# Paradigm Clashes Among Basic Writing Teachers: Sources of Conflict and a Call for Change

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ABSTRACT: *Although basic writing has become a strong independent field with professionally sanctioned ways of making knowledge, what Stephen North refers to as "lore" still maintains a strong foundation in the field. This lore is often grounded in the belief in a linear paradigm of learning, and is to some degree fostered by traditional conceptions of basic writers and basic writing teachers. The paradigm clashes between lore and professionally sanctioned knowledge emerge quite organically from the varying background experiences of faculty; but, rather than creating a richly diverse group of pedagogical approaches that enhance the quality of basic writing classes, these paradigm clashes are often obstacles to building strong basic writing programs.*

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Stephen North discusses the division he saw in 1987 between practitioners and researchers in the field of Composition. According to North, prior to the 1960s academic reform movement, practitioners, writing teachers, had been the locus of knowledge-generation for the field of composition. After the founding of modern Composition, capital C, the new field demanded a knowledge-making process more "professional" and scientific than practitioner inquiry, or lore, as North calls the informally shared beliefs about and practices of teaching writing that circulate among practitioners. Lore and practitioner knowledge were, after this point, discounted as legitimate sources of reliable knowledge about teaching writing.

Although North's description and analysis of the transition from prac-

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titioner-based to researcher-based generation of knowledge in Composition is quite valid for professionally sanctioned knowledge, lore still maintains a strong currency, not only among individual practitioners but in many departments. This prevalence of lore, or what Jeanne Gunner, from a Foucaultian perspective, calls "iconic discourse," among teachers of basic writing, along with the simultaneous professionalization of Basic Writing as a field have resulted in paradigm clashes, significant differences in belief and philosophy, among basic writing teachers. As a faculty member in a community college that offers many sections of basic writing, I have observed significant paradigm clashes among those who teach these classes. The paradigm clashes emerge quite organically from the varying background experiences of faculty; but, rather than creating a richly diverse group of pedagogical approaches that enhance the quality of basic writing classes, paradigm clashes are often obstacles to building strong basic writing programs.

**Paradigm A: The Linear Narrative of Writing Ability**

Some teachers, typically non-composition specialists who find themselves teaching writing either full-time or part-time, appear to believe in what I would like to call the linear narrative of writing ability. The linear narrative of writing ability is a story of how writers learn; it goes like this: individual writers begin to write by marking letters, then words, then phrases, then sentences, and then small compositions down on paper. Once writers can write sentences and small compositions correctly, they can move on to more complex skills, such as paragraphing. Having mastered paragraphing, they can move on to writing descriptions and personal narratives. Then, slowly but surely, they can make their way to analysis and research. In this narrative, abilities are acquired sequentially, in what is believed to be a logical, building-block order. Abilities build on preceding abilities, the simpler coming first, the more complex following. At the heart of the linear narrative is the belief that there is, ontologically speaking, a sequence of complexity to verbal acts and the parallel belief that discrete levels of ability correspond to the sequence of complexity.

Further, the sequential perspective does not apply only to mastering correct grammar; the linear narrative makes claims about where different genres fall in a sequence of increasing complexity as well. Although this narrative sequence appears in different incarnations (some beginning with

personal writing, some with descriptive writing, and others with summary), they have in common the presumption that a particular sequence of genres or rhetorical modes represents an ascending sequence of complexity and skill. One place we can see this clearly is in the hierarchy of "thought patterns" for basic writing classes that Mina Shaughnessy articulates in her seminal *Errors and Expectations* (288). For the first semester of a basic writing course, Shaughnessy advocates teaching only the first three thought patterns, which are: "this is what happened," "this is the look (sound, smell, or feel) of something," and "this is like (or unlike) this" (257-61). Shaughnessy's formulation implies that generic complexity is lowest in acts of narration, slightly higher in acts of description, and higher still in acts of comparison. Only later in their schooling will basic writing students, according to Shaughnessy, be prepared to theorize about causality, solve problems, paraphrase and quote from other writers, and offer their own opinions or interpretations—thought patterns four through seven, respectively (257-61). In my experience, Shaughnessy's beliefs are echoed in the beliefs of many basic writing teachers currently in the field. Last semester, I worked with a colleague in my department who would assign his basic writers essays that essentially asked them only to summarize the plot of the works of literature they had read for the class. When I asked him why all of the students' papers from his class were elaborate, well-written summaries, he told me that he felt that students at this level needed to demonstrate their ability to summarize well before they could move on to argumentative essays.

Interactions I have had with other basic writing instructors have illustrated the strength their belief in the linear narrative. One event stands out in my memory. A group of basic writing faculty in our department had gathered to look at some sample student essays from a basic writing course. The purpose of our meeting was to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the student writing in order to come to a consensus as to how to evaluate student writing in the course: What kind of writing should pass? What kind of writing should fail? By chance, some student writing from a course I had taught the previous semester had been chosen as the sample student work we would discuss. Since some of the projects I assign to students in developmental classes differ from those assigned by some of my colleagues in the department, the focus of the discussion quickly turned from the student papers to the way I teach. Many of the teachers in the session remarked positively upon the quality and the quantity of student writing in the portfolios. They expressed shock that I could "get our students to write that

much," and they were sure that their students would not, or *could* not, produce such lengthy work for them. The teachers were also impressed that the student writers were clearly doing some text-based research for the essays. My colleagues seemed surprised that I had had time during the semester to teach my students how to do research. They were sure that, because their students were basic writers and had "basic" skills to learn during the semester of developmental writing instruction, they could not ask their students to learn how to do research and the analysis research requires.

Shaughnessy and my colleagues are hardly alone in advocating a generic sequence. In his influential book *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, James Moffett suggests teaching genres of writing in the order of their level of abstraction because they correspond loosely to Jean Piaget's developmental schema, even though that schema was based on the cognitive development of children. Piaget believed that different cognitive processes unfold and develop over time. He believed in the concept that development occurred before learning and made learning possible. He thought it was a waste of time and basically bad teaching to introduce a concept or skill that was more advanced than a student's current level of development. Thus, Moffett advocates a curriculum that asks students to record and report present events, narrate past events, generalize about events, and, finally, theorize — in that order. We can still see the influence of this in the current-traditional perspective represented in many writing textbooks and syllabi, what David Bartholomae refers to as the "infamous description, narration, exposition, persuasion" (86). How many popular college composition textbooks move from the personal narrative to the analytical essay or research paper? Further, how many syllabi for Freshman English or basic writing do the same?

If students are basic writers, often they are asked to write almost exclusively personal essays until they master that type of essay, it being perceived as the lowest on the totem pole of essay writing ability. In a one-on-one writing conference, a basic writing student of mine last semester told me that my class was the first time she had been asked to "write like an adult" in a basic writing class. She had taken this particular course three times, each time hoping she would pass on into Freshman English, and each time failing the portfolio and standardized test at the end of the course. When I asked her to describe the types of writing she had been asked to do in previous semesters, she said that she had been asked to write a lot of autobiographical and personal essays. She was tired of them. She did not find these essays intellectually challenging to write or to read. In particular, she was

tired of re-telling her experience of immigrating to the United States. She had been asked to write about this repeatedly by different teachers over the semesters, and she clearly felt that this type of writing was not helping her to increase her ability to do academic writing.

There are many reasons why the belief in the linear narrative remains so strong among writing teachers. Depending on our ages, we ourselves were very likely taught to read and write based on this narrative model. This was certainly the case for me. I was never asked to develop a research question in grade school; instead, I was asked and expected to *describe* things in detail and to write broadly focused *reports*, in which I organized and presented everything the encyclopedias in the library would tell me about a topic. It was as if curiosity about something and the ability to ask a focused question do not, or cannot, develop until a child reaches middle school. Further, once I had finished secondary school and had entered college, description, narration, and reporting were no longer asked of me. Never once was I assigned a project where I had to utilize these other thinking and writing skills that had been so central in my earlier education, as if narrating and describing are such simple tasks that college students would not benefit from doing them.

Perhaps I have misperceived the writing curricula I experienced as a student. Perhaps, as a college student, description, narration, and reporting were vitally involved in the thesis-driven research papers and analytical essays I wrote. Undoubtedly, it is true that I used all of these skills, to some degree, in most writing projects I completed in college. However, just because we can say that analytical writing often involves describing, narrating, and reporting does not mean that we can necessarily say that describing, narrating, and reporting do not each often involve analysis. If we think of any seemingly simple act of narration, we quickly realize that it involves multiple acts of analysis in choosing and creating perspective, pace, form, plot, etc. The same is true of description and reporting. These seemingly simple skills become more and more complex the more attention we pay to them, revealing the artifice in the designation of certain writing skills as "simple" and others as "complex."

Moffett himself warned his readers not to take the sequence of writing tasks he proposed too seriously. He referred to his theory of discourse and his ideal schema for a curriculum as "hallucinations" (54). They are unrealistic because they presume a level of uniformity as to what individual students — and even groups of students — are capable of thinking and writ-

ing that is simply not accurate. In fact, it is often not the students' ability that determines what types of writing they will be asked to do; it is, instead, often teachers' presumptions regarding what their students should be able to do that determines what they will be asked to do. In describing his findings from a study of writing assignments given in various levels of schooling, Moffett notes:

> Certain assignments were not given below a certain grade because the teachers did not want to inflict a debacle on either the children or themselves. Certain upper cutoff points on the abstraction ladder seemed obvious for certain ages. And only a few teachers of very able twelfth graders would even consider assigning an essay that argued a theory from premises, a refusal that was undoubtedly based on good judgement but that may show the ineffectuality of present schooling rather than a developmental limit. (55)

So in order to avoid a "debacle," some students are not even asked to do certain types of abstract thinking in writing. At all levels of schooling, presumptions such as these, about order and appropriateness of skill acquisition, are used by writing teachers to construct curricula.

Teachers who believe in the linear narrative of writing ability conceive of their job as assigning projects that they feel are appropriate for the students' ability level. Thus my colleagues' surprise that I was asking writers who had been deemed "basic" to do projects they thought appropriate for regular freshman or sophomore students. In describing why they would never ask their basic writing students to do the types of projects I had asked them to, these teachers talked about how students were not "ready" for research and complex problem-solving. They often said things like "[the students] can't even write a coherent sentence! They're certainly not ready to try to write a research paper." This comment reveals the belief in the linear narrative of writing ability: the writer who has not yet mastered the "correct" grammar of a sentence is not ready, or able, to move on to a more complex level of writing.

At my college, as at many others, part of our job as basic writing instructors is to play a gate-keeping function; we assess which of our students are ready to go on to the credit-granting Freshman English course, which is a graduation requirement for every student at the college. Teachers routinely use expressions such as "can Suzie *handle* Freshman English yet?" and

"I just don't think he could *handle* that type of work" when making decisions about who they will and will not allow to pass out of developmental writing. These attitudes and beliefs mask the common reality that certain students are in developmental writing not because they are incapable of abstract or complex thinking but because they are second language speakers of English and have not yet mastered Standard English, or because they were never asked or expected to write analytically in their prior schooling and thus do not perform well on tests that ask them to do just that, or because they speak a form of English that is not acceptable to those who score the gate-keeping standardized writing exams.

Teachers' presumptions that basic writing students cannot, in some sense, *handle* regular academic writing may sometimes find support in older research that suggested that basic writers were cognitively deficient or slow, as compared to their colleagues. In a 1979 article, Andrea Lunsford asserted her then belief that basic writers are cognitively deficient; specifically, she argued that basic writers have not "attained the level of cognitive development which would allow them to form abstractions or conceptions" (38). Similarly, in 1987 Janice Hays presented samples of student writing as support for William G. Perry's conceptual scheme of development in college writers. Hay's article demonstrates one teacher's belief both in cognitive deficiency in basic writers and in the existence of a progressive sequence of writing ability. Today, neither Lunsford nor Hays would likely support their previous positions on basic writers' cognitive deficiencies, but they were hardly alone in presuming some type of cognitive deficiency on the part of basic writing students (Shapiro; Tremblay; Hays). Although research claiming that basic writers are cognitively deficient has since been directly challenged and complicated by other research (See, e.g., Bartholomae and Petrosky; Martinez and Martinez; Lu; Sternglas; and Shor), the idea that basic writers are intellectually less able than their colleagues has a deep history in our field.

## Paradigm B: Basic Writers Aren't Basic Thinkers

A contrasting paradigm that exists among basic writing instructors, especially but not exclusively among those with formal training in the field, is the notion that basic writers, although clearly different from their mainstream counterparts in some ways, are not basic thinkers. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, researchers were already challenging and revising the cognitive deficiency model. In 1987, Joseph and Nancy Martinez presented a

study demonstrating that often what we perceive as evidence of less ability on the part of our students is instead evidence of less fluency in Standard American English. They conducted a study of the writing abilities of basic writers versus graduate students using two different writing tasks. Their results showed no significant differences between the two groups' abilities to perform writing and thinking tasks. However, the results did show consistently more mechanical and spelling errors among the basic writers. Is this Moffett's "debacle"? In the discussion of their findings, Martinez and Martinez suggest that it is primarily unfamiliarity with the basic skills of writing Standard American English that classifies students as "basic writers," rather than their deficiencies as logical thinkers and writers. In 1986 Bartholomae and Petrosky published *Facts, Artifacts, Counterfacts*, in which they present the program of seminar-style Basic Writing courses that they teach and direct, and in which they argue that there is

> no reason to prohibit students from doing serious work because they [can] not do it correctly. In a sense, all courses in the curriculum ask students to do what they cannot yet do well. There [is] no good reason to take students who [are] not fluent readers and writers and consign them to trivial or mechanical work in the belief that it [will] somehow prepare them for a college education. It would make more sense, rather, to enroll these students in an exemplary course. . . . (Preface)

This perspective represents basic writers as literate performers who might be inexperienced in the specific venue of the academy. They don't lack ability, per se; they lack knowledge of conventions and experience with the types of reading and writing the academy requires and rewards.

The theories of learning developed by Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner have influenced much scholarship on basic writing and basic writers. Although they do not openly ground their ideas in Vygotsky's, Bartholomae and Petrosky's basic writing course is sympathetic to Vygotsky's notion that learning *precedes* development, and not vice versa. Vygotsky's theory advocates what some might call *premature* instruction. His *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) refers to the "distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable colleagues" (86). Within a social con-

text of learning, a person is capable of solving problems and completing tasks that they would not be able to complete in isolation. Further, the only way they will learn to complete these tasks independently is by being asked and expected to accomplish them when they do not yet know how to. Thus, "good learning," according to Vygotsky, is "that which is in advance of development" (89).

Marilyn Sternglass ("Conceptualizing") openly called for a Vygotsky/Bruner-inspired curriculum in all instruction, especially remedial English instruction. Sternglass's study found that students who came through both ESL and regular basic writing courses did not draw wide-ranging implications from specific texts as much as those students who had been placed directly into Freshman English. Sternglass is cautious to argue that this is not because these students were not able to function at an analytical level. They were perfectly able to do so, but they neglected to perform this ability when writing about literature. Sternglass concluded that "it seems likely that the students coming through the two remedial tracks had not had enough opportunities [in the remedial courses] to consider and practice writing about larger issues and questions posed by instructional materials they had interacted with" (93, brackets mine). Sternglass calls for eliminating the notion of remedial courses as "bridge" courses that teach "basic skills" to students so that they may acquire higher levels of thinking when they join the mainstream courses: "Rather, all these courses, remedial and traditional, should be conceived of as part of a 'spiral curriculum,' to use Bruner's term, in which all kinds of conceptual and linguistic activities are introduced and practiced at each level" (94). If the students in her study had had the opportunity to practice complex "conceptual and linguistic activities" while in remedial English classes, perhaps they would have performed much better on writing tasks demanding complex analysis in regular Freshman English.

But if we assign complex writing and reading tasks, will basic writing students prove capable of making leaps forward in their writing ability, without having been specifically instructed in the seemingly prerequisite levels of writing ability? Nancy Burkhalter asked similar questions when she put Vygotsky's theory of ZPD to the test in a writing class. She investigated whether a group of children could be taught, with adult guidance, to perform a writing task that would have seemed to be beyond their ability level. Groups of fourth and sixth graders wrote two persuasive essays after only three weeks of daily forty-five minute lessons on persuasive essay writing. The students in the experimental group demonstrated greater ability than

the students in the control group to write persuasive essays. Among those in the experimental group, there were no significant differences in ability by grade level (12). Reflecting specifically on writing curricula, Burkhalter states that "exposure to [persuasive writing] enables students to improve their mastery of it" (16). She stresses that the focus of instruction in writing, and in education in general, should be on how much a person can learn with peer and adult assistance instead of on whether a person meets certain cognitive criteria before instruction ever begins. Moreover, Burkhalter's study challenges us to reconsider the validity of the linear narrative of writing ability.

In my department, I am by no means alone in aiming to teach basic writing in ways that challenge students' writing abilities by requiring them to do what we consider college-level work. I strive to create rich reading and writing environments that enable students to question and analyze in ways that broaden their writing abilities. I try to design my curricula with Bruner's "spiral curriculum" always in mind. While I do not want to frustrate basic writing students by asking them to do work that is completely different from what they are used to writing, I do insist that they do the same types of reading and writing as students in literature electives and other courses. I teach a developmental reading and writing course in which students read Homer's *Odyssey* and several subsequent versions of, or literary responses to, *The Odyssey*. Students keep a reading and writing journal, in which they write their own responses to the reading, answer some reading comprehension questions, and write several creative, ungraded pieces that ask them to take different perspectives on the reading. We write a series of four to six essays in this course, each of which is revised a minimum of three times. Although I do provide an assignment sheet for each essay, I do not create the questions or topics for the students' essays. Approximately a week before each essay is due, the students work together, in small groups or with a partner, to create questions they feel have been raised by the literature we have been reading. Although I may help the students reword their questions for clarity or breadth, I do not change the focus of the students' questions. My course is just one example of many in my department in which basic writing instructors enact their belief in the paradigm that says that basic writers should be engaged in truly college-level reading and writing projects. While this perspective has a strong foothold within my department and within our field, it has not displaced the linear narrative of writing ability and the cognitive deficiency model, and belief in any of these paradigms is highly resistant to change.

## Sites of Resistance: Icons and Lore

Within the basic writing community, certain philosophies and attitudes have become institutionalized into dominant ideologies over decades of research and practice. Employing Foucault's concept of the "icon," Jeanne Gunner divides research in basic writing over the last twenty years into two groups: "iconic" and "critical" discourse. Iconic discourse "reproduces the field according to certain laws, always in relation to the iconic text and figure," while critical discourse "is transgressive, challenging the laws and the icon, and so is received with hostility by the traditional Basic Writing community" (27). She cites Mina Shaughnessy as the iconic figure in basic writing scholarship. Shaughnessy's opinions, and what have come to be positioned as Shaughnessy's opinions, on basic writers and how we should teach them have become the norm within our field. In addition, Gunner examines how Shaughnessy has come to fill Foucault's author function by redefining basic writers as "beginners whose errors have a linguistic logic decodable by the teacher, thus staking out a justifiable place for them within higher education" (28). When Shaughnessy first asserted this perspective on basic writers, this was a new way of understanding them. She effectively authored a field dedicated to studying basic writers, understanding the needs of basic writers, and ensuring the place of basic writing within the university. The field has continued to evolve and generate knowledge, however, and had Shaughnessy lived, her thinking would undoubtedly have evolved as well.

Shaughnessy has also come to be a "founder of discursivity," which means essentially that her text is not just a text on its own but that it has opened up a space for other texts to be produced and reinterpreted. We see this through the myriad citations and uses of Shaughnessy's name, and sometimes actual use of *Errors and Expectations*, by other researchers in their articles and books. Shaughnessy has come to represent a way of thinking about, and teaching, basic writers that goes beyond what she actually advocated in her own writing. Gunner reminds us that Shaughnessy advocated "formalistic instruction in syntax, punctuation, handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary," which are currently outdated modes of instruction for basic writing (28). Because of the degree to which Shaughnessy's ideas from *Errors and Expectations* have permeated the field—through formal scholarship and through informal word-of-mouth—of basic writing, practitioners and scholars may not even consciously realize that the way they think about basic writ-

ing is rooted in Shaughnessy's work. However outdated, *Errors and Expectations* remains the "originary point of reference for the Basic Writing field" (28).

Through the concept of lore, North describes how beliefs, iconic or otherwise, about basic writing instruction become part of common knowledge among practitioners. Lore is "the accumulated body of traditions, practices, and beliefs in terms of which Practitioners understand how writing is done, learned, and taught" (22). Beliefs enter lore by being "nominated"— through a casual comment by the copy machine—by a practitioner. These beliefs do not have to be substantiated by extensive classroom experience or by any careful study or research, although they may be grounded in research. They can be passing impressions, such as "my students seem to do best when I give them specific outlines for how they should write their essays," or fairly institutionalized practices, such as "we should correct our students' grammar errors with a contrasting colored pen." Much of the linear narrative of writing ability is transmitted via lore. Information and perspectives from research can also enter lore, but they are often reinterpreted and fragmented to such a degree that they fit in with the beliefs that already exist in the lore. Shaughnessy's advocacy of formalistic instruction from *Errors and Expectations* has certainly made its way into lore, but her later work, which complicates some of what she advocated in 1977, has not ("Selected Speeches and Essays"). Since there is no official, sanctioned, peer-reviewed means to regulate the creation of lore as knowledge, there is no institutionalized way to change it.

In fact, lore and iconic discourse resist challenge. Lore cannot be stopped. It is a natural, social part of teaching and can help to create a strong community among teachers. Also, since lore can reinterpret and integrate research findings into its own body of beliefs without disrupting the existing beliefs, it is difficult to change merely by increasing teachers' familiarity with contemporary basic writing research. Similarly, because iconic discourse within the field of basic writing is so strong, any research or opinion that challenges it is received harshly and somewhat defensively. Gunner examines how Min Zhan Lu and Ira Shor, as examples, have opened up the "iconic" Shaughnessy/basic writing institution to criticism. Both Lu's and Shor's *JBW* articles criticized the icon in different ways, and both met with strong, defensive responses from much of the basic writing community. This same defense of the icon may have motivated some of my colleagues to question and critique my teaching choices. The fact that I do not think basic writers need special, different treatment or that they cannot handle certain

types of assignments means that I implicitly challenge the iconic position. Certainly some faculty, many of whom have taught in our department for decades, perceive and internalize the iconic discourse that they hear from other faculty and from the institution. They do not even need to be familiar with Shaughnessy's work or other research that supports the iconic position; they simply have to be aware of the lore about what basic writers are like and how they learn.

## The BW Teacher's Role

A belief in the linear narrative of writing ability allows teachers of basic writing to feel certain that our courses are legitimately *necessary* for our students. If, and only if, there truly are basic writing skills that our students need to master before they would be able to do much more complex and difficult writing and thinking, then our position, as those who teach those basic skills, is vital. We have a meaningful and necessary role in the educational process. In fact, if we are truly teaching basic writers skills that they must have to be able to do college-level reading and writing, one could argue that our job is one of the most vital teaching roles within the university. From this perspective, "the Basic Writing teacher . . . occupies a position of honor. The teacher is constructed as a kind of hero" (Gunner 31).

Gunner defines four "rules of construction" of the teacher-figure according to iconic discourse, the first two of which help us more fully understand some of my colleagues' reactions to my teaching choices and their commitment to their own belief in the linear narrative of writing ability. Firstly, unlike most other faculty in universities, basic writing teachers' "primary credential . . . is individual commitment, a sense of mission to teach, initiate, inspire, and defend basic writers" (31). For the basic writing teacher, "knowledge is based in experience and agency in will," rather than being based in scholarly experience or knowledge of the field (31). Thus, many basic writing teachers who are not compositionists have little or no familiarity with scholarship in basic writing or, more generally, composition studies. This is not a problem in iconic discourse because "the teacher-figure works from individual feeling, inspiration, and creativity rather than socially-grounded scholarship," so lack of knowledge of scholarship is not seen as a weakness for a basic writing instructor (31). The qualifications for teachers of basic writing are dedication to teaching basic writers and some experience teaching them, or other students. Of course, a major practical reason that many faculty are hired without experience in teaching basic writers

and/or without scholarly knowledge of the field is simple: numbers. Community colleges must staff an enormous number of basic writing courses, and, unlike many universities, do not have a readily-available fleet of graduate students in Composition Studies, or at least English, to staff the courses. Program administrators interview widely when hiring part-time or full-time instructors, and sometimes hire people with little or limited teaching experience. Fortunately, iconic discourse assures them that the candidate's dedication to teaching and (perhaps limited) teaching experience will suffice. These faculty members' lack of familiarity with research in the field leaves them particularly vulnerable to lore about basic writers and teaching basic writing.

The second of Gunner's rules of construction addresses basic writing curricula. Because knowledge is based in individual experience, "curricula and pedagogies are to be self-made" (31). Unlike many university freshman and sophomore composition programs, which often follow relatively prescribed curricula, basic writing curricula are largely left up to individual instructors to invent. Having worked as an adjunct and full-timer at my college for years, I can attest to the validity of Gunner's observation. In my department, many different course descriptions exist for our various basic reading and writing courses, but instructors are given a great deal of latitude. Approaches, texts, and activities are recommended, but no actual curricula are distributed to teachers. Even if there were specific and directive curricula, although this might lead us to imagine that there was consensus on appropriate curriculum and pedagogy, in fact there would exist a wide variety of quite different versions of each course. Because faculty members are working from very different paradigms about basic writers and how they learn, the courses these faculty actually teach manifest their divergent beliefs. When we compound this self-reliance with Gunner's first rule, we realize that many teachers of basic writing courses are not grounding their own curricula and instruction in current basic writing scholarship; instead, they are basing their decisions on their sense of what basic writers need, which is largely informed by the linear narrative of writing ability. Furthermore, many teachers of basic writing use strictly current-traditional or grammar-based methods that basic writing scholarship challenged and revised years ago; however, the scope of basic writing programs coupled with the vast numbers of contingent faculty who staff them make it almost impossible to manage this clash of paradigms effectively.

**Breaking Down Walls**

Often these clashes in teaching style and philosophy remain tacit, or if consciously noticed, are considered too significant and deeply ingrained to work on resolving. We do our basic writing students a disservice by accepting paradigm clashes among faculty and not actively trying to break down, or at least scale, the walls between different belief systems. Although paradigm clashes will likely always exist to some degree in any large department, many steps can be taken to try to acknowledge, understand, and work towards resolving these differences. Assuming that many basic writing courses will continue to be taught by faculty who have not been formally trained as composition teachers and scholars, institutions could help increase teachers' familiarity with professional scholarship in basic writing. Taking into consideration North's warning that lore can withstand even scholarship that directly challenges its beliefs, it would be neither sufficient nor effective simply to distribute scholarship to teachers and expect it to have any effect on their thinking or practice. Instead, there should be department-sponsored opportunities for dialogue among faculty. Within the context of these dialogues, points of difference in philosophy and practice should be noticed and focused on. The goal of this type of dialogue would not simply be to instruct or inform teachers about scholarship, but rather to encourage teachers to think of themselves as a group of learners who are learning together through discussions of readings and practices.

Obviously, the primary obstacles to offering this type of faculty development are time and money— free time during which an already overworked faculty can participate, and money to organize the faculty development and to encourage participation. In my department, like many others, we try to do the best we can with limited resources. We offer some workshops and talks during each semester on topics in teaching composition, but attendance at these workshops is entirely voluntary. Not all faculty members are able to attend or choose to attend. If institutions could offer significant financial incentives to faculty to participate, or could require participation in a quantity of discussions, this would help encourage real dialogue. We also use norming sessions, in which faculty meet to come to consensus on how to evaluate sample student essays, to foster faculty development. During the work of "norming," we sometimes have the opportunity to discuss some elements of our practice or problems we are running into in our classes. While this is a good idea, it simply does not offer the

concentrated time and scholarly context necessary for conceptual issues in teaching to be seriously discussed.

If colleges do not have the resources to run the types of discussion groups described above, they could at least institute ongoing faculty discussions of research and practice in a less formal manner. Faculty could be invited to come together to discuss research in the field and aspects of their own practice that they are consciously working to improve. This kind of conversation would help departments begin to break down the walls created by paradigm clashes that exist among basic writing faculty. The iconic image of the basic writing teacher as a rugged individual whose teaching is based on lore and field experience is counter-productive to our work as a field. There is some irony to the fact that the majority of basic writing courses may be taught by faculty who are unfamiliar with basic writing scholarship. We must take steps to open dialogue among faculty with differing beliefs about teaching basic writing in order to build better community and improve our collective practice.

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