how difficult it is to map out an ecosystem for a course—to articulate to students and to oneself the assumptions that shape absentee policies (or lack thereof), the grade percentage devoted to participation, to drafting, to final papers, the order and selection of readings. Even more difficult, however, was the task to develop these syllabi without yet knowing the students they would impact. How might these undergraduate students be different from those I had taught in these classes a decade ago? My worries stemmed not only from being out of touch with students in these more standard courses for so long, but also being out of touch with the various learning ecologies to which students were now accustomed on my home campus. While I am certainly grateful for the leave, I came to view it as a plot to coerce me into generating plot lines that could not possibly consider the multiple interests and concerns students would bring with them. I felt more or less in a situation in which I had to either develop an ecology that fell in line with whatever ecology the campus now expected teachers to construct or to develop an ecology that was too far out of sync with anything that might be remotely familiar to students unfortunate enough to enroll in my courses.

I wanted to start from scratch, but that turned out to be tricky. I probably just needed to seek out more community during the leave and to spend less time in isolation, where I kept manufacturing fears to combat imagined situations. I'd like to think my anxieties mark a form of literacy that understands an instructor cannot anticipate all the various interests and concerns of

students, or even the multiple institutional concerns that might press into classrooms, but that an instructor must always anticipate diversity, nonetheless, and that anticipation must be open-ended, ready for what's next, what's unanticipated. I wanted to start from scratch, but I couldn't. In fact, working on this issue (and, indeed, the previous eight volumes of *Open Words*) made me suspicious of scratch. This journal serves in many ways to connect me with a community that consistently anticipates and responds to diversity, not to mention broader institutional and social factors that might seek to disappear diversity in favor of a certain notion of scratch. What I'm talking about is the sense of scratch that is divorced from students, the type of scratch, I take it, that I was supposed to conform to over the period of the leave in which I was to revise my syllabi—all alone, with no students.

This situation reflects a bad type of scratch, a type, I was beginning to perceive, that the essays we'd accepted for this issue were challenging. I found this sense of scratch evident in the Academic Affairs committee that cancels the course Kelly Kinney describes in "The Quick Rise and Untimely Fall of 'Writing Your Way into Graduate School,'" the course her program developed to counter a taken-for-granted process (preparing written documents for application to graduate schools) and to provide additional access to students who might otherwise lack familiarity with that process. The committee wanted her to start from scratch, a scratch founded on committee members' conceptions of relevance and rigor. Scratch of this sort would surface again as the racist components that pervade student presentations in Jody A. Briones's "Identity, Voice, Social Justice, and Blundering in Critical and Cultural Studies Composition" and that sustain the ground upon which she must stake her perspectives as a working-class Chicana compositionist. In Genesee Carter's "Bypassing the Silence," I saw bad scratch buttressing traditional approaches to Technical and Professional Writing classrooms. Scratching beyond this scratch, Carter argues that a discourse analysis approach that engages the literacies of peripheral students can help these students develop the agency they need to make language choices that not only demonstrate the communication skills they need for jobs and promotions, but also for personal and civic situations. Also taking into account the literacy practices students bring with them to college, Scott, Hockenberry, and Miller's "Tutoring the 'Invisible Minority': Appalachian Writers in the Writing Center" helps readers relativize a starting-from-scratch approach to writing center tutorials that might otherwise disappear the interests and concerns of Appalachian students. In this essay and others collected here, scratch is an always already that diversity disrupts, disrupts to guide us to a scratch beyond scratch where teachers engage with the "non-traditional" and seek new grounds.

The last time I taught the courses that I am scheduled to teach this spring, my co-editor Bill Thelin and I were preparing our first issue of this journal. Working with our board and our contributors and their accounts from their various institutions over the last decade, I find that my views on scratch have grown more complicated, less stable. While Bill and I worked through the revisions for the articles collected here, I was also revising the three syllabi for the courses I would be returning to this semester. There was some old material and old assignments and policies I could still make sense of, and there were some new things I developed along the way. Nevertheless, these courses are still incomplete, not because I started from scratch, but because I couldn't. I couldn't start from the scratch I was expected to start from. Now, as I am writing this, my spring classes start in less than 24 hours. When I meet my students for the first time, there and then I will know it's really time to start from scratch—and to keep on scratching.

John Paul Tassoni

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