

TOWARD A POLITICAL ECONOMY OF BASIC WRITING

BY

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To the Faculty of Washington State University

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the dissertation of Wendy Olson find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Chair

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Abstract

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Chair: Victor Villanueva, Jr.

This dissertation attempts to complicate our field's understanding of basic writing and its historical relationship to composition and U.S. literacy formation. I argue for a political economy of basic writing, an analysis of our field's construction of basic writing in light of actual socio-cultural, material processes and formations of basic writing, remediation, and composition among and across higher education institutions over the course of the last century. In doing so, I suggest that basic writing scholarship has yet to substantially uncover and interpret multiple basic writing's narratives and their relations to the economic, to fully recognize basic writing as material practice with all that such a recognition connotes about basic writing's fluctuating position and presence in civil society. And unless we are able to recognize and articulate the cultural, historical formations of basic writing as they accord with the rise of capitalism—most specifically because of how capitalism has lately influenced literacy trends in the 20th-and 21st-century United States—our efforts to reform basic writing, even as we do so with the best interests of our students in mind, are necessarily thwarted. By viewing basic writing as a

political economy, we are able to see alternative narratives and provide a substantial means of change.

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Dedication

To David, who sustained me unconditionally throughout the process.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A broader view of literacy that sees it as contextualized, and sees context as economic at heart, may constitute the possibility for change as well as a means.

J. Elspeth Stuckey, *The Violence of Literacy*

1999. Elspeth speaks to me: where I have been, where I am, where I am going as a teacher of writing, one engaged in the enterprise of academic literacy.

Some snapshots:

New to teaching. As a TA, I assign personal narratives to my freshman composition class. My uniformly almost-twenty, mostly white students write about leaving home, about boyfriends/girlfriends, about snowboarding. Occasionally, there is a divorce or death to wrangle with. Overall, though, it's safe territory: white, middle-class discourse. There is just the one child molestation essay in two years, the student I lost. Though I'm still growing into my teaching skin, my university pedagogy more or less works. I don't have to walk the line of separating experience from skill. My students contain their narratives within the boundaries of what the university folks constitute as acceptable—perhaps vacuous but at least coherent—academic essays.

Freeway flyer. It's my first year as a CC adjunct. I teach at two community colleges, drive up and down I-5 twice a week. Just out of grad school, I feel lucky to have three classes for Winter Quarter. I enter my night class tired and hungry. We discuss a

short story from Sherman Alexie's The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.

"Why so much anger?" the white faces ask. I see the moment is ripe for me to move them into acknowledging their own privilege, a strategy I picked up at the university.

"Can you imagine what it's like," I ask them, "to go to the grocery store and be asked for your food stamps by the cashier *just* because of the color of your skin?" Silence encompasses our circle—but not for long. One young woman speaks, slowly, her eyes lowered: "I remember having food stamps when I was little," she says. "I always hated going to the store with mom." Another student, our requisite jokester, offers up his own story: "my sister's on food stamps right now. It's hard for her and her kids." Discussion ensues. My students recognize their own anger in Alexie's story, and I recognize my students.

Two years later. A permanent full-time position at a rural community college. I assign freewriting diagnostics on the first day of class to four basic writing classes. I sit at my desk near tears as I read. Reading through their first batch of essays, the narratives of my students' lives overwhelm me: stories of drug addiction and spousal abuse replace snowboarding and leaving home as common themes. One white woman writes about her crystal meth addiction and having her children taken away from her. A young woman writes about witnessing her best friend kill himself with a handgun. One of my favorite students, who self identifies as half native and half white, writes about coming to terms with prison life. A white veteran tells of his return from Vietnam, describes how lesions still cover his body. His long term memory is gone. Gone. Some are working class, many are working poor.

One Latina student, pursued by her abusive husband, doesn't turn in an essay, doesn't return to class. I visit the local woman's shelter looking for her, take their cards for the next time. More often than not, though, I do not act. I listen to my students, read their writing, play teacher. My university pedagogy breaks down. Again and again.

I begin to wonder, how do I separate experiences from skill? Content from form? And, furthermore, what are the implications of doing so?

Back in graduate school. I visit a tribal college in the Northwest. "It's wild," the newly full-time, white instructor tells me as we walk up the unfinished stairwell to her small office. "They call it 'Indian time': students come late to class all of the time—if they show up. Someone dies, and everyone's gone for a week." On Indian time, we visit the Archives Museum in town. We meander through the stacks of government documents with a cohort of students. Their family names, tribal names, are transcribed throughout the documents: birth and death certificates, deeds, newspaper clippings. BIA records. Their family stories are written and contained within the boundaries of other people's documents, recorded in white people time. As she speaks, the white librarian unconsciously addresses her words to the other white people in the room: the teachers. A polite white woman teacher, I smile back at her.

Some questions:

Nagging questions that guide: How do nice people abide by and maintain not nice things, like a system in which certain groups are consistently relegated to the

bottom of the structure in disproportionate numbers? How is ideology transmitted rhetorically? How can more oppressive ideologies be countered in the rhetorical enterprise, which includes the teaching of composition?

--Victor Villanueva, "Rhetoric is Politics"

I share these snapshots of my life as a teacher of writing, one who engages in the teaching of composition and literacy, for a number of reasons. First, I share these vivid experiences with and about my students to remind both myself and my readers that while most of what follows in my discussion of basic writing elides the day-to-day realities of the basic writing classroom and construction of student texts, it does so only in the service of informing and hopefully improving the experiences of basic writing students as culturally literate agents. That is, I move to interpret the historical and economic formation of basic writing in order to affect its current contexts and practices within classrooms.

Second, and nevertheless, I also share these experiences to emphasize that basic writing must be understood beyond the classroom and pedagogy. We need to recognize the ways in which basic writing is tied to literacy and society—but beyond the ways that our scholarship has, for the most part, up until this point professed. That is, we need to interrogate the relationship between basic writing and literacy crises, but we need to do so in a way that recognizes literacy crises are not simply political rhetoric that functions to maintain cultural, racial, and economic inequities. Rather, we also need to interrogate and articulate the ways in which literacy has evolved to function in capitalism and to

therefore explore how we can position literacy education in higher education to assist our students in negotiating these economic changes as they impact their daily lives.

Lastly, I share these reflections of myself as a teacher to illustrate how we as educators, even at our best moments and with our best intentions as “nice people,” are complicit in the maintenance of “not nice things,” namely the machinations of hegemonic literacy processes. And while the prospects of doing so are dreary and even potentially devastating, the acknowledgment is necessary if we are to truly affect hegemony.

For once we recognize our complicity within hegemony, we can affect it because while hegemony functions as common sense, our common sense, it can only do so effectively as a process, a rhetorical process, as Villanueva notes (*Bootstraps* 124). Thus in demystifying the rhetorical, such as our complicity in maintaining dominant literacy structures, such as basic writing (even as we are attempting to change for the better some aspect of them), there is finally the potential for genuine transformation. And at the very least, there is the struggle.

As Laura Gray-Rosendale observes in *Rethinking Basic Writing*, we have too long focused our energies on identifying and classifying what constitutes a basic writer. While Gray-Rosendale suggests that we turn our attention to examining what basic writers do in the classroom, I believe that we must also examine how our own roles as basic writing teachers are affected by larger cultural and economic forces. One important step in this direction is to reinterpret the history of basic writing in light of such forces.

Thus this dissertation attempts to complicate our field’s understanding of basic writing and its historical relationship to composition and U.S. literacy formation. I argue for a political economy of basic writing, an analysis of our field’s construction of basic

writing in light of actual socio-cultural, material processes and formations of basic writing, remediation, and composition among and across higher education institutions over the course of the last century. In doing so, I suggest that basic writing scholarship has yet to substantially uncover and interpret basic writing's relation to the economic, to fully recognize basic writing as material practice with all that such a recognition connotes about basic writing's fluctuating position and presence in civil society. And unless we are able to recognize and articulate the cultural, historical formation of basic writing as it accords with the rise of capitalism—most specifically because of how capitalism has lately influenced literacy trends in the 20th-and 21st-century United States—our efforts to reform basic writing, even as we do so with the best interests of our students in mind, are necessarily thwarted.

In chapter two, “Rhetorics of Basic Writing,” I examine dominant theories of basic writing in the field's journal, *Journal of Basic Writing*, through discourse analysis. This historical examination of the field's literature, albeit inevitably limited, reveals common recurring argumentative types of basic writing scholarship, types which I refer to as rhetorics of reform, rhetorics of abolition¹, and rhetorics of crisis. At the rhetorical level, rhetorics of reform and abolition appear to further very distinct positions about the state of basic writing, arguing for its legitimacy as well as the need to reform it or, contrastly, arguing against its legitimacy and the need to get rid of it in the latter case. At another level, however, rhetorics of abolition and reform both function hegemonically within the field as rhetorics of crisis, often effecting the appearance of debate and change while the actual material conditions of basic writing programs, classrooms, and

¹ I take these classifications, “reform” and “abolition,” from Robert Connors' “The Abolition Debate In Composition: A Short History.”

pedagogies are little affected. One reason for this disparity, I argue, is our field's assumptions about the origins of basic writing. When we insist on reading basic writing only as a distinct break from the history of remediation—that is, when we fail to read remediation and basic writing together as a re-emerging pattern within social-cultural material processes—we misinterpret basic writing.

In the next chapter, “Economies of Basic Writing,” I argue that in order to fully interpret and critique rhetorics of crisis in basic writing, rhetorics which function as the field's ideological common sense, we need to develop a political economy of basic writing that recuperates both the historical and the material conditions as formations of basic writing tied to larger cultural and economic formations, in particular literacy and capital, as they have shaped the development of higher education and academic literacy standards since the 1890s in the United States. In developing a theory of political economy, I draw from the work of Min-Zhan Lu, Bruce Horner, and Mary Soliday, material theorists who have articulated cultural and institutional economic critiques of the enterprise of basic writing, furthering their work to read such economies as also related to the rise of the knowledge economy in the 20th century. According to Deborah Brandt, literacy has come to function within the knowledge economy as capital, therefore, in my estimation, economies of basic writing must also attempt to interpret how literacy as an economy has shaped the cultural and historical formation of basic writing in higher education.

In chapter four and five I demonstrate how a political economy of basic writing might begin to interrogate rhetorics of basic writing by uncovering the history of basic writing and remediation at Washington State University, a land-grant research university

in the Northwest. In both chapters I construct the history at Washington State University in critical analysis to the history of basic writing and composition as we know it in our field. In chapter four, “The Basic Writing Question at Washington State University, 1967-2005,” I examine how basic writing at Washington State University evolved differently than how basic writing evolved at CUNY, the basic writing story we are most familiar with in the field and which, I argue, guides the field’s understanding of basic writing, also limiting it. In doing so, I consider how the local socio-economic and cultural conditions at Washington State University affected basic writing’s formation at the institution as much as, and perhaps more than, national conversations about basic writing. As such, I argue, basic writing needs to be read as hegemonic as well as counter hegemonic, that Shaughnessy’s basic writing project at CUNY during the 1960s and 1970s was not a unique historical break from the history of remediation but rather one example of academic literacy and remediation being remade within the hegemonic enterprise.

In the fifth chapter, “Remediation at Washington State University, 1892-1958,” I examine the evolution of remediation at Washington State University from the institution’s inception until the 1950s. In the first half of the chapter, I record the formation of remediation in the department of English as it develops from preparatory training at the University’s preparatory school in the early years, to a supplemental course provided after first-year composition, to a mandatory gatekeeping course prescribed before first-year composition, the course we are most familiar with in composition. In the second half of the chapter, I map the formation of the ‘skills and drills’ remedial writing course that we have come to loathe in our field, elaborating how it becomes a fixture in

the department of English during the World War years before it disappears altogether for approximately two decades. In doing so, I examine how economic changes merge with cultural fluctuations to shape the development of remedial writing at Washington State University, illustrating the cultural formation of the course as complex material processes at work. In other words, however remediation might have come to function in the Department of English at Washington State University during the years surrounding World War I and World War II, it developed from a confluence of socio-historical and economic processes, the kinds of processes that we, as a field, have yet to uncover and fully appreciate. And these processes reveal that in recuperating the relationship between basic writing and remediation, we might also recover counter-hegemonic moments within other basic writing histories from which to learn from.

Chapter five, “Rehistoricizing Basic Writing,” elaborates where a political economy of basic writing might continue. I outline three further political economy projects: a historical analysis of basic writing in two-year institutions, an recuperation of Fred Newton Scott’s pedagogy at University of Michigan during the early 1900s, and, an examination of the relationship between the Students’ Rights to their Own Language beginnings and basic writing pedagogy. In each case, I argue that we need to read basic writing as a political economy if we are to see alternative narratives and provide a substantial means of change.

CHAPTER TWO

RHETORICS OF BASIC WRITING

Open Admissions began as a remedial wing to a few departments on traditional college campuses, but it is now transforming the colleges themselves, exposing far more than the deficiencies of the new students. By probing into the nature of those deficiencies and resisting those who have tried to isolate the phenomenon of disadvantage from the society that caused it, Open Admissions is forcing the real question—not how many people society is willing to salvage, but how much this society is willing to pay to salvage itself.

--Mina Shaughnessy, “Open Admissions and the Disadvantaged Teacher”

Shaughnessy founded the *Journal of Basic Writing (JBW)* in 1975. The first and only journal to focus exclusively on scholarship concerning the practices, issues, and contentions—among other things—surrounding the teaching of basic writing, the journal’s creation was a response to the cry for academic standards that developed at CUNY after a policy of open admissions was adopted in 1969. Creating an academic journal that concerned itself with basic writing issues helped to legitimize the field, its teachers, and its students in the wake of both academic and social resistance. Since 1975, the journal has functioned as an academic forum where teachers and scholars of basic writing converse and debate pedagogy and best practices; assess the successes and failures of basic writing on both classroom and programmatic levels; and theorize the meaning, purposes, and limitations of basic writing within the socio-political world of

academia. In short, *JBW* provides an important forum that legitimates and justifies basic writing in academia.

As the dominant medium by which basic writing legitimates itself in academia, I argue, *JBW* serves as a useful tool for examining how basic writing, as a cultural construct, produces and reifies itself through rhetorics of basic writing. These rhetorics of basic writing assume Shaughnessy's coining of the term "basic writers," during open admissions at CUNY in the 1970s, as the birth of basic writing as a field. And, to an extent, it certainly is. However, by misreading and overvaluing this historical moment, I suggest, teachers and scholars subsequently end up undervaluing the ways in which other historical factors—historical rhetorics of literacy, rhetorics of identity, and political economies, to name a few—have impacted both the perceived evolution of the field and our reading of the field in relationship to civil society. That is, the shift from remediation to basic writing was, and continues to be, much more complex than our scholarship addresses. Consequently, I believe we are less prepared than we could be to meet the needs of the students in our classrooms.

In attempting an analysis of the rhetorics of basic writing, I was tempted to develop a historical taxonomy, something akin to what Joseph Harris does in his 1995 *JBW* article, "Negotiating the Contact Zone." As well as providing a potential model for taxonomy, Harris' article illustrates how social construction theory influences the field of basic writing and thus rhetorics of basic writing. In this article, Harris sketches three metaphors he identifies as having influenced the development of the field of basic writing: growth, initiation, and conflict. While pedagogies of growth and initiation focus on the student writer as the problem, pedagogies of conflict, or contact zone pedagogies,

pose students as working through a problem, the problem of negotiating competing discourses (31). Moving beyond growth pedagogies that downplay the differences basic writing students bring to the classroom and initiation pedagogies that overemphasize such differences, contact-zone pedagogies, according to Harris, create a space where the various discourses that students bring to the classroom can be authorized and mediated along side the academic discourses of the classroom rather than replaced by them. For Harris writing in 1995, the dominant metaphor that defines basic writing is conflict, a theoretical lens that highlights basic writing as a politically contested space and serves, in many ways, as a structural support for how rhetorics of basic writing operate politically within the field of basic writing.

Arguably, this conflict model dominates at the time Harris is writing not simply because it is perceived as the best pedagogical stance to date—that is, a model of pedagogy refined over time. Rather, this model dominates for what it reveals *about* pedagogy, about the teaching of writing. Contact-zone pedagogy only works, makes sense, if you accept the tenets of social construction. And what contact-zone pedagogy does for the larger field of composition is to highlight the politics of teaching writing.

The legacy of social construction in basic writing scholarship, then, is the recognition of the classroom as a political space. An important aspect of contemporary basic writing theory, therefore, is an attempt to unpack the identity of the student writer. In doing so, the emphasis in basic writing moves away from the deficiency of students and starts to interrogate the pedagogical practices and assumptions—the ideological baggage—of writing instructors/instruction. This shift is evidenced by Linda Brodkey in her 1989 article “On the Subjects of Class and Gender in ‘The Literacy Letters.’”

Brodkey calls on teachers of basic writing to “learn how to ‘read’ the various relationships between writer, reader, and reality that language and discourse supposedly produce” (125). In doing so, she points to the fact that as writing teachers we are, perhaps, experts at reading our students as discursive subjects but novices at reading ourselves as such.

Examining a set of “literacy letters” between ABE working-class women and middle-class English instructors, she explicates the ways in which teachers are “spoken by” educational and class-based discourses in interactions with students. The hegemonic processes of educational discourse, according to Brodkey, allow for well-meaning teachers, such as those in her study, such as ourselves, to see themselves as agents of social justice—that is, educators providing students with meaningful and fair educational opportunities—while their/our discursive practices actually reify educational hegemony. Consequently, this process alienates both students and teachers. Her essay, she explains, “is about the ways discourses construct our teaching” (126).

Brodkey’s reading of the literacy letters makes the politics of teaching explicit. By foregrounding the discursive practices of both students and teachers, Brodkey illustrates how antagonisms erupt between the institutionally-sanctioned discourse of her middle-class teachers, a discourse that speaks a class-free worldview, and the working class discourse of her ABE students, which asserts a class-based reality. The result: politically-infused, oppositional educational experiences. Unmasking the political, economic, racial, and social implications of basic writing as a track within composition, within education, various social constructionist critiques explode within basic writing scholarship during the 1990s after Brodkey’s analysis. Yet what is often lost in the

subsequent flurry of social constructionist critique is Brodkey's emphasis on the relationship between class and discourse, and how this relationship affects the teacher as much as the student. Consequently, her critique, which originally attempted to address the relationship between materiality and language is later reduced to language politics in basic writing discussions. And it is thus these politics of basic writing that infuse the rhetorical arches we see in *JBW* from its founding to the present.

Turning to investigate these rhetorical arches in *JBW*, I realized a historical arrangement of the rhetorics of basic writing would not work if I was to adequately capture the complexity of how such rhetorics form in the field. As Susan Miller explains in "Writing Theory : : Theory Writing," our turn toward the postmodern in composition studies has made us suspicious of grand narratives of theory; instead, we prefer the messiness of situated, localized, and often times conflicting theories (63). What results in our scholarship, then, is not a neat chronological evolution of theories but, rather, a web often times conflicting, simultaneously existing theories. Another consideration for analysis, as Kathleen Yancy reminds us, is that clean historical breaks just don't exist. They are constructed, more often than not, as a way of making sense of cultural processes. Instead, we get "waves" of theory, dominate theories that Yancy describes as "overlapping" and contesting one another at particular historical junctions. In order to best make sense of the complexity of basic writing and its rhetorics, then, I realized that such a mapping would need to address not only the "messiness" of the postmodern condition, but also its tendency to conflate the material with the rhetorical. Instead, I needed in a theoretical framework that exploited the gap between the ideological and the material in the history of basic writing.

Harris' model is a useful one for capturing a bird's eye view of basic writing. It outlines the historical trajectory of Shaughnessy's basic writing through the late twentieth century by capturing the dominant theoretical conversations in the field from open admissions to the nineteen nineties. His use of metaphors to describe the various stages of basic writing theory unpack the value-laden ideological assumptions behind each theoretical lens. What it does not do, however, is look at how these definitions of basic writing function rhetorically within the field of composition. By identifying and examining rhetorical patterns within basic writing scholarship, we are better positioned as a field to recuperate the full history of basic writing's cultural formation.

Consequently, I offer a taxonomy of type instead of a historical trajectory of basic writing rhetorics: rhetorics of reform, rhetorics of abolition, and rhetorics of crisis. In doing so, I hope to move toward an examination of how these various rhetorics of basic writing operate ideologically within the field, effecting a limited understanding of basic writing by disappearing its historical and material connections to a larger history of remediation practices in higher education and its relationship to societal literacy issues. I take these first two categories (rhetorics) from Robert Connors' "The Abolition Debate in Composition: A Short History." In this article, he identifies "reformism" and "abolitionism" as "alternating periods" in the history of composition in the U.S. (280). The third category encompasses the first two, and it is this category, rhetorics of crisis, that basic writing is mired in, I argue. Before turning to examples of such rhetorics and how they function within the field of basic writing, though, some necessary background is in order.

The field of basic writing, Trudy Smoke reminds us, developed out of the “political turmoil” of open admissions within the CUNY system of the early 1970s (88). It is a story we are familiar with in composition. Basic writing’s development as a field is marked by the social and political upheaval in the United States during the Vietnam War. Basic writing emerges as a pedagogy, developed out of a literacy crisis² that resulted from the expansion of higher education after the political activism of the 1960s in the United States. In his 1996 article, “Discoursing Basic Writing,” Bruce Horner explains the evolution of this expansion.

Horner argues that the dominant discourse of basic writing evolved in response to the larger public discourse debating higher education and open admissions, a discourse that “perpetuates the denial of the academy as part of the material, political, social, and historical worlds” (200). The rhetoric of open admissions, according to Horner, put forth that it could preserve academic excellence as well as accommodate the new, presumably unacademic, students—“ a different kind of student” (204). Mina Shaughnessy and other CUNY basic writing teachers develop their defense of basic writing and basic writing students, those folks subsequently permitted to enter the university because of open admissions, through the same particular rhetorical positioning, a positioning that “required that they contend, and shaped how they contended, with terms of the public discourse prevailing in debate on the educational rights and capacities of their students” (207). In other words, the rhetoric of basic writing pedagogy had to balance justifying the presence of these new students in the academy at the same time that it promised to preserve the hierarchy of academic standards. What resulted was an acculturative

² While many readers are, perhaps, most familiar with the 1975 article, “Why Johnny Can’t Write?” as the historical literacy crisis marker of this period, my reading of basic writing suggests that the formation of this literacy crisis must be read in conjunction with the formation of basic writing at CUNY.

molding of basic writing students into the academy, a shaping that brought basic writers into the university but also simultaneously defined them as others within its walls.

To illustrate this point, Horner charts how the discourse of basic writing evolves out of CUNY public editorials, institutional policy documents, English department memos, course surveys, etc. Through close discourse analysis, he shows how Shaughnessy's defense of basic writing strategically allowed, at least temporary, access for basic writers into academia, but in so doing the evolving discourse of basic writing also developed a particular way of seeing and reading basic writers: "Basic Writing discourse accepted the identification of basic writers as 'outsiders,' it characterized them as nonthreatening, apolitical, as beginners or foreigners seeking and able to join the American mainstream" (207-208). This lingering representation is well exemplified in Patricia Bizzell's 1986 article, "What Happens When Basic Writers Come to College." In this article, originally published in *College Composition and Communication*, then reprinted in *A Sourcebook for Basic Writers*, edited by Theresa Enos, Bizzell illustrates the evolving discourse that Horner critiques:

let me suggest that 'Basic writers' are those who are least prepared for college. They may be defined in absolute terms, by features of their writing, or in relative terms, by their placement in a given school's freshman composition sequence, but, either way, their salient characteristic is their 'outlandishness'—their appearance to many teachers and to themselves as the students who are most alien in the college community. (164)

The danger in these kinds of representations, according to Horner, is that such rhetorical maneuvering results in particular givens about the basic writer. He explains, "it thus

‘naturalized’ them both in a cognitive developmental and civic sense, locating them at a particular stage in a natural sequence of learning and attributing to them the aspiration to join with rather than disrupt mainstream American society” (208). This rhetorical positioning of basic writing carries over to and infuses *JBW*. It also contributed to a historical undervaluing of other writing pedagogies, such as demonstrated in the work of Geneva Smitherman and others through the *Students Right to Their Own Language* initiative that occurred around the same time as Shaughnessy’s basic writing experiment at CUNY (*Composition* 82), a point I will return to in more discussion in the final chapter, “Rehistoricizing Basic Writing.”

Rhetorics of Reform

Reformist efforts in composition, Connors reminds us, are abundant—and in basic writing we see no exception to this pattern. From its foundation, *JBW*, arguably, has functioned as a reformist text in the field of basic writing. According to Connors, reformist periods in composition function “as the thin red line protecting the very life of literacy” (280). As a pedagogy, Shaughnessy’s basic writing served as a “thin red line” of literacy by providing previously “unadmissible” students with the skills they would need to survive in the university while simultaneously quieting protests against educational inequality. That is, the premise of Shaughnessy’s reformist rhetoric relied upon her new pedagogy as an acculturative process, making sure that the new students rose to the level of academic literacy as it was defined by the university. The institutional standards and assumptions that spoke what constituted academy literacy by the university were never actually challenged within this discourse. Shaughnessy’s work and legacy are

therefore distinctly reformist measures because they argue for the improvement of basic writing as a necessary literacy threshold.

In the years following the founding of *JBW*, most of the articles in the journal have relied upon and expanded the reformist rhetoric that Shaughnessy and others employed during open admissions in the early 1970s. Throughout the eighties, articles published in *JBW* focused most heavily on the study of error and basic writing pedagogy. While the approaches to error and pedagogy during this period in some cases vary drastically, what all of the approaches have in common is an ethos that contributed to the legitimacy of basic writing as an academic field, and, in many cases, an underlying assumption that little questioned its acculturative stance.

And while reformist rhetoric has changed and adapted over the years, most significantly in response to the social turn previously mentioned, its underlying argument for the necessity and usefulness of basic writing remains unchanged. The most representative example of contemporary reformism in basic writing comes from the work of Laura Gray-Rosendale. Her reformist efforts illustrate what Connors calls “status-quo or modern reform”: critiques of basic writing are offered followed by suggestions for restructuring or rethinking the field. The reasoning behind such rhetoric critically assesses *how* such work gets done within the institution while the underlying assumptions of the arguments work to sanction the necessity of basic writing.

Gray-Rosendale is disillusioned by what she sees as an overemphasis on “identity politics” in basic writing scholarship, a tendency toward describing and categorizing basic writers rather than a process of figuring out what basic writers do—the dominant theme in basic writing throughout much of the 1990s. In her critique of basic writing, she

argues that while identity categories such as class, race, and gender are important, “examining them to the exclusion of other factors has also at times limited our understanding of Basic Writers” (13). Instead, she proposes that basic writing scholarship turn to an analytical model that “discloses the local, social construction of Basic Writers’ identities and knowledge productions in their everyday talk within our classrooms” (15). Rhetorically, then, Gray-Rosendale admits to problems with basic writing in the university, “identity politics,” but instead of moving to unpack the “why?” and “how?” of this problematic postmodern condition, she proposes a shift in focus for basic writing—a classic reformist move. Since 1996, four articles by Gray-Rosendale have appeared in *JBW* and she currently sits on the journal’s editorial board. It is not an overstatement to suggest that her work has significantly impacted the field recently.

The most politically charged reformist rhetoric since the beginning of the journal is the discussion that preceded the closing of open admissions at CUNY. In 2001 CUNY reneged on its 30-year-old open admissions policy by stopping open admissions at four of its colleges. In the years working up to this monumental policy change, debates surrounding the state of basic writing flourished in *JBW*. Former *JBW* editor, Karen Greenburg, perhaps best represents this reformist movement in her 1997 response to Ira Shor’s “Our Apartheid: Writing and Inequality.” In this article, Shor calls for the end of basic writing. Greenburg responds to Shor in the next *JBW* issue, chiding Shor for his generalizing and “demonizing” of basic writing programs (90). Speculating on how Shaughnessy might respond to Shor’s argument, Greenburg’s critique of Shor is at once logically, emotionally, and ethically charged. Her argument also illustrates another reformist rhetoric move identified by Connors, the praise or tribute. In responding to

Shor, she exposes what she reads as myths of basic writers and basic writing, in turn arguing for the uniqueness of basic writing programs and the dedication and pedagogical flexibility of basic writing teachers.

Other critics also responded to the CUNY crisis. Acknowledging that the history of basic writing is rooted in issues of racism, classism, and exclusion, Deborah Mutnick, Mary Soliday, and other reformists argue that teachers must also negotiate the very material conditions that circumscribe students' work with discourse and error. "To defend basic writing at present," Mutnick writes in a 2000 *JBW* article, "means contending both with the conservatives who condemn us for allowing underprepared students through the doors of higher education in the first place and those in our own discipline who want to abolish remedial instruction because it stereotypes students and segregates them from the mainstream" (71). The rhetorical implication here is that basic writing once again stands as the "thin red line" protecting both literacy and equality in the U.S. literacy practices.

As a rhetoric, rhetorics of reform within basic writing work to maintain basic writing as a unique pedagogy for academically marginalized students within higher education. They argue for a space for such students in higher education. At the same time, rhetorics of reform, in arguing for a particular kind of pedagogy for a particular kind of student, can also contribute to and maintain certain assumptions about student identities, abilities, and place. In doing so, they can effect a gap between how we perceive such students (our assumptions about them) and the realities of their lived experiences inside and outside of academia.

Furthermore, rhetorics of reform, in arguing for basic writing's uniqueness, make it difficult to see beyond academia in thinking about how to engage and resolve basic

writing issues and concerns. That is, rhetorics of reform often focus on alternative, and even innovative, pedagogical and programmatic changes in basic writing within academia. There is little discussion in rhetorics of reform, however, as to how basic writing concerns merge with economies of knowledge and the rise of mass literacy outside of academic walls as well.

Rhetorics of Abolition

Rhetorics of abolition that pick up in basic writing scholarship during the 1990s might well be attributed, at least in part, to Sharon Crowley. In her 1991 article “A Personal Essay on Freshman English,” Crowley proposes to abolish the universal requirement of composition in academia. Citing a slew of problems associated with the course—an inconsistent curriculum, unethical working conditions, its gatekeeping position within the university, a “remedial” categorization within English departments, to name a few—she argues against the discipline’s search for a universal solution to the problems of FYC: “we have to think hard about the wisdom of developing universal solutions for a set of problems that have been generated by the imposition of a universal requirement upon very different kinds of institutions” (169-170). She continues this argument in her 1995 article “Composition’s Ethic of Service, the Universal Requirement, and the Discourse of Student Need.”

In this piece, she charges that composition’s ethic of service allows for the perpetuation of the myth that students need the required course, institutionalizing what she calls a “discourse of student need” throughout higher education. This ideological stance, the unquestioned belief that “students need what we teach,” works to maintain

composition's low status in the institution while, ironically, it also attempts to professionalize the discipline, according to Crowley (232). Furthermore, the "needs" argument makes invisible the politics of composition's role in the academy: its preservation of classism, gatekeeping, and disciplinary hierarchies, as well as its suppression of an authorized space for students to voice their own needs (due to its presumed necessity) (236). Crowley concludes by arguing for the dismantling of the universal requirement of composition.

Crowley's argument, coined "New Abolitionism," picks up supporters across composition camps, such as Robert Connors, Charles Schuster, and Lil Brannon. Her arguments' influence on the field of basic writing, I believe, cannot be underestimated. Though he does not reference Crowley, David Bartholomae's 1993 *JBW* article, "The Tidy House: Writing in the American Curriculum" questions basic writing as a curriculum within the institutional structure of the university just two years later, posing questions about the field's legitimacy that, in many ways, echo some of Crowley's central concerns with first-year composition³.

Like Harris, Bartholomae is persuaded by Pratt's contact-zone pedagogy, and he uses it to raise the question of who is best served by the institutionalization of basic writing. An underlying tenet of contact-zone pedagogy is the questioning of assimilationist pedagogical tactics. Instead of working toward a "utopian" classroom, where differences among students are erased, Pratt argues, we should work towards creating "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (34). It is this utopian classroom model, an acculturalist model, that Bartholomae sees at the root of

³ It is important to note that though Bartholomae is cited here under rhetorics of reform, his earlier work is more concerned with basic writing reform.

basic writing, and he suggests that this utopian model perhaps serves the institution and the teachers more so than the students. He writes, “basic writers are produced by our desires to be liberal—to enforce a commonsense among our students by making the differences superficial, surface-level, and by designing a curriculum to both insure them and erase them in 14 weeks” (12). Comparable to Crowley’s argument against the universal requirement of composition, Bartholomae worries that basic writing does not necessarily offer the best solution to how writing instruction should be engaged in higher education.

While Bartholomae does not explicitly call for the abolition of basic writing, his article does pose many questions about the formation of the field. Reflecting on the state of the basic writing in academia, he writes:

Basic writing has begun to seem like something naturally, inevitably, transparently there in the curriculum, in the stories we tell ourselves about English in America. It was once a provisional, contested term, marking an uneasy accommodation between the institution and its desires and a student body that did not or would not fit. I think it should continue to mark an area of contest, of struggle, including a struggle against its stability and inevitability. (8)

A problem for Bartholomae is the way in which basic writing has come to function rhetorically in the field of composition, “naturally, inevitably, transparently there in the curriculum.” In his critique of this rhetoric, Bartholomae reminds us that writing courses are historical and institutional constructs that have not always existed in the university. This rhetorical move, according to Connors, is a consistent argument in abolitionist debates. A consistent strategy within critiques of composition over the last 100-plus years

is a reminder that composition began as a provisional solution to the problem of literacy until secondary education improved (Connors 281). Bartholomae uses a similar logic when he questions the “stability and inevitability” of basic writing at the current historical moment.

If Bartholomae’s “Tidy House” represents abolitionist questioning of the field of basic writing, Ira Shor’s “Our Apartheid: Writing and Inequality,” answers with a resolute call for the end of basic writing. As mentioned earlier, Shor’s controversial article drew heated debate from reformist camps during the latter 1990s. Shor, too, sees basic writing as educational and social acculturation. Rather than reading basic writing as the educational equalizer Shaughnessy imagined—an enterprise “to remedy the failure(s)” of educational institutions and society (Shaughnessy 107)—Shor argues that it has grown into an extended system of language control. Once the “egalitarian 1960s,” had passed, he writes, “BW emerged soon after as a new ‘identity,’ a new field of control to manage the time, thought, aspirations, composing, and credentials of the millions of non-elite students marching through the gates of academe” (93). He questions the motives of a institutional system that consistently relegates folks of color, the poor, working class, and women to the bottom of the educational system via their sorting into basic writing courses.

For Shor, basic writing provides one means to maintain the educational and economic status quo in our capitalist system. In what he labels as backlash against the social movements of the 1960’s, Shor argues that conservative campaigns for standards and a back-to-the-basics movement in the 1980’s co-opted basic writing. As Shor sees it, basic writing evolved into a containment track that professes to provide basic skills while

in reality it acts as a gatekeeper to maintain not only biased academic standards but also societal inequalities. Consequently, Shor argues to abolish basic writing.

These basic writing abolitionist arguments are different from previous abolition movements in composition history. According to Connors, most abolitionist arguments are based on the assertion that basic skills instruction is not the responsibility of the university, that students should acquire these skills before admittance to the university (287). Abolition rhetorics of basic writing differ distinctly from this claim. Bartholomae, Shor, and other abolitionists are not, arguably, university elitists concerned with maintaining the institutional status quo. The reasoning of their arguments, instead, actually questions the status quo of literacy instruction. Their major concern is that the institutionalization of basic writing, perhaps, does more harm than good for students required to take such courses. Their purpose in arguing for the abolition of basic writing is to advance education toward what they believe should be a democratic ideal for its students.

The latest manifestation of abolition rhetorics in basic writing can be found in mainstreaming debates in the field. Mainstreaming, in short, is a programmatic change that folds basic writing instruction back into traditional composition classes, thus abolishing the need for separate basic writing sections of composition. The mainstreaming debate surfaces in *JBW* around the same time that CUNY announced the end of open admissions in the late 1990s. This debate is distinct from the previous abolitionist rhetorics mentioned in that rhetorics of mainstreaming include a focus on basic writing at the programmatic level, an emphasis on assessment of basic writing

programs, and the tendency to stress the institutional uniqueness of basic writing programs across institutions.

A foundational *JBW* article in mainstreaming includes “From Remediation to Enrichment: Evaluating a Mainstreaming Project” by Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason. In this 1997 article, the authors describe and assess a mainstreaming project that they were able to pilot at CUNY with support from a FIPSE grant. Mainstreaming’s persistence in the field is, perhaps, best illustrated in *Mainstreaming Basic Writers: Politics and Pedagogies of Access*, edited by Gerri McNenny and Sallyann H. Fitzgerald, a collection of essays that engages the question of mainstreaming across a spectrum of institutions wrangling with basic writing policy and program changes at the turn of the century. While mainstreaming functions to abolish basic writing programs, it does so hesitantly. Rhetorically, mainstreaming functions as a last resort to preserve basic writing pedagogy within a reduced curricular space.

In addressing the constraints of basic writing programs within academia, such as reduced funding and institutional support, rhetorics of abolition often address the materiality of basic writing in ways that rhetorics of reform do not. Rhetorics of abolition recognize the institutional nature of basic writing as an economy more so, I’d argue, than rhetoric of reform—an economy of institutional need, as Bartholomae’s critique suggests, or an economy of educational downsizing, as many mainstreaming arguments contend. Yet in their materialist critiques, rhetorics of abolition fall short in two significant ways. First, while critiques of basic writing in abolitionist rhetoric move beyond the classroom and into program and institutional conversations about basic writing, they are still often limited, as with rhetorics of reform, to critiques within academia. Second, as illustrated in

Shor's rhetoric, even when conversations about basic writing move beyond academia and engage with the civil society, there is a tendency in abolitionist rhetoric to focus on how basic writing functions as a system rather than a move to investigate its historical, cultural formation as a process. That is, abolitionist rhetoric might argue that basic writing functions as an educational gatekeeper in society, but there is no discussion as to how this happened in relation to economic, historical forces. Therefore, an understanding of basic writing as a process of the formation of literacy as an economy is hindered.

Rhetorics of Crisis

Unlike earlier reformist and abolitionist movements in composition, the reformist and abolitionist movements in basic writing are not as ideologically distant from one another as their rhetorics suggest. That is, a distinct character—and rhetoric—of the earlier reformist movements in composition centered on student need while abolitionist arguments, decidedly, did not. Abolitionist movements argued against composition for reasons of standards (elitism), workload issues (exploitation), self-protection (the preservation of literary courses), and romantic ideals about the nature of writing (arguing, essentially, that writing cannot be taught), but the movements never argued against composition because they believed it failed student's needs⁴. To be precise, it is fair to say that earlier abolitionist movements did not concern themselves with students' needs at all; their focus, rather, was on the needs of the institution and/or its faculty. Reformist and abolitionist movements within basic writing, however, agree that the problem of basic writing rests on the hinge of what basic writing students need and deserve of a

⁴ Excluding Crowley's recent *New Abolition*, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

literacy education at the college and university level. This emphasis on student need is manifest rhetorically through rhetorics of crisis.

A structure of feeling, Raymond Williams writes, is “the continuity of experience from a particular work, through its particular form, to its recognition as a general form, and the relation of this general form to a period” (“Drama” 9). To tap into the structure of feeling of a work is to become privy to the underlying historical processes that contributed to its ideological formation. For Williams such an analytical model is necessary for any full understanding of the “practical problem” between “intellectual work” and “societal practice” (“Uses” 20). Though Williams speaks about literature in the above passage, his meaning fittingly applies to other cultural texts, such as *JBW*. The “continuity of experience” that is threaded throughout *JBW*—through its articles and through its editors’ columns over the years—is an outlook of uncertainty and instability, a continuing anxiety that worries over the purpose and fate of basic writing. That is, though the institution of basic writing does not appear to be going anywhere in the near future⁵, the rhetoric of basic writing, through the language of crisis, purports otherwise.

The structure of feeling that marks basic writing as recorded in *JBW*, I suggest, is a rhetoric of crisis. Founded during the 1970s open admissions’ literacy crisis, basic writing scholarship continues to rely on the originating theme of crisis, whether manifest through rhetorics of reformism or abolition. Arguably, then, both rhetorics are, however distinct they appear to be on the surface, rhetorics of crisis. Rhetorics of crisis within reformism vary, but the underlying element of crisis centers on the consequences for students if basic writing programs are eliminated. For abolitionism, the element of crisis

⁵ I do not mean to suggest that there are not real problems that basic writing programs are faced with daily. My point here is only that basic writing programs are quite institutionalized within educational systems.

rests on the consequences of a gate-keeping function if basic writing programs continue. If basic writing is to truly assist its students in the academic enterprise, its theoretical and pedagogical emphases need to move beyond such limited rhetorical constructs.

Basic writing theory and scholarship serves as the place where we create, circulate, and transmit what we value as a community. It is, in many respects, where the ideological formation of the field occurs. Based on the analysis above, basic writing reads itself as an emergent field, the point of crisis that formed it understood to be the collective years between the 1969 open admissions policy at CUNY and the 1975 founding of *JBW*. And yet rhetorics of crises that permeate *JBW* simultaneously legitimize and call into question the legitimacy of basic writing as a field, forming a common sense that produces the illusion of cultural change along the continuum of debates among abolition and reform wherein, in actuality, larger systemic structures are little altered.

Toward a Political Economy

Common sense, for Gramsci, is how ideology works in the cultural sphere, in civil society. It is “a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and of his world,” according to Williams (“Base and Superstructure” 459). These common sense notions create and transmit meaning throughout civil society; we buy into them because we believe that such common sense notions evolve out of our own historical constructs, that they are a result of our acting on the world. And, to an extent, they are. Certainly, the way common sense works to serve the dominant hegemony is complex. As Williams notes, it works

effectively because it allows for contradictions. Ideology doesn't work as a single dominating force, though it is a totalizing structure (458). *JBW* serves as a cultural text, a body of texts, that produces and maintains the common sense of crisis within the field of basic writing because it appears to resolve just contradictions through discourse.

One very specific way in which this happens, I argue, is in the lack of a full historical understanding of the cultural formation of basic writing. The basic belief that basic writing as a field formed out of the 1970s open admissions literacy crisis at CUNY both accepts and scripts basic writing as a field in perpetual crisis, a script that reproduces itself every time a *JBW* editor or author evokes Shaughnessy and/or her pedagogy as foundational. This lack of historical understanding occurs for a number of reasons but one predominate reason is because basic writing has divorced itself entirely from its remedial roots. What if, however, we can recuperate some of the social material processes that connect basic writing and remediation historically? What if, for example, basic writing *pedagogy* has a much longer history—that it is, in fact, a residual cultural process rather than an emergent one?

By limiting and misreading the cultural formation of basic writing, we do a disservice to ourselves and, more importantly, to our students. In arguing for a political economy of basic writing, I argue for further investigation into the structure of feeling of crisis that pervades the field. In doing so, I hope to uncover the relationship between capitalism and literacy expectations in the U.S. and how such relationships impact the development of basic writing as a field within higher education.

A framework of political economy is a necessary part of a fuller analysis of basic writing because it allows for a materialist approach to the field. Political economy

assumes a material relationship between economics and aspects of culture, in this case cultural notions of literacy. As such, it provides a framework for mediating and interpreting the relationship between ideologies of literacy in accordance with the rise of capitalism, allowing for a cultural materialist analysis of the evolution of basic writing. In order to fully explore the intertwined politics of basic writing and economics, however, such an analysis must also engage in historical materialism. If, as Karl Polanyi argues, economy is “embedded” among “politics, religion, and social relations” (xxiv)—a premise that under girds this examination—a historical mapping of basic writing as a production of the social sphere of education is a necessary part of developing a political economy of basic writing.

A political economy of basic writing moves beyond a free-forming cultural theory analysis because it affords a critical framework and discourse for interrogating and making visible the contradictions that emerge from social theories that do not take into account the material affects of economy on the social, political, and historical. A political economy of basic writing, then, must articulate the historical formation of basic writing as a discourse within the cultural apparatus of education, look to it as a product of civil society, and mediate the relationship between the ideological formation of the field and its material, structural base. In doing so, such an analysis would examine the hegemonic contradictions among various cultural loci—the constructions of basic writers and basic writing, social and economic policies, and rhetorics of literacy and capitalism—in order to unpack both causes and effects in the historical formation of basic writing. In the next chapter, I explore how such a political economy of basic writing might be theorized.

CHAPTER THREE

ECONOMIES OF BASIC WRITING

The role of rhetoric, according to Burke, is the demystification of the ideological.

The role of political economy is the demystification of relations tied to the economic. If we are to understand where we are and what is happening to us—and maybe even to affect it—we need the tools provided by both.

--Victor Villanueva, "Toward a Political Economy of Rhetoric"

A political economy of rhetoric, according to Villanueva, provides an avenue for investigating the relationship between the rhetorical and the material in our lives, a way to both recognize and unveil potential gaps between what we know through language (the rhetorical, the ideological) and the reality of our day-to-day living as material beings caught up in an economic web of existence. Such a view of economics, it is important to point out, does not reduce human existence to merely the economic, does not, in other words, return conversations concerning materialism to a simplified economic determinism, to a simplified cause/effect relationship among the base and superstructure, in Marxist terms. What it does do, however, is recuperate cultural materialist conversations from the slippery slope of postmodernism. That is, in arguing for a political economy of rhetoric, Villanueva recognizes the complexity of the cultural sphere, yet he also makes explicit the need to *not* divorce it from material conditions.

Thus in developing a rhetoric of political economy, Villanueva implies that our current conversations about the cultural are necessarily limited and, contrary to scholarly professions across disciplines that such work exposes ideological constructs, he suggests that such work does, in fact, more often than not maintain ideological mystification: “We cannot discuss the ideological and thereby the rhetorical reproduction of beliefs about gender, race, class, age, nation, religion, or any other of the axes of difference—without a grasp of how such axes are embroiled in the economic. In short, rhetoric is tied to political economy, if the work of rhetoric is the demystification of the ideological” (“Toward” 64).

Villanueva’s theory of a political economy of rhetoric has vast implications for the work we do in basic writing. As touched on in the previous chapter, contemporary scholarship of basic writing functions as an *ideological* common sense within the field. Furthermore, the rhetorics of crisis outlined, vacillating between reformist and abolitionist, also function ideologically. That is, the structure of feeling, the “continuity of experience,” that runs through basic writing—though a common theme within this structure of feeling is at times economically motivated—is also a rhetorical manifestation of our reading of basic writing as a cultural construct. It is, in short, a rhetorically constructed myth that sustains a limited understanding of basic writing. It preserves what Mary Soliday calls the “always newness” of basic writers, thereby impeding any extended historical analysis of basic writing’s relationship to economic ebb and flow. Consequently, the “common sense” of basic writing needs to be dismantled if we are ever to affect any kind of change that moves beyond the cosmetic. In order to develop sustained, counter-hegemonic work in the enterprise of basic writing, we need to,

as Villanueva directs, examine how the cultural politics of basic writing are “embroiled in the economic.” Gramsci’s theory of hegemony provides one avenue for maneuvering such work.

Scholarly conversations over the last fifteen years or so have moved to better address issues of materiality within the field of basic writing. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Shor’s critique of basic writing worries over its very real gate-keeping function and its economic effects on students’ livelihoods. Horner and Lu collectively assess the material influences and consequences of Shaughnessy’s basic writing. Horner’s analysis of CUNY documents asks us to reconsider our understanding of Shaughnessy’s legacy as a pioneer in light of the ways in which it has affected the material realities of basic writing as an institutional mechanism, while Lu critiques Shaughnessy’s pedagogy as an acculturating, assimilating agent. Gray-Rosendale argues for a microlevel analysis of student’s identity that addresses materiality as student performance within the classroom. Most recently, Mary Soliday argues the need for a historical analysis of basic writing that addresses the ways in which the material realities of institutional needs effect the various forms remediation, such as basic writing, take on in the academy. Each of these approaches, however, offers a too limited view of the relationship between the economic and the ideological in the enterprise of basic writing in that they continue to operate within the ideological realm of basic writing as crisis. What is needed, in addition, is an understanding of how basic writing functions in broader terms. A political economy of basic writing that works to uncover the dialectical relationship between the rhetorical and the material as manifest in social material practice better moves us in this direction. In developing a comprehensive political economy of

basic writing, the following draws on the already established work in the field of composition, then turns to Deborah Brandt's work in literacy studies.

Cultural Economies

The foundation for developing a political economy of basic writing from within the field is best demonstrated through the work of Horner and Lu. In *Representing the 'Other': Basic Writers and the Teaching of Basic Writing* they examine basic writing from a cultural materialist lens. In their reading, which they describe as concerning “discursive practices in basic writing, foregrounding the specific sociopolitical and intellectual contexts of both the production and reception of a discourse dominating the field” (xi), the authors emphasize how particular material and historical conditions contribute to the construct of basic writing as we know it today. That is, they attempt to deconstruct assumptions of basic writing and basic writers as “natural” by mapping the ways in which various discourses emerge historically to create basic writing as a particular field and basic writers as a particular kind of student. Such analysis is important because it points to the constructed nature of basic writing, opening up a space for a political economy of basic writing to recuperate other basic writing histories.

For example, Horner's “The ‘Birth’ of Basic Writing”⁶ as mentioned earlier, examines how competing public discourses debating the policy of open admissions and the role of higher education in New York during the late 1960s through the early 1970s shaped the discourse of basic writing that evolved out of CUNY in distinct and selective ways. In particular, Horner comments on how this shaping contributed to a view of basic

⁶ This essay is an expanded version of “Discoursing Basic Writing,” originally published in *College Composition and Communication*, 1996.

writers as both activist and minority students, even though the majority of open admissions students constituted working-class whites (8). Equally problematic for Horner, is the way in which basic writing developed ideologically as a means to resolve the conflict over the purpose of higher education during this historical period. In developing their defense and rationalization for basic writing, Shaughnessy and her colleagues had to contend with the above mentioned representations of open admission students as outsiders—both in the public’s and institution’s eye—while also assuaging fears (again, both public and institutional) that the institutionalization of basic writing within the university would not adversely affect university standards regarding academic excellence (14-15). The result, according to Horner, was a discourse on basic writing that maintained rather than challenged the educational status quo.

In “Conflict and Struggle,” Lu examines Mina Shaughnessy’s legacy within the field of basic writing, uncovering how conflict and struggle as educational processes are suppressed while education as “acculturation” and “accommodation” is ideologically embedded in basic writing discourse (32). Such work, she argues, misrepresents language as “essentialist” and “utopian,” ignoring the ongoing dissonance that occurs for students moving among discourse communities (55). Instead, she argues, basic writers should be allowed to experience such conflicts in order to be able to etch out the discursive resistances that speak to and validate their experiences as borderland subjects. This work is further refined in “Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence,” where Lu uses Shaughnessy’s *Errors and Expectations* as a means to investigate how essentialist views of language can contribute to a pedagogy

that assumes language is transparent, thereby ignoring the material practice of language as struggle and meaning-making.

In their analyses, Horner and Lu identify five assumptions that undergird their cultural materialist readings of basic writing: the view of discourse as material practice, a theory of multiple subjecthood, the assertion of education as a political and socio-economic structure and construction, the notion of hegemony as a transformational possibility, and a belief that human agency is always limited by material constraints (xiii-xiv). These assumptions provide a theoretical baseline for examining the ideological construction of basic writing and its relationship to economic and material realities. By revealing the institutional pressures that contributed to the formation of basic writing at CUNY, Horner and Lu make vital connections between how basic writing policies and pedagogies are complexly yet directly related to civil society and therefore necessarily not value-free. By reading the enterprise of basic writing and its effects on basic writers through this cultural studies lens, Horner and Lu succeed in “relocate[ing] writing and the teaching of writing in society and history” (xiv). One important consequence implied by their collective work, therefore, is the recuperation of an institutionalized legacy of basic writing prior to Shaughnessy, a legacy mired in the social and the political. From here, a political economy of basic writing can further evolve to include an analysis of wider cultural, historical, political, and economic processes that have impacted basic writing in critical ways.

While the work of Horner and Lu is phenomenally important and foundationally essential for a political economy of basic writing, it is also necessarily limited by the nascent nature of their particular theoretical lens within the field. In particular,

foregrounding discourse as a material practice limits their discussion of the material in other key ways. This move limits discussion of how non-discursive practices—such as budget cuts and economic recessions, for example—also impact the formation of basic writing and its representation of basic writers. Thus, their emphasis on student identity and representation as a starting point for analysis at least partially implies that language in and of itself can affect materiality in significant ways.

That is to say, their privileging of discourse de-emphasizes any cause/effect relationship between materiality (cause) and the rhetorical (effect) by emphasizing the cause/effect relationship between the rhetorical (cause) and materiality (effect). As Soliday observes, Lu's work suggests a presumption that "if our ideas about language change and individual consciousness shift, then the politics of basic skills are also altered. One assumption here is that ideas drive the bureaucratic machinery of institutions" (*Politics* 83). Certainly, as Lu and Horner's work makes explicit, the rhetorical, as a way of knowing, needs to be questioned and interrogated. Yet a comprehensive political economy of basic writing must address the complex cause and effect relationships among both the rhetorical and the material, taking into account the dialectic relationship among them, an analysis that Horner and Lu's work in this collection does not quite reach in their cultural materialist critiques. Nonetheless, the work of Horner and Lu makes significant progress in the development of a theory of basic writing that interrogates the rhetorics of crisis that pervade the field.

Institutional Economies

Mary Soliday's recent work, *The Politics of Remediation: Institutional Needs in Higher Education*, is also an important contribution to political economies of basic writing. In this timely text that situates basic writing within the history of remediation, she argues that the history of writing remediation, the beginning of which she traces to over 100 years ago, must be read in light of the institutional needs it performs within the academy. Similar to Shor, she critiques basic writing's use as an "economic base" (7) in academia while it perpetuates a reliance on remediation through traditional, common sense notions that assume that "remediation exists only because students need to be remediated" (22). This ahistorical assumption, of course, assumes that while students' skill levels might ebb and flow across decades and demographics, a certain universal standard exists to be met by students while the institutional conditions and expectations remain the same.

A historical analysis of remediation within educational institutions, however, provides a lens for reading the inherent biases in such an *a priori* assumption, also revealing how literacy standards within academia are historically and politically constructed within particular institutions to meet particular needs at particular historical moments. While Horner and Lu interrogate the presumed "naturalness" of basic writing and basic writers, then, Soliday extends this conversation to investigate the "always-new remedial student" (10) alongside a history of remedial programs that adapt to a variety of institutional needs across time, such as enrollment increases and decreases, more often than to actual student needs.

It is important to note that in continuing materialist critiques, Soliday splits from the political economy work established by Horner and Lu in two distinct ways. First,

unlike Horner and Lu who read Shaughnessy's basic writing legacy as historically and culturally problematic at best, Soliday argues for its innovative approach, marking it as a turning point in the history of remediation, thus reaffirming its iconic status. In her historical analysis of remediation, Soliday reads Shaughnessy's basic writing as a "distinct break" (70) from the traditional roles remediation had played in the academy:

The policy *was* unique because it attempted to institutionalize remedial education systematically rather than as a set of ad hoc practices. More important, the policy attempted to change students rather than the university—the focus of much critique of the policy and Shaughnessy—because the original aim was to provide a traditional education for nontraditional students. (original emphasis, 70-71)

According to Soliday, Shaughnessy's pedagogy and program resisted the legislative push to tier New York's higher education offerings, a push modeled after the three-tiered California model. Instead of foremost accommodating the institutional needs of higher education, specifically the commitment to provide access while also maintaining selectivity through a stratified system, Shaughnessy's basic writing policy "constituted a radical challenge to the standardized means of managing the crises of growth and the demand for more access in the '60s," according to Soliday (72). Yet a political economy of basic writing needs to re-examine this uniqueness in light of historical patterns of remediation.

Second, as alluded to above, Soliday argues for a reading of basic writing that distinguishes between politics of access and politics of representation. For Soliday, a distinction between politics of access and politics of representation is necessary because each politic approaches basic writing from distinct positions. Politics of representation

foreground student identity and the politics of student language use within basic writing programs while politics of access are more concerned with the internal and exterior barriers that work to limit or widen student access to higher education beyond the classroom level (13). This distinction is, in fact, a primary reason for her support and rehistoricizing of Shaughnessy's work as an administrator who worked to widen access across the college. Though the pulse of basic writing scholarship has lately privileged politics of representation (in particular the work of Lu and Horner), Soliday argues that such an approach is not necessarily more progressive than a politics of access:

While I embrace the view that a critique of knowledge is central to educational reform, I also take issue with multicultural perspectives that tend to assume that curriculum changes will challenge the academy's selective functions. To work against the discourse of student needs as that has defined our enterprise, we cannot afford to conflate two perspectives or to neglect one in favor of the other.
(19)

She reminds us that politics of access are as important as politics of representation in the enterprise of basic writing because the realities of institutional policies can promote or inhibit democratic access to education regardless of how language and student identity are addressed through curriculum and classroom pedagogy.

Soliday's most important contribution to a political economy of basic writing is the way in which she furthers the historical trajectory of basic writing by situating it within a political and economic history of remediation in academia. While the understanding that the first writing course offered at Harvard in 1875 was, in many ways, a kind of remediation is not new to our field, Soliday uncovers a variety of remedial

programs and practices that stretch back through the history of the modern academy in America. Marking five distinct institutional crises, she describes how one form or another of remediation was used internally and/or externally to stabilize institutional change, such as the drawing of boundaries between educational tiers or the move to literary specializations in English departments. While I will discuss these kinds of institutional needs and remediation programs in more detail in the next chapters, at this point it is important to emphasize that Soliday's analysis exposes a historical legacy of basic writing that has, more or less, been made invisible through the discourse of basic writing that Horner traces back to CUNY and Shaughnessy. Yet unfortunately, Soliday reinforces a privileging of Shaughnessy's legacy when she argues for its uniqueness among this history.

Soliday writes basic writing into the historical script of remediation at the same time that she argues for its distinction as a version of remediation that challenges the institutional uses of remediation. What allows for and validates this move is the limited scope of her material analysis. In focusing her analysis on institutional needs, she neglects the impact other cultural and economic forces have historically had on higher education at the same time. Namely, she contributes changes in remediation to institutional forces, but she does not go on to explore how changes outside of educational institutions—changes in market economies, for example—shape and effect the kinds of institutional needs that develop within higher education. As such, she positions basic writing as the pinnacle of a democratic remediation program because, as she emphasizes, basic writing challenged institutional pressures to segregate education opportunities

rather than furthering the sectioning of basic skills as had the history of remediation up until this point.

In short, Soliday reads basic writing as a transformative moment in the history of remediation while a broader analysis of how remediation and basic writing are tied to larger economic modes of development and literacy crises in civil society might reveal basic writing as conjectural rather than revolutionary within a contemporary hegemonic web. That is, we need to read Shaughnessy's basic writing within and across a range of hegemonic processes if we are to truly understand the depth of its cultural force and impact on student lives. In order to do so, we need to understand how basic writing also functions as a literacy technology in a new, techno-informational paradigm within a capitalist world order that constantly remakes itself.

The Knowledge Economy

Recent work by Deborah Brandt concerns the rise of mass literacy in the U.S. and what she sees as its impact on the workplace. In "Writing for a Living: Literacy and the Knowledge Economy," Brandt argues that writing and textual production have become "hot property," (167), literacy skills that fuel a new economy that takes knowledge as its means of production. The knowledge economy, according to Brandt is "wealth created by generating and leveraging knowledge," where information is traded and the skills to create knowledge are a commodity to be marketed (167). As forms of knowledge, literacies act as both the vehicles by which knowledge gets created and traded as well as the packaging for production. The rise of literacy as an economy, Brandt argues, offers the potential for both transformation and exploitation in the lives of individuals.

While Brandt explores the effects of this literacy transformation on the workplace, I am interested in how her discussion of writing and literacy as part of the knowledge economy⁷ might reshape our understanding of basic writing as a field, as a curriculum, as a literacy within academe. As a site where academic literacy is produced and regulated—more so, I’d argue than first-year composition—basic writing serves as a particular kind of literacy that contributes to the new economy of knowledge in a particular way. That is, in functioning as a literacy commodity within the university, basic writing is presumed to supply the knowledge economy with an end product, academic literacy skills (and/or academic writers) and in doing so it works to maintain the social capital of academia within this new literacy/knowledge market. Therefore, it is important for us as educators, as “literacy brokers”⁸, to ask the following: what role does basic writing play as an economic literacy in the transformation and/or exploitation of its students?

Literacy sponsors, as Brandt describes in earlier work, are “any agents, local or distant, abstract or concrete, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (“Sponsors” 166). In other words, literacy sponsors act as literacy conduits, distributing and channeling the particular forms of literacy throughout society that best support their political and economic interests. And while literacy has always been tied to the social and political—that is, cultural transmission—what has changed, according to Brandt, is the unprecedented expansion of mass literacy as a social capital and its role as a new economy to be consumed and marketed for profit. “By the early decades of the twentieth century,” Brandt writes, “literacy was already changing, as the skills of reading and

⁷ In fact, Brandt asserts that “writing is at the heart of the knowledge economy” (Writing 166).

⁸ In “Sponsors of Literacy,” Brandt suggests that we, as writing teachers, are “conflicted brokers between literacy’s buyers and sellers” (183).

writing were becoming more deeply implicated in the engines of economic productivity” (“Changing” 248). Whereas past literacies tended to preserve and adapt cultural traditions in light of economic change, in the economic environment of the 20th century literacy is a form of capital that effects economic formation.

Brandt’s concept of literacy sponsors is a useful tool for reminding us that literacy is neither natural nor value-free and that literacy skills are never neutral. That is, literacy is always ideologically embedded and, moreover, it is a technology always used by someone or something for some purpose. Furthermore, her analysis makes explicit the relationship between literacy and economics, offering a useful analogy for beginning to uncover how literacy operates in civil society. And while I believe the process she describes by which literacy transmission takes place via literacy sponsors needs further unpacking—needs, for example, to attend to the dialogic nature of such a process and what that implies concerning *how* literacy gets transformed in such transactions—her framework for how literacy sponsorship works affords a viable lens for exploring basic writing as one such site of the economy of literacy.

In her explanation of literacy sponsorship, Brandt outlines three trends or potential outcomes in literacy sponsorship: 1) the stratification of literacy opportunities, 2) the rise in literacy standards which can ignite so-called “literacy crises,” and 3) the appropriation or reconfiguring of literacy for personal means by folks sponsored by literacies. These potential outcomes result from what Brandt describes as “the jockeying and skirmishing for economic and political advantage going on among sponsors of literacy” (“Sponsors” 169). In other words, competition among literacy sponsors to exploit literacy for their own economic and political means determines such processes as

how individuals experience literacy, how literacy becomes capital within the knowledge economy, and how the value of particular kinds of literacy rise and fall in this market.

We can see, simply enough, how rhetorics of basic writing might read basic writing programs as implicated in each of these potential outcomes of literacy sponsorship. One such reading might go something like this: the rationale for basic writing programs and pedagogy rose out of a “literacy crisis” in the early 1970s. A consequence of this institutionalization of basic writing included a stratification of literacy access: in order to gain access to the ubiquitously mandatory freshman composition—completion of which is itself a prerequisite to many other specialized academic literacies—the student placed into basic writing now had another literacy layer (more minute, more confining) to conquer before admission into even the bottom rung of university literacy that is first-year composition. The ladder for the basic writer, that is, started in the basement rather than the first floor.

And at the same time, a central rationale for basic writing, then and now, speaks to its potential as a transformative literacy space—Brandt’s third option—a place where students might procure and use academic literacy skills for their own personal development. Many rhetorics of reform rely on this assumption. That is, a common thread in basic writing pedagogy celebrates basic writing as a forum for students to take on and use the literacy of the university for self and social transformation. This phenomenon is perhaps best lately exemplified in basic writings’ embracement of Freirian critical pedagogy, where the literacy sponsorship of the university, a sponsorship that works to control and standardize literacy levels within the university, is “reappropriated” (to use Brandt’s terminology) by students and teachers of basic writing.

I'd like to suggest that this is a kind of literacy narrative that we are familiar with as basic writing teachers. That is, we recognize and embrace our roles as benevolent literacy brokers within the academy, within this narrative of basic writing. And this is, by and large, the picture we paint of basic writing in our literature, especially since Shaughnessy. It's a nice story. We come out looking good in it, we teachers of basic writing, ourselves underdogs in the academy, working side by side with our students to challenge the institutional control of literacy. Yet this literacy narrative only works with a rhetorical disappearance of the full historical and material conditions that gave rise to basic writing and its remedial legacy over the past century.

So I'm not sure it's a completely accurate picture. Or, rather, I fear it's a bit too simple. That is, as teachers, I'm not sure that we can—or should—read ourselves as only reappropriating literacy on behalf of students in the academy. This tendency happens, though, I believe, fundamentally due to our lack of a deeper historical and economic understanding of basic writing and how it operates in relation to civil society. To read ourselves by and large as only the heroes in basic writing (since Shaughnessy) reveals an acritical stance. At the simplest level, such a reading suggests that nothing has changed since Shaughnessy, that the conditions and circumstances of her fight for basic writers are more or less the same now as they were then: socially, politically, economically, globally. At a more complex level, it moves the enterprise of basic writing to a precarious position, positions it as a cultural manifestation of a superstructure that reproduces social critique while the basic material conditions—realities—of basic writing remain more or less unchanged. Without a complex historical understanding of how economics effect (and are affected by) the conditions of basic writing, basic writing critiques are significantly

limited. In short, our rhetoric continues to mystify rather than reveal an understanding of how basic writing is tied to the economic and what implications this reality has for our students' lives.

As educators, we are better off, I think, working to recognize and acknowledge our situated historical and material positions as literacy creators and carriers within the rise of the knowledge economy. A first step to this kind of work is to recognize ourselves as one of the literacy sponsors competing and vying for the means and production of literacy capital in the current historical moment of basic writing.

As mentioned earlier, Brandt suggests that we writing teachers are literacy brokers, caught between the “buyers and sellers” of literacy (“Sponsors” 183). To a certain extent, Brandt is right. But I think she lets us off the hook too easily. I’d argue that we also act as literacy sponsors in the context of how Brandt defines them. Let’s return to her definition. Literacy sponsors are “any agents, local or distant, abstract or concrete, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way” (“Sponsors” 166). Certainly, we are implicated in this kind of knowledge creation and control as writing teachers. Consequently, it behooves us to think critically about how to enact a classroom agenda that moves beyond skill transmission and engages students in critical literacy work.

An extended example of how our scholarship entangles us in this particular economy illustrates this point more fully. Scholarship, arguably, is a form of knowledge that holds cultural capital in academia, particularly in a saturated market such as English where tenured positions are less and less available and competition for them is higher and higher. More and more, securing a tenure-line position, securing tenure (and thus

economic viability) relies on the production of a substantial amount of scholarship at the university. This increasing push for new knowledge and new thinking, a characteristic of the knowledge economy (“Changing” 248), affects the kind of academic literacy that gets sanctioned within basic writing classrooms. More to the point, the vast array of pedagogies articulated and harnessed in our journals and books are not pedagogies that exist outside the knowledge economy and economic conditions of the university; in short, they are pedagogies *at least in part* constructed by these economic realities. And we are their sponsors.

Whether or not we produce the scholarship, consume it, or transmute it (the latter two of which is more likely the case for the majority of basic writing teachers who are more often than not community college instructors, adjunct, and/or TAs), it shapes how basic writing as a kind of academic literacy gets defined and authorized in the basic writing classroom. Now what’s particularly messy or problematic about this phenomenon for students sponsored by our literacy is that the academic form of literacy that we bring to the classroom rarely squares up as an exact match with the academic literacy that is sponsored and expected to be transmitted by the university. And to be realistic, it is often, quite frankly, at odds with university sponsored literacy. Take, for example, the great skills versus process debate in basic writing. Thus, students in our basic writing classrooms find themselves “caught up in the turbulence” (“Sponsors” 248) of two competing literacy ideologies that can’t help but affect not only how they access academic literacy but also its final product: the kind of academic literacy that they leave the classroom with as they move forward (or not) in academia. Instead, our work in basic

writing should concern exploiting such dichotomies and move toward a value-explicit, politically charged, literacy of writing.

If we can begin to see how we are participants in the knowledge economy of basic writing within academia, then we might have a better chance of seeing how this knowledge economy works in relations to other spheres of civil society. For the enterprise of basic writing is not fueled solely by the vested literacy sponsors of academia. It is also a competition ground for other, more powerful and interested literacy sponsors: business, technology, government, and military sponsors, to name a few. We know this much, of course. We bemoan it, critique it, and resist it in our everyday work as teachers and administrators. Recent conversations on the WPA-L, for example, have covered such topics as the mandated testing and writing classes offered through corporate foundations. But what we often don't acknowledge or cannot seem to see for reasons mentioned earlier (e.g., our own embroilment in this economic web) is the complex process by which these literacy demands come to be and how embedded they are in the material needs and existence of our students.

That is, it is one thing to lament the corporatization of academia and then go on to teach “basic” academic writing skills in the classroom or, conversely, a “critical pedagogy” that is all critique and no pedagogy—both actions which result in substituting one literacy economy, functional literacy or cultural theory, for another, institutional literacy—while subsequently leaving students with no means for critically mediating their position as so-called “human capital” in this knowledge economy. It is quite another thing to recognize that “literacy is changing because the economy is changing” (“Changing” 245) and to, therefore, use the resources of the university or the college to

aid students in negotiating, mediating, and, hopefully, surviving the escalating and contending literacy demands they are likely to encounter throughout their lives.

We do much of the former in our work in basic writing, I'd like to suggest, but we need to do much more of the latter. And how we do so, I think, must attend to changing economic conditions in our society. That is, I believe that our current notions of academic literacy, in part because of the present economic condition that pits literacy knowledges against one another in constant struggle for capital, do more to preserve a "residual" literacy of the academy, to draw from Williams, than to contribute to any kind of substantial literacy learning for our students. And while this occurrence is further complicated by a host of other inter-related factors—working conditions, racism, sexism, language imperialism—our best hope, I believe, is to truly position ourselves as allies among our students in this current capitalist state. To do so, I'd wager, means that we need to move beyond conversations about pedagogy and work conditions and student identity in isolation of one another. Rather, it means that we have to theorize and act en masse to rethink and restructure the space that basic writing and FYC now hold in academia. And to do this work, we need a more coherent understanding of the historical and economic conditions that give rise to literacy crises over time. We need a fuller grasp on how these processes shape educational policies which in turn mediates the allocation of funding and curricular changes in basic writing programs.

"The new proletarianization," Villanueva writes, "where labor includes the word processor as well as the assembly line, should remind us that we, as educators, are no less the new working class. We too wear collars, even if looser than many" (*Boostraps* 137). This is a revelation we have yet to fully acknowledge as educators, perhaps even

ironically as writing teachers. We have too long attempted to preserve academic literacy (as a stable, unchanging monolith) from the influences of civil society and we have too long fooled ourselves into believing that with the right curriculum, the right pedagogy, the right funding, we can stabilize the “supply and demand” of literacy capital. As Brandt matter-of-factly puts it, “the schools will probably never attain equilibrium between supply and demand when it comes to human capital, including literacy. The standards will keep rising; the rules of the game will keep changing” (“Sponsors” 249). But there is hope in these revelations. It makes it easier to choose sides and to start asking the right questions. Instead of asking “who is the basic writer?” or “what’s the best basic writing pedagogy?” we can turn our attention to what we have so long missed: what economic realities effect and are affected by basic writing? How do they shape and/or obscure our understanding of the socio-political constructs of basic writing? And what are we going to do about it?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BASIC WRITING QUESTION AT WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY, 1967-2005

[Be]fore the '60s, the crises had included shedding a classical curriculum, raising the prestige of a four-year degree, creating steady enrollments, and rationalizing funding. But in this decade, institutions had to manage a phenomenal expansion in enrollments, in professional schools and in the sciences, and also in capital improvements, the hiring of faculty, and graduate study. Increased differentiation into tiers marked by mission, curriculum, and student body would begin in the '60s and intensify in the '70s to manage the crisis of growth.

Mary Soliday, *The Politics of Remediation*

In *Politics of Remediation*, Soliday examines how higher educational capital influenced the emergence of basic writing at CUNY. In this chapter, I examine the emergence and development of remediation and basic writing practices at Washington State University in relation to Shaughnessy's basic writing from the 1960s to the present. I illustrate how the uniqueness of Shaughnessy's basic writing and its legacy, as important as it is, needs to be read in light of other basic writing practices as well as within the context of the history of various remedial practices as they developed and evolved at other institutions, such as at Washington State University and its surrounding community colleges. In doing so, I further complicate current rhetorics of basic writing,

particularly our field's reading of how literacy crises function across society and higher education, attempting to uncover the roles economies of basic writing play in such cultural literacy periods. I begin with a discussion of mainstreaming debates in basic writing, examine how mainstreaming functions as a rhetoric of basic writing, then move to uncover the cultural formation of remediation at Washington State University during these years by tracing the shift from basic writing to mainstreaming.

Conversations about mainstreaming in basic writing scholarship came to the forefront during the 1990s under a confluence of socio-economic and cultural events. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, this decade saw the rise of socially-based pedagogies, one outgrowth of social construction's theoretical influence in the fields of composition and rhetoric. While a variety of such pedagogies exist in contemporary basic writing scholarship, in general they share the assumption that since language is socially constructed, basic writing instruction needs to acknowledge the rhetorical context basic writing students find themselves immersed in when negotiating academic writing—a move which centers error, in particular, as a rhetorical issue rather than an issue of cognitive development or an issue of correct usage.

Likewise, some basic writing scholars influenced both by theories of social construction and social justice began to argue for the abolition of basic writing, positing that basic writing programs are constructed on ideological grounds that function to hinder already disenfranchised students in the very real constraints of a hierarchical educational enterprise. At the same time, university administrators, politicians, and other public factions outside of academia also made arguments to abolish basic writing at four-year schools, though for very different reasons: issues of higher education standards,

university downsizing and budget cuts, and politics of meritocracy surfaced as the most common calls against basic writing programs during this period that was dubbed by many as the era of backlash on open admissions (see Shor, *Culture Wars*). Consequently, mainstreaming emerged within the field of basic writing as an alternative survival strategy in what Gerri McNenny coins the “post-remedial university” (see “Writing Instruction and the Post-Remedial University: Setting the Scene for the Mainstreaming Debate in Basic Writing”).

In “A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures: A Baseline and Five Alternatives,” William Lalicker reports on a survey he conducted of basic writing programs through writing program administrators in 1999. In this report, he outlines six basic writing program structures: the prerequisite model, the stretch model, the studio model, the directed self-placement model, intensive model, and the mainstreaming model. While Lalicker’s survey defines mainstreamed courses as only those programs that “essentially [eliminate] basic writing classes and [put] all students, no matter what their apparent writing ability, into standard comp classes” (par. 9), other conversations in the field define mainstreaming programs less narrowly. Trudy Smoke defines it as “placing basic writers in freshman composition classes rather than in separate basic writing classes” (217) while in the same collection McNenny sees mainstreaming as affording “alternative configurations for writing instruction that attempts to do justice to both students’ needs and administrative constraints” (xi). In any case, whether supported or critiqued, mainstreaming is most often viewed as basic writing’s latest cultural formation—as either resistance or incorporation—within the politically charged and economically motivated climate of late twentieth-century capitalism. That is, proponents

of mainstreaming argue on its behalf as a means to either negotiate or resist capitalist incorporation while critiques see mainstreaming as the result of a democratic space in higher education that has already been overtaken by capitalist pressures (see Gilyard, “Basic Writing, Cost Effectiveness, and Ideology”). For the purposes of this extended analysis, in what follows I examine the specific ways in which mainstreaming functions both as a rhetoric of basic writing and as a historical, cultural formation at Washington State University in order to recover an alternative basic writing narrative.

In doing so, I argue that while mainstreaming is described in the literature of basic writing almost exclusively in relation to Shaughnessy’s basic writing, a historical and material analysis of mainstreaming strategies at Washington State University reveals that while rhetorics of basic writing—theories of basic writing, that is—certainly influenced the formation of basic writing and mainstream practices at Washington State University theoretically, these factors were by no means the only contributing factors to the state of basic writing at Washington State University at the turn of the 21st century. Rather, a local literacy crisis, a burgeoning university-wide assessment process, along with proposed state legislation and budget cuts that would shift so-called remedial education practices back to two-year colleges, as had been the case in the years between 1958 and 1980, also functioned as important catalysts in the university’s move toward a mainstreaming strategy. This distinction is significant because it illustrates a basic writing agenda that is tied to the historical processes and patterns of remediation at an institution that did not experience open admissions in the same way that CUNY did. This recognition is important because it disrupts the homogenizing narrative of basic writing as the field knows it, problematizing its subsequent reification in academia and U.S.

culture by uncovering other specific material practices in an effort to recuperate other basic writing histories.

When mainstreaming, as a rhetoric of basic writing, is abstractly understood and limited in our literature by historical associations that reach back only as far as Shaughnessy's basic writing in the 1970s, the complexity of its relationship to cultural formations of remediation that developed before it and parallel to it are lost. What we lose as a community in the process is a more comprehensive understanding of how remediation functions as ebb and flow in relation to larger cultural processes of mass literacy as it develops into an economy. That is, while rhetorics of basic writing might effectively work to critique abhorrent remediation practices, such cultural practices, limited by the very discourse of basic writing, also subsequently work to rhetorically form and sustain a gap between ideologies of remediation and its historical, material realities—a gap which needs to be exploited if agency is to effectively take place for students and teachers as cultural workers.

The Mainstreaming Effect

One program often cited in mainstreaming literature is the *Enrichment* project, piloted from 1993 to 1996 by Mary Soliday and Barbara Gleason at—not coincidentally—City College of New York (CCNY), a campus of CUNY. In contrast to the traditional basic writing courses where students were placed into courses based on an impromptu writing exam and where the courses carried no credit, the *Enrichment* pilot writing courses were open to all students and carried full college credit (“Remediation to Enrichment” 65). Emphases of the project’s two consecutive semesters of writing

instruction included linguistic knowledge and literacies, emphases tapped into through language study and cultural themes research where instructors were able to stress working with sources as well as critical analysis (66-67).

Concluding the mainstreaming pilot a success, Soliday and Gleason nevertheless did not recommend abolishing basic writing programs in their final report on the project. Instead, they suggested “that CCNY provide students the option of a two-semester college writing course that bears full college credit and that is supported by faculty development, tutoring, and formative evaluation” (76). In other words, they argued for a mainstreamed sequence where both basic writing students and students who place into college-level writing courses would enroll, a sequence that is fully supported within a “responsible writing program” (76). Thus, Soliday and Gleason used the mainstreaming project as a means to argue locally that writing programs need multiple avenues of support in order to sustain not just minimal but substantial instruction for the variety of student populations and learning styles that populate university writing classrooms.

Their results and assessment of this project are published in “From Remediation to Enrichment: Evaluating a Mainstreaming Project.” Since its publication in *JBW* in the spring of 1997, this article has been cited in other *JBW* articles concerning mainstreaming at least eight separate times; nine of the 12 essays in the collection *Mainstreaming Basic Writers* also cite their research. It is not an overstatement to suggest that this particular mainstreaming project has become a mainstay in contemporary rhetorics of basic writing. This observation is significant, arguably, because as a rhetoric of basic writing it reinforces a particular reading of CUNY, open admissions, and basic writing. That is, while Soliday and Gleason make no reference in their text to Shaughnessy or open

admissions during the 1970s⁹, many of the citations that follow the article draw this historical connection, literally scripting mainstreaming into Shaughnessy's legacy of basic writing.

While Soliday and Gleason's work at CUNY with the *Enrichment* program provides a cautious yet successful elaboration of mainstreaming in action, the situation at California State University (CSU) during the late 1990s and into the 21st century affords a vision of what can happen to basic writing programs in lieu of mainstreaming strategies in fast capitalism. In "Looking Back, Looking Forward: California Grapples with 'Remediation,'" Mary Kay Crouch and McNenny describe the evolution of events that removed basic writing courses from California four-year institutions and sanctioned them to two-year schools. While CUNY phased remediation out of its four-year schools in 1999, effectively ending its open admissions policy, the remediation debate at CSU took a different turn, accountable to the 1960 Master Plan of Higher Education, revised in the 1987 document "The Master Plan Renewed." While The Master Plan made CSU accountable to providing remedial education, a number of reports grappling with how to negotiate the quality of higher education in CSU institutions along side "a deep recession" where "severe cut backs were made in classes and faculty" also emerged in the years between 1984 and 1994 (49). During these years, enrollment in remedial courses continued to rise while policy statements continued to debate whether or not remediation in CSU was appropriate for the CSU mission.

The Executive Order 665 (EO665), developed in 1996 to take effect in 1998, provided the final word in the debate. The current remediation policy at CSU, a policy

⁹ This article was originally delivered as a workshop at the 1997 annual College Composition and Communication convention.

that embodies the contradictory nature and practices of remediation in higher education, provides CSU students one year of remediation, which must begin in their first semester. If this work is not successfully completed within one calendar year, students are “disenrolled from the university” (52). As Crouch and McNenney observe, it sends a particular message about remediation’s place in higher education: “remediation can be tolerated but only for a limited period of time. When remediation is thought of simply as a term rather than a population of students, limits for it are easy to set” (53). Such a compromise, in the eyes of CSU’s Board of Trustees, allows the university system a window of remediation to aid in efforts of retention and diversity but not too much remediation, which it argues would negatively affect the university’s ability to provide a quality educational opportunity in “prepar[ing] a competitive workforce and an enlightened citizenry” (“Item,” quoted in Crouch and McNenny 54).

Published in *JBW* in 2000, Crouch and McNenny’s research furthers mainstreaming rhetorics in their analysis by acritically comparing and contrasting the CSU situation with what happened at CUNY. In the first section of their article, “The Deep Roots of EO665: 1960 – 1990,” the authors contrast how remediation policies at CSU since the 1960 Master Plan vary from policies of open admissions at CUNY over the same time frame. This distinction marks the most significance difference the authors note in their analysis. Most of the remediation issues discussed are read as similar to the circumstances at CUNY. For example, they reference that “Shaughnessy challenged the adequacy of timed writing tests as placement instruments” (58) in their own critique of the CSU timed placement essay. Most striking is how the historical scope of their essay is

limited by CUNY's historical scope of basic writing, and what is thus not included in their CSU analysis.

In "looking historically at CSU's attempts to grapple with what it views as the 'problem' of remediation," (64) the "looking back" reaches only so far back at 1960. Likewise, there is little discussion of the economic, social, and cultural factors outside of the university system that might make the history of remediation in California distinct. There is little to no discussion, for example, as to how a legacy of language imperialism and English only legislation in the state, not to mention distinct local, economic concerns, might shape both historical and contemporary policies on remediation in higher education in California. Through these omissions, the only distinction between CSU and CUNY becomes how they resolved the problem of remediation. The underlying assumption, however, is that the problem developed at the same time, during the crisis of open admissions in the 1960s and the problem of basic writing is more or less the same everywhere, with the story of CUNY as the marked norm.

Like CUNY and CSU, Washington State University also felt the crunch of budgetary cutbacks and the national politics of remediation during these years. But while CUNY's effort evolved out of a legacy of open admissions and counter-hegemonic resistance at urban campuses and while CSU's remedial debates encompassed a very different student demographic¹⁰ and the particular kinds of language imperialism marked by California's distinct immigrant population, remediation at Washington State University also developed within its own set of local exigencies.

¹⁰ Crouch and McNenny note that when The Master Plan was revised in 1987, the college population in CSU had changed from a "fairly homogeneous" native white population in the 1960s to a significant number of non-native English speaking and first generation Mexican American students (53).

Unlike the remedial and basic writing enterprises at CUNY and CSU, the number of sections of English 100: Basic Writing (and its various incarnations) offered per academic year at Washington State University has never reached epic proportions. Enrollment in basic writing courses has never exceeded 20% of the student population (Wyche 104). And though some version of basic writing course dates back to 1910 within the Department of English, basic writing courses actually disappeared from the university and into community colleges in the years between 1958 and 1980.

In the 1980-1982 College Catalog, English 100 resurfaces after a twenty-two year hiatus. The course, “Mechanics of English,” is described as a course in “basic usage, grammar, and mechanical aspects of written English.” English 103, “English for Foreign Students,” which has been repeatable for up to six hours of credit since 1970, is replaced with English 103, “Basic Skills in English—ESL,” though the course description remains the same. English 104, “Intermediate Grammar and Basic Skills—ESL,” and English 105, “Freshman Composition for ESL,” as well as English 102, “English Composition for Chicanos,” also appear in this catalog. The course descriptions are as follows:

Intermediate Grammar and Basic Skills—ESL: More complex aspects of English syntax and the development of basic reading, abstracting, and writing skills.

Freshman Composition for ESL: Special grammatical and rhetorical problems of ESL students.

English Composition for Chicanos: Same as Ch ST 102.

The course description for English 101, “English Composition,” remains more or less what it has been since 1964: “the writing of correct, coherent English prose, stressing orderly development of thought and precise exposition.” It is important to read the re-

emergence of English 100 among its peer basic writing and first-year composition courses in light of what was happening culturally and socio-economically, both nationally and locally, during this period. While the 1960s saw enrollment expansions in higher education that allowed universities to manage their growth by raising or changing admittance requirements, the national recession of the 1970s left many English departments across the country with low enrollments and the need to downsize in an era where students were enrolling in professional programs at high numbers. As such, according to Soliday, many English departments, which had done away with composition courses the decade before in order to focus the department's energies on the work of literary study, brought composition requirements back (*Politics* 59).

Though Washington State University never completely dismantled its composition program during this era, it did significantly streamline its offerings. While on the other side of the country Shaughnessy and her CUNY cohorts were developing and pioneering the pedagogy that would come to be known as basic writing, courses in pre-college writing—or as they were likely called then, remedial writing—were not offered at Washington State University. During these years, state community colleges took up the basic skills enterprise and no basic writing courses were offered at Washington State University. English 102, “Composition II” disappears in 1964 and the only first-year composition courses offered by the Department of English are English 101, “English Composition” and English 103, “English For Foreign Students.” Accordingly, the formation of basic writing at Washington State University developed differently than the basic writing associated with open admissions at CUNY during the same time period.

Shaughnessy's basic writing pedagogy was, as many insist, historically unique and counterhegemonic in its attempt to resist the institutional hierarchical boundaries that had formed between universities and community colleges and/or branch campuses by the sixties. According to Soliday, remediation has always assisted in designating the borders between institutions and the controversy over basic writing at this time was no different (*Politics* 67). What was distinct, though, was the rise of the two-year college as a new kind of institution and Shaughnessy's commitment to keep basic writing instruction as an option within the realm of a liberal arts education at the four-year institution.

In his 1963 report to the National Council of Teachers of English, "The Two-Year College & the Teaching of English, Albert Kitzhaber documents the phenomenon of the two-year college, providing an overview and critique of the conditions of writing instruction within these institutions. The following excerpt from the report speaks specifically to the role writing remediation came to occupy in the two-year colleges versus the four-year colleges and universities:

In most four-year institutions, remedial (subfreshman) English composition seems destined soon to disappear because the need for it is fast being removed; fewer really bad writers now show up at these colleges. In the two-year colleges the situation is painfully different. The kinds of students who used to populate the remedial English classes at state universities, and who have recently found themselves barred or discouraged from enrolling there, are now attending junior colleges instead, where they are either accepted with philosophic fortitude (especially if the college has become large and prosperous and secure) or welcomed with highminded statements about democratizing higher education

(especially if the college is new, small, and ambitious). The junior colleges not only teach remedial English; they often teach sub- (and sometimes sub-sub) remedial English; and once in a while they teach what might be called advanced remedial English in the sophomore year. (6-7)

Although the national rhetoric of the time embraced community colleges as democratic gateways to higher education and upward mobility, according to Kizhaber, such equality was also mired by inequality. That is, the internal contradictions of hegemony made it possible that while the growth of community colleges certainly did provide more folks than before with access to higher education, at the same time these educational opportunities were not equal to the opportunities found at the four-year institutions because of a number of cultural and economic factors. Furthermore, Soliday argues that we cannot read the emergence of two-year institutions without contextualizing their economic and political relationships to already established four-year and research institutions. During the 1960s and 1970s, English departments across the country experienced unprecedented growth in graduate studies as a result of private and governmental support (*Politics* 52).

Consequently, most departments, such as the Department of English at Washington State University, were better positioned, economically and politically, to concentrate their efforts on literary specialization without having to worry about the teaching of writing for departmental funding within the university. Soliday describes this institutional crisis of growth below:

From this perspective, the fortunes of remediation did not change in the '60s because students were more literate, or only because the less able among them

were attending two-year colleges. Rather, the number of remedial courses declined also as a result of the response of English departments to a new crisis. Put more bluntly, the nature of the crisis allowed them to sustain their central enterprise—the teaching and study of literature—without having to rely on the economics of writing instruction. (*Politics* 51)

Thus, two-year colleges came to absorb the burden of administrating and delivering the bulk of pre-college writing classes in an era when graduate institutions had the luxury of reasserting their literary focus while at the same time the postwar years saw a new collective demand in civil society for economic and social equity. Kitzhaber’s report also contributes the rise of the two-year colleges to a number of cultural and economic issues across institutions. In his opening, he attributes three major causes to the growth of the two-year college: population growth, the demand for post high school “education or training” for a growing number of the population, and the subsequent selectivity of four-year colleges and universities¹¹ (Kitzhaber 1). In stark contrast to CUNY, where the politics of basic writing were, even if only provisionally, influencing both how and where remedial courses were taught in New York, remediation at Washington State University followed the national trend.

Washington State University’s contemporary history of composition and basic writing is probably best known in our discipline through *Beyond Outcomes: Assessment and Instruction Within a University Writing Program*. In this collection, edited by Rich Haswell, former and present Washington State University writing administrators and graduate students collaborate in the telling of the university-wide writing assessment

¹¹ Kitzaber suggests that populations growth and a lack of expansion in four-year colleges and institutions contributed to selectivity rather than, as Soliday suggests, a valuing of literature over writing at an opportune time.

program, which serves to support writing and instruction throughout students' university careers. One layer of this program encompasses writing placement and first-year composition courses, including basic writing. Susan Wyche's chapter "Taking the 'Basic' out of 'Basic Writing'" most explicitly deals with the issue of basic writing at Washington State University during this period¹².

According to Wyche, the basic writing program at Washington State University "enrolled a mix of students, some self-selected, some advised" until 1991 when the university's English Placement Examination went into effect (94). At the same time that this new assessment program was implemented, the English 100 curriculum was also revised. The revision "exchanged two decades of schoolbook grammar lessons and rhetorical modes for a 'rehearsal' approach that drew on the materials and methods of the regular composition course" (94-95). This 'rehearsal' approach was modeled after the "Stretch Program" at Arizona State university, one kind of basic writing model Lalicker designates in his survey research. With this curricular change and because the new assessment program allowed for easier data collection, the folks at Washington State University began to notice a trend: though English 100 students' writing did not measure up with English 101 (the first-year composition course) students' writing at mid-semester, the same was not true by the end of the semester:

We speculated that the primary difference between the basic writers and their peers in English 101 was the extent of their experience with school-sponsored writing and reading....The first few weeks of English 100, then, provided an opportunity to catch up; that's why the midterm portfolio, occurring as it did at

¹² While Wyche refers to the program at Washington State University as a "mainstreamed" approach, the program she describes, which uses supplemental tutorials, more closely approximates what Lalicker identifies as the "studio" model.

the seventh week, showed little progress. But final papers, after students had had several more weeks in which to internalize what they had learned, were noticeably improved. (96)

As a result of these assessment-induced realizations, the faculty and administrators began considering the idea of abolishing English 100 and mainstreaming those students into English 101.

The eventual decision to move forward in abolishing English 100 also hinged on a number of other factors. Nationally, conversations within composition studies were debating mainstreaming in light of what was going on at CUNY: looming budget cuts and more selective admission requirements. And as Wyche notes, rumors suggested similar tactics might occur in Washington to move courses considered remedial back to two-year colleges (98, 102). Campus visits from two well known and influential composition scholars and a rethinking of the newly minted English 102 writing studio also added to mainstreaming discussions.

In 1990, during the first year of the new placement exam, English 102 was established as one placement option, a placement situated between English 100 and English 101. Students whose writing suggested they might have difficulties in English 101 but did not need an entire two-sequence writing course to complete first-year work were placed into English 101 and English 102, a writing tutorial workshop to supplement English 101 instruction. The workshops, facilitated by tutors, required that students meet once a week with their tutor groups (four to five students, all enrolled in English 101 for the semester) to workshop English 101 assignments (97). Approximately two years later, Peter Elbow visited campus to research the new tutorial workshops and Ed White

returned to campus to conduct an interim evaluation of a program review he had completed for Washington State University a few years earlier. Both Elbow and White's assessment of the program, though distinct from one another, suggested that the English 102 tutorials could effectively replace English 100 in a more positive supporting environment (98-99). In short, they both recommended abolishing English 100 and using the English 102 tutorials as a substitute.

It is important to note that the institutional funding to support the move to abolish English 100 was what made the move more than a theoretical pondering at Washington State University. According to Wyche, that Elbow and White had both spoken publicly about their research and assessment of the new writing program at Washington State University made it easier to "obtain the blessings of our administration" (99) in the form of both political and financial support. Furthermore, White's previous program review had provided similar successes for the nascent writing assessment program. Unlike the CUNY *Enrichment* pilot, where assessment developed out of the mainstreaming project funded by grant monies¹³, local assessment was used as the catalyst in arguing for changes in basic writing instruction at Washington State University.

Significant in the development of the university-wide writing assessment program that so influenced the shape of basic writing instruction at Washington State University was a local report in 1985 that surveyed Washington State University alumni, where former students described writing as among their worst experiences as undergraduates at the university. Another survey, distributed at the same time to major employers in the

¹³ In the final evaluation of their project, Soliday and Gleason argue that ongoing assessment of their project provided them with much needed data, arguing that such data collection and assessment procedures are what contemporary writing programs need in order to negotiate both the needs of students and programs as well as the demands of legislatures and institutional administrators.

region (including the likes of Microsoft and Boeing), revealed that these employers were also dissatisfied with writing skills of Washington State University graduates they employed (Condon).

Another significant factor in the abolishment of English 100 at Washington State University was the theoretical and pedagogical philosophies of the writing program administrators. During the abolition of English 100, Wyche was director of composition. When Victor Villanueva assumed the director of composition position, he argued for the reinstatement of English 100. As Wyche notes, “he possessed a different and far more positive view of basic writing” (103). The history of English 100 since its reinstatement in its revised stretch model is documented in a recent first-year composition assessment report produced by the Department of English.

Villanueva argued that English 100 was needed for those students whose writing needed more support than English 102 could supplement. In order to keep English 100 above the remedial radar, “he successfully persuaded legislators that English 100 was not about re-teaching or remediating, but about helping students learn a particular brand of literacy with which they had had less experience than many of their peers” (3). This move to revisit English 100 was also furthered by a re-examination of the pilot study Wyche had administered to test the quality of English 100 portfolios against the quality of English 101 portfolios, a study that was subsequently considered flawed because it had included students who had both volunteered for and placed into the course (2). While the argument for a revised, non-remedial basic writing course has kept English 100 at Washington State University since 1996, its legitimacy is always in process.

As noted in the 2005 basic writing report, Washington State University has recently raised admissions standards for incoming freshman. Though the rhetoric surrounding these higher requirements as documented in on-campus and off-campus newspaper articles, press releases, etc. suggests that these changes are a result of a ‘higher quality’ of student applicants to draw from, what is less mentioned but equally related are the severe budget cuts Washington State University has recently received from the state of Washington. As the basic writing report observes, “given the current state of the budget at WSU, it is very unlikely that any additional resources will be made available for English 100 in the near future whether or not questions about its value are raised” (7-8). The underlying acknowledgement here, arguably, is that the value of and rationale for basic writing, whether writ positively or negatively, is always contingent upon funding resources and the ability to argue suasively for them.

Basic Writing as Conjectural Crisis

Much literature on basic writing’s emergence as a new pedagogy, a pedagogy to be distinguished from its remedial roots, argues for its transformative nature. Mutnick states that basic writing had a significant role in opening up educational access in higher education for working class people of color (“Strategic Value” 72), while Soliday points out that an even larger number of students served by basic writing during open admissions were working-class whites (*Politics* 123-124). Finally, others argue that Shaughnessy’s basic writing illustrated an example of the democratic educational ideal in action. No doubt each of these assertions is true. In developing a political economy of basic writing, however, this analysis is less interested in the particulars of basic writing’s

uniqueness at CUNY and more interested in the how this particular moment reads both ideologically and materially in relation to basic writing and remediation beliefs and practices before, after, and parallel to it. And part of this work, because of the ideological enterprise of basic writing as it stands in academia today, means recovering other histories in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the politics of basic writing.

What we see at Washington State University during the 1960s and 1970s, then, provides a backdrop for reading the script of Shaughnessy's basic writing and how it functions ideologically as *the* transformative narrative in the field and its journal, *JBW*. Though Shaughnessy's basic writing pedagogy did make a mark in the teaching of writing, and thus influenced writing pedagogy, during this era, much pre-college level writing instruction, such as was the reality at Washington State University, was moved to two-year colleges where current-traditional rhetoric remained the instructional mainstay due, more than likely, to economic constraints (enrollments per section, instructor course loads, and the likes). Furthermore, as Shor notes, "at the time of BW's explosive birth in the 1970s, the status quo was under siege from below by protest movements whereas its job market was unable to absorb the mass of students from the baby boom generation then graduating cohort by cohort" ("Errors and Economics" 39). As such, basic writing's counterhegemonic quality during this era must be read less as the only way pre-college level courses were addressed during this time and more in light of how it functioned in relation to other pre-college level practices at the time—that is, as one of a number of cultural formations of remedial practices. Reading basic writing as a political economy allows for such needed analysis.

Such an analysis means examining the transformative ideal of basic writing, which functions rhetorically as a given, with regards to the actual historical and material processes that brought it about. Consequently, basic writing needs to be read as both a cause and effect within the cultural logic of capitalism. Thus, while basic writing can and should be read as counter-hegemonic, this status must always be understood as in process and in flux with relation to larger hegemonic forces. Furthermore, basic writing must also be read as always contributing to the ongoing reformation of remediation within the U.S. cultural and economic hegemonic, a process among processes.

Such a reading acknowledges the transformative character of basic writing's pedagogy at this time but it also recognizes the historical formation that made it possible, thus allowing for a more complex rendering of basic writing's transgressive potential and limits, as well as an understanding of how it continues to operate ideologically within the complexity of hegemony. This ongoing process is illustrated in the formation of basic writing at Washington State University as distinct from the formation of basic writing at CUNY. Within the rhetorics of basic writing, arguments surrounding basic writing are often limited to either/or option: reform basic writing or abolish it. Shaughnessy's pedagogy needs to be understood not only as counterhegemonic, but also, as many scholars have pointed out, an accommodation or negotiation within larger hegemonic forces: a both/and process rather than an either/or function. Such an analysis allows for a rereading of Shaughnessy's legacy within the larger cultural formations of remediation. That is, Shaughnessy's pedagogy did not just appear, nor was it inevitable. It evolved among a complex set of material and cultural circumstances in which Shaughnessy struggled to keep basic writing students within four-year institutions in an effort to resist

the hegemonic incorporation of basic writing instruction into the two-year colleges, a resistance which was eventually co-opted. By complicating the ideal of basic writing pedagogy with the competing hegemonic structures that contributed to its formation, we are better able to read basic writing in its larger historical context.

Therefore, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the fate of Shaughnessy's basic writing within the economic and social hegemony of the U.S., and to read this process as a pattern within the history of remediation. Shor goes on to suggest that amidst this political and economical turmoil, basic writing at CUNY soon emerged as a gatekeeper rather than a point of educational access. Soliday, too, acknowledges that basic writing's challenge to educational hierarchicalization diminishes in the late 1970s due to the national recession and corporate and governmental support of institutional stratification (*Politics* 71). We see this complex social processes at work in the various formations basic writing took at CUNY, California State university, and Washington State University during the 1990s.

This observation is significant for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that while Shaughnessy's basic writing was certainly one historical moment in remediation, it was not the only one. Second, it makes explicit that such historical moments are not static, that they are always in process. And as such, remediation and its practices occupy the realm of what Williams calls the "dominant and effective" as well as its non-static counterpart, "modes of incorporation" ("Base and Superstructure" 458-459). Furthermore, by unveiling the complex relationships among the historical, cultural formations of basic writing, remediation, composition, and literacy, we are better

positioned to both recognize and affect the ways in which various rhetorics of basic writing shape and are shaped by economic material processes as well.

For Williams, our understanding of dominant culture and its selective historical process of creating history¹⁴—through the rhetorical and ideological—are always shaped by processes of incorporation that are continually happening in the forming of cultural meaning and practices. “All these forces,” Williams argues, “are involved in a continual making and remaking of an effective dominant culture, and on them, as experienced, as built into our lives, its reality depends” (459). An unveiling and acknowledgement of these complex historical processes is important because it provides a clearer understanding of how our perceptions of basic writing are limited by the rhetorical, its making and remaking within a select and narrowly defined historical arch. A key element of Williams’ point, in furthering Gramsci’s theory of hegemony, is that ideology is not simplistically imposed from a dominant class. It is, rather, constantly remade from within.

Popular contemporary Marxist readings of basic writing, however, tend to read basic writing from a functionalist perspective, a perspective that obscures rather than clarifies the complex process of hegemony. Both Soliday and Shor, for example, focus their critiques on how basic writing functions within higher education and society in general. In her analysis of how remediation shifted to basic writing, Soliday argues that institutional needs function to keep basic writing and remediation at the margins of academia. Similarly, Shor contends that basic writing in its current formation functions to keep the working class, people of color, etc., out of higher education. That is, in each of

¹⁴ Williams writes, “at the true level of theory and at the level of the history of various practices, there is a process which I call *selective tradition*: that which, within the terms of an effective dominant culture, is always passed off as ‘*the tradition*,’ ‘*the significant past*.” (459).

their critiques, they both make arguments about how basic writing and remediation practices operate as unjust systems that are imposed upon basic writers. And while such analyses are significant in revealing the construction of basic writing in higher education, such readings limit a more comprehensive understanding of basic writings' cultural formations as a literacy practices among competing hegemonies and their processes. In short, a political economy of basic writing is needed in order to better understand basic writing's shift from remediation in a new economic order. Such analyses certainly reveal basic writing as a conjunctural crisis where reform takes place with little change to the actual status quo. Yet such a reading also suggests the possibility for some semblance of agency.

In his analysis, Williams points to the significant yet complex role education plays within dominant culture. "The educational institutions," he writes, "are usually the main agencies of the transmission of an effective dominant culture, and this is now a major economic as well as cultural activity" (459). At the same time, he argues for the simultaneous recognition of how "oppositional forms" can also exist in hegemony (460). In other words, as Villanueva explains, the contradictions within hegemony are certainly more powerful than ideology, but they also allow for the possibility of agency ("Rhetoric" 332-333). Recognizing and understanding this possibility of provisional agency within hegemony allows for potential resistance along the continuum of incorporation. What we have lost in reading and utilizing Gramsci and Williams within the realm of academic theory that dominate in rhetoric and composition is this complex understanding, the both/and of hegemony. Consequently, our critiques of basic writing, in particular, have suffered. At the same time, we have both underestimated and

undervalued the role of hegemony in basic writing formation. We have yet to recognize how it subsumes us, how complicit we are in its making and remaking. And until we do so, we are limited in recognizing how genuine agency might be negotiated in the enterprise of basic writing.

CHAPTER FIVE

REMEDICATION AT WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY, 1892-1958

Despite the claims of college professors that students ought to come to college with mastery of the composing process, no generation of college students has ever in fact done so. Twentieth-century U.S. colleges, like their more elite counterparts in the nineteenth century, have continued to provide courses in writing, and there is obviously something perverse in labeling as remedial a course which is necessary for nearly all students.

--James A. Berlin, "Writing Instruction in School and College English, 1890-1985"

As Berlin attests in the above excerpt, and as many other composition historians, such as Robert Connors and Sharon Crowley, have noted elsewhere, composition's history is rooted in work labeled as remedial. Similar to its earliest years, composition is still viewed by many outside of composition circles as an educational stopgap to remedy students' perceived literacy deficiencies. These assumptions remain in our national discourse on literacy, a literacy common sense, even though as Berlin notes, writing courses have never disappeared from higher education since their inception over a century ago. His point is well taken: what logic maintains the assumption that first-year writing courses—courses which the majority of students across the majority of higher education institutions have to take—function to remedy gaps in knowledge while first-year courses in the majority of academic disciplines and departments (with the notable

exception of mathematics) are conceived as introductory courses¹⁵? And furthermore, if first-year composition is generally viewed as remediation, why and how has basic writing developed as another layer of literacy remediation in academia?

Most certainly, there are no easy answers to these complex questions. A number of complex factors contribute to assumptions about composition's role in the university, including its legitimacy as an academic discipline and first-year composition's status as a university service course, factors others within the discipline have explored in depth¹⁶. Composition's associations with literacy are even more complex, as the previous chapters in this collection demonstrate, yet in furthering a political economy of basic writing, I'd like to suggest that one influential factor we have yet to fully realize in composition's association with remediation and literacy is the economic undergird that makes first-year composition a literacy commodity in higher education, a factor which affects composition's value from both within and outside academia.

In the following chapter, I examine the development of remediation and its relationship to composition at Washington State University, a land-grant university, from the end of the 19th century to the era of basic writing during the 1960s. In doing so, I uncover how literacy expectations changed outside the academy, thus affecting how notions of writing formed and came to be defined within academia. As such, I demonstrate how the rise of mass literacy as an economy in the 20th century contributed to basic writing formation at Washington State University.

¹⁵ It is worth noting that even when first-year composition courses are described in course catalogs, curriculum, and syllabi as introductory (as opposed to remedial), as is the current national norm, the underlying assumptions that such courses are nevertheless inherently remedial (fixing rather than adding to student knowledge about writing) often remains unchanged.

¹⁶ For example, see Susan Miller's *Texual Carnivals*.

The first composition program, according to Brereton and other historical scholars, coalesced at Harvard around 1870, a by product of the modern university. For institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and the University of Michigan, already established elite American colleges, the move to become a modern university meant significant institutional change. We know the story well in composition circles: enterprising college presidents, influenced by the Enlightenment's emphasis on the knowledge of science and the German university model where discipline specialization was the educational focus, brought American colleges into the 20th century by restructuring the old curriculum. Instead of an elite, liberal curriculum that emphasized a common civil training for the likes of future lawyers, doctors, politician, and clergy, the new modern university emphasized the discovery of knowledge through disciplinary immersion that produced scientific experts, folks with PhDs. This move on the part of higher education institutions to not only transmit but also produce new knowledge proved a key moment in the development of the knowledge economy that would overtake the U.S. throughout the 20th century, an economy that developed to mediate the value of literacy.

The two major characteristics that marked the rise of composition within this new university, according to Connors, were mass education and the change from an oral emphasis to written emphasis within the realm of rhetorical training ("Modern University" 55-56). Brereton notes that this distinction between the old system of orality and the new system of literacy ignores the literate practices of the old curriculum. Instead, he argues, "it seems more accurate to say that the new university dropped much of the oral emphasis and consequently valued the written word much more" (4). Hence, literacy evolved as a commodity, a commodity that took its worth from the newly

emerging professional class. As such, writing—as both a skill to be measured and mastered as well as a newly emphasized requisite of the learned professional—emerged prominently within the new university. Whatever forms of literacy that may have been practiced in the old curriculum took on a new purpose within the modern university, where the cultural formation of mass education resulted, at least in part, from economic demands for more literately skilled workers. Subsequently, one role of writing in the new university concerned defining and assessing qualities of literacy skills.

Issues of language and rhetorical training have always been tied to cultural class anxieties, and the new university's contribution toward the development of a literate professional middle-class in America at the turn of this century was no exception. In order to best understand the “why?” and “how?” of these cultural changes, though, it is necessary to point out how these anxieties and the shift to writing as the favored form of rhetorical training during this period evolved out of a complex relationship among economic and social changes that shaped such cultural formations as a new university system and the need for mass education. That is to say, the presidents of Harvard, Yale, and University of Michigan did not wake up one day and decide they preferred the German university model to the American college model simply because the German model seemed the best approach toward the search for *a priori* truth and scientific enlightenment, the natural progression of knowledge—though, of course, this is a narrative academia often embraces because of its collective ideological naiveté concerning the Enlightenment ideal and the workings of hegemony.

Instead, the change from the elite liberal colleges to the modern university in America was directly tied to changes in trade and industry that grew out of the second

half of the 19th century, changes that greatly influenced the move to mass education in the form of modern universities. The causal relationships of these economic changes and the subsequent effects on the evolution of the modern university and the rise of composition is the element of the composition story that we have remained less familiar with, partly, I argue, because of the ways in which rhetorics of literacy crises function in our scholarship. That is, without a comprehensive historical understanding of how the rise of capitalism has demanded not only a more skilled workforce but has also shaped and been shaped by an economy of literacy, we have tended to embrace literacy crises at surface level, believing that they simply reveal students' inabilities as measured along a universal literacy standard (as was typical in English departments in the early half of the 20th century), or we read literacy crises as politically motivated, rhetorical arguments that function to maintain class systems with little to no grounding in the reality of literacy construction (as is a common argument in contemporary composition theory). The realities of literacy crises demand that we understand their direct relation to the rise of literacy as an economy.

One cause and effect of this limited historical understanding is that we have tended to view and accept the story of Harvard and its counterparts as “The” story of the history of composition and/as remediation, without much attention, for example, to the particulars of how composition from elite universities influenced (or not), and continue to influence (or not), the histories of composition among other U.S. higher education institutions, influencing a number of composition histories across the U.S: histories of composition at the community colleges, the liberal arts colleges, and land-grant universities, for example. In doing so, our history reflects what Horner calls a selective

tradition, a history that risks “overlooking what may be counter or alternative to the hegemonic within the tradition” (*Terms of Work* 166). Recognizing the processes of how this selective tradition works is significant because it provides the potential for demystifying the ideological by revealing the historical and economic relations that bring tradition about. Furthermore, it allows for the recuperation of possible counter-hegemonic traditions.

The Land-Grant University

Founded as a land-grant institution in 1890, instruction at Washington State University began in 1893. Initially named the “Washington Agricultural College, Experiment Station and School of Science,” these formative years of Washington State University focused on agriculture as a technology: “college instruction was thus provided in the sciences upon which agriculture and the mechanic arts are based, and the study of the economic side of these subjects was to be supplemented by the practical illustration of the corresponding arts” (*College Catalog* 1893/1894: 18). As a land-grant university, Washington State University’s founding and focus was typical of other land-grant universities established in the same era, developing out of a need to harness and manage the material conditions and consequences of the industrial revolution:

The new comprehensive university was signaled by the passing of the Morrill Federal Land Grant of 1862, establishing state institutions designed to apply the findings of science to the managing of economic affairs. Even schools far removed from the land-grant model—Harvard, for example—responded to the demand for this new institution. The curriculum was to be elective, not

prescribed, and its purpose was to train certified experts in the new sciences, experts who could turn their knowledge to the management of the production, distribution, exchange, and consumption activities of society for profit. (Berlin, “Writing Instruction” 185).

Land-grant universities established under the 1862 Morrill Act nationally represented both a new cultural and economic era, an era where knowledge, as noted above, was to be mass produced and commodified within the evolving enterprise of a new economic order. In *The Legacies of Literacy*, Harvey J. Graff speaks to the complicated and contradictory relationships among the economic, demographic, technological, sociological, and political forces of the time. He outlines three contributing factors to the expansion of education, such as the modern university, which, he argues, need to be interpreted less linearly and more complexly: the influence of Enlightenment benefactors, working class mobilization, and the role of the state (261). Ideologically, education represented progress during the 19th century in the U.S. West while, at the same time, the material needs of industrialization demanded more and more skilled workers in order to sustain itself. Therefore, as Graff notes, “economic needs for reading and writing reached unprecedented levels” because “with changes in patterns of work and residence and with the expansion of service and technological spheres, practical and functional needs for literacy grew” (261). These changes within civil society thus shaped the colleges and new universities by placing a heavier demand on what constituted minimal literacy skills as authorized and endorsed in academia.

Furthermore, literacy skills no longer served as a social stabilizer in times of economic and social turmoil as they had historically done so. As Brandt observes, from the late 19th century on, literacy, as an economy, began to effect change in society:

Rather than serving to replicate tradition, literacy was pushed into the service of the restless search for new thinking, new knowledge, new products, new angles, and new markets. Instead of serving as a counterbalance during periods of excessive or rapid social change, literacy began to play a leading role in that change; it became a major catalyst in new modes of communication, production, and social relations” (“Changing Literacy” 248).

Consequently, the modern university became the place where these competing new literacies were produced, legitimized, and reified with the technology of writing taking on new social and economic importance. As a result, new pressures were weighted on academic writing as a literacy threshold.

We see this trend play out distinctly in areas supported by land-grant universities, such as Washington State University:

As the effects of education became evident in improving yields, the Grange and the Alliances also became important lobbying groups, first, for state-supported agricultural institute programs, through which well-planned short courses of a day’s or two days’ duration would be brought to the localities—the model referred to was often the teachers’ institute; then, for the agricultural colleges themselves, as farmers began to see those institutions as *their* institutions; and, later, for agricultural experimental stations. (Cremin 472)

Established as one such agricultural experimental station, Washington State University's emphasis on agricultural technology and "the economic side of these subjects" suggests a direct relationship among the knowledge economy supplied by the university and the material livelihood of Eastern Washington, where agriculture remains the regions' primary source of income even today.

1892-1917

As a land-grant university, Washington State University did not experience the metamorphosis that the elite universities underwent, the catalyst from a primarily oral to primarily literate institution that signals an important turning point in our field's story of Harvard. That is, rather than convert from a liberal college to a modern university, Washington State University started as the latter during this historical period. As such, no institutional history of rhetorical training, such as the likes of what existed at older institutions, existed at Washington State University at the turn of the century. While no doubt influenced by the liberal college and modern university split between orality and literacy, because of its uniqueness as a land-grant university, the history of composition at Washington State University, consequently, began in an institution already convinced of the primacy of literacy in this new world order, a primacy that is evident in the earliest formations of the Department of English at Washington State University.

English Language and Literature was among nine of the founding courses of study offered at the opening of the university, which evolved into the Department of English Language and Literature in 1906 and changed to the Department of English in 1917, which it remains today. No Endowed Professor of Rhetoric has ever been

appointed at Washington State University, and from its inception until very recently, the study of rhetoric and composition has been more or less ancillary to the study of literature within the Department of English. Yet the pressure to raise the literacy levels of students across the university certainly fell to this department early on. These particular origins, no doubt, shape how remediation and basic writing developed at the institution.

One of nine original departments of instruction at the college, the Department of English Language and Literature identified two overarching goals for its coursework in its third annual catalogue: “the practical use of the English language in writing and speaking” and “the study of the masterpieces of English and American literature, as the expression of the best thoughts and highest ideals of the Anglo-Saxon race” (*College Catalog* 1893/1894: 49). At this beginning, Nancy L. Van Doren, who also served as the university’s preceptress and librarian, was the only professor within the department. Seven courses are listed: “Medieval and Modern European History,” Rhetoric and Essays,” Masterpieces in English Literature A,” “History of English Literature” “Shakespeare,” “The Drama,” “Oratory,” “Early English,” and “Seminary Course.” Under this new modern university system, where “it is better to know one thing thoroughly than to have a smattering of a great many things” (73), students chose majors and minors at the beginning of their college careers, the disciplines of which determined their overall course of study. In addition to the required and elected coursework in their area of study, requirement for graduation included a handful of required courses for all, courses that would come to be known as general education requirements. Among these requirements in the 1893-1894 academic year were two English Language and Literature

courses, “Rhetoric and Essays” and an additional semester of coursework from within the department, chosen by the student.

The departmental goals and course descriptions as outlined above, which emphasize the necessity of the English language and its history for the modern student, imply that the English language is not only to be appreciated, but that it also functions as commerce in this new industrial era where “practical use” of English can go a long way in assisting in both knowledge consumption and the demands of new kinds of literacy acquisition. And while the racist overtones used to describe the English language in phrases such as “best thoughts and highest ideals of the Anglo-Saxon race” are so obvious that they hardly require identification, it is important to point to how such ideologies are embedded in what Horner and John Trimbur describe as a “tacit language policy of unidirectional English monolingualism” in the history of U.S. writing instruction (“English Only” 594), a history which cannot be separated from its ties to U.S. economic formation.

In a 2002 article, Horner and Trimbur argue that the cultural logic of unidirectional monolingualism, which continues to influence current English Only legislation as well as educational policies that affect basic writers and ESL courses, can be traced back to the late 19th century, to when first-year composition courses began to develop (596). According to Horner and Trimbur, this monolingual development was not inevitable but rather the effect of instruction and study in English taking the place of instruction and study in the classical languages. This curricular change, which dovetailed with the previously discussed change from a predominately oral to a predominately literate emphasis in universities, subsequently created a monolingual emphasis in English

language instruction where the classical curriculum's use of translation as the primary means for studying the English language had inherently emphasized bilingualism (602). While Horner and Trimbur tie composition's monolingualism to American "nationhood" and internal colonization, implicitly connecting this language policy to the rise of capitalism in the United States, I'd like to suggest that this connection is at once much more direct and more complex than we often imagine in our field. That is, while the logic of fast capitalism posits English as the language of global commerce in the 21st century, as Lu suggests ("An Essay" 16), the logic of capitalism in the late 19th century U.S. contributed to the formation of English as the language of national commerce throughout the 20th century. And this influence is evident in the Washington State University college catalogs at the time.

The description for "Rhetoric and Essays" during the 1893-1894 catalogue reads as follows:

The work in this course presupposes the completion of a preparatory course in Composition and Rhetoric. Diction, quality of style, figures of speech, the forms of composition are studied with care and largely in light of the best specimens of English literature. The process is intended rather to be inductive than deductive. Constant practice is given in criticism. An effort is made to discover rhetorical principles from the study of standard authors. Two days in the week are devoted to the preparation and criticism of original essays. Daily, second semester. All students who are applicants for graduation are required to take this course. (49).

This course description reveals two significant points about composition in its early years at Washington State University. First, as Russell observes of the early years in the

modern university, there is an assumption that students demonstrate mastery before entry into the curriculum rather than using the course as a forum to practice and develop the literacies expected in academia even though the institutional requirement of a composition course assumes that students coming into the courses did, indeed, need further literacy instruction and practice (24). Second, the work of composition, even at this early date, is already subsumed by the reading and study of “the best specimens of English literature.” That is, the study of great works of literature is presumed to be the best approach to the practice of composition and rhetoric. As Horner and Trimbur note, this best approach was sanctioned by the implicit monolingual policy that developed from composition’s replacement of classical curriculum in the modern university. These observations suggest, arguably, that the earliest formation of composition at Washington State University was not simplistic. Composition at this land-grant university developed under competing, and at times contradictory, ideologies about the purposes and uses of literacy in a new era of education and capitalism.

Rhetoric, as a course of study, is not primary in this nascent department. It is acknowledged as a necessity to meeting the “practical use of the English language in writing,” yet reduced to an element in two courses within the department of English Literature and Language, only one of which is mandatory: the covering of “rhetorical principles” in “Rhetoric and Essays” and the “study of great orators” in “Oratory” if students are so inclined to take the latter course as an elective. Though this burgeoning composition course “Rhetoric and Essays” is the only required course in the department, providing it with a seemingly elevated stature, composition’s beginning at Washington State University in 1893 differs greatly from the composition program at Harvard around

the same time. Between 1880 and 1910, Harvard's composition program, at its fullest, offered a range of courses, employed prominent teachers, and tasked students to write compositions that did not rely on readings of literary texts (Brereton 11). One result of this limited rhetorical emphasis contributes to composition's formation at Washington State University as directly linked to the development of student's written literacy skills. Such literacy skills were needed to support agriculture's emergence as a science, a science that relied upon the instruction of agriculture as a technology, which subsequently required that such scientific knowledge be codified and circulated through written texts, such as manuals, pamphlets, and textbooks, not to mention the production of agricultural research in-and-of itself.

In the 1894-1895 academic year, "Medieval and Modern European History" and "History of English Literature" is replaced in the catalogue with "Historical and Biographical Studies in English Literature"; all other courses remain the same. In 1895-1896, "Argumentative Composition" is added:

Ten lectures upon the subject of Argumentation, accompanied by a careful study of speeches and essays of which briefs may be made. Students will be required to collect material, arrange briefs, and prepare forensics. Practice in speaking first from full notes, then from outline, and finally from notes, will be a requirement. Examination test will be ability to write argumentative essay some subject previously studied. Daily, first semester. (57)

Annie Howard, Professor of Rhetoric, joins the department this year, and we see her influence, perhaps, in this course with its emphasis on forensics. In 1899-1900 "Oral Debate," focusing on "preparation and criticism of briefs, conferences with instructors,

and set debates,” is offered jointly with instructors from the department of Economic Science and History (68). Howard leaves the department in 1902, though, and while the occasional professor or instructor over the next two decades earns his or her credentials from the likes of University of Wisconsin or Harvard, no title of “Rhetoric” professor or instructor is not bestowed again until the 1990s.

From 1900 to 1910 rhetoric and composition courses are added to the curriculum as the department grows, but they never accumulate more than (and are often much less than) approximately one third of the courses offered at any given year. Courses introduced in composition include “Expository and Argumentative Composition,” “Advanced Composition,” and “Narration and Description,” while versions of courses focusing on debate, public address, in addition to oratory also surface and disappear during this decade. The mentioning of English graduate students occurs in the 7th annual, and literature courses expand to include a variety of courses in both English and American literature.

As many scholars have observed, the reduction of rhetoric as a field of study to one or more required composition classes can be contributed to a number of changes, including the shift in emphasis from the oral to the written in academia or the move to mass education where the student to instructor ratio increased dramatically. As mentioned earlier, another significant factor is the increased pressure to produce literate workers for changing industrial demands where written rather than oral skills are in higher demand. At the same time, it is important to note that during these years the course work in composition and rhetoric at Washington State University is not represented as remedial in the course descriptions. And even though the study of rhetoric is limited to a few courses

within the department of English Literature and Language, and often conflated with the study of composition, collectively the emphasis on composition and rhetoric in the department is treated as a comprehensive course of study, available to students across their four years of undergraduate study. “Rhetoric and Composition” remains a college-wide requirement for graduation, while “Advanced Composition” is offered as an option for students demonstrating “special skill in composition and [who] wish further practice in writing under supervision” (*College Catalog* 1906/1907: 78). “Expository and Argumentative Composition,” focuses on expository and argumentative “specimens” rather than literary ones. In current with academic literacy trends of the times, remedial work is sanctioned to the preparatory school offered at the college.

The preparatory school at Washington State University functioned productively until the 1904-1905 academic year, when it disappears. During the years from 1893 until 1905, the Preparatory School provided up to three years of course work for incoming students, course work that provided “sound training and such development as will enable the student to carry any of the college courses successfully” (*College Catalog* 1893/1894: 84). This course work covered a variety of subjects at all levels of instruction—grammar, rhetoric, elocution, and composition among them—and resembled, perhaps, the old college curriculum in its interdisciplinary and non-elective nature. As such, the preparatory school, perhaps, illustrates a cultural formation in some ways similar to Shaughnessy’s basic writing that emerges during the 1960s. That is to say, certainly, pedagogy in the preparatory schools was more than likely what we might expect, not much more than the rote skills and drills compositions have come to justifiably critique, not Shaughnessy’s pedagogy. However, the formation of preparatory schools as a

curricular space *within* universities to support new populations of at risk students in many ways coincides with Shaughnessy's politics of access as described by Soliday and discussed in the previous chapter.

The demise of the Preparatory school at Washington State University is directly connected to the rise of accredited high schools in the state. In the 1898-1896 catalog, information on how high schools might become accredited by the university emerge, and students from these high schools are accepted into Washington State University without examination but with the caveat that they might be required to enroll in preparatory work during freshman year for course work not covered or taken in high school. A list of accredited high school begins to appear in the catalogue in 1902, with the Preparatory School no longer an option after the 1904-1905 academic year.

With the Preparatory School gone and the boundaries between high schools and colleges and universities solidifying, remedial English surfaces in the Department of English at Washington State University ostensibly as a curricular cushion for students who are presumed to need more time on task to develop their English writing skills. The first remedial English course appears in the 1910-1911 College Catalog, when "Practice in Writing English" pops up as a course offering. A three hour course, it is described thus:

This course is designed for students who need more practice in writing English than that afforded in English 2: [Rhetoric and Composition]. Theory will be reduced to a minimum, and the stress will be laid upon practice, with special attention to the most common mistakes. This course in no sense duplicates the work of English 4 or 15 ["Expository and Argumentative Composition" and

“Narration and Description”], and is not to be regarded as a substitute for English

2. Three hours per week, each semester. (118)

Enrollment into this course is, presumably, voluntary, since there is no explicit description requiring enrollment or placement into the course. And according to the description, this course would be taken after the required “Rhetoric and Composition,” and it cannot be taken in place of this requirement. Evident through this description, the earliest courses in remedial English at Washington State University appear at least somewhat substantively similar in philosophy to the kinds of remediation that happened in colleges before the move to the modern university, where students received remediation as needed throughout their academic careers. Though supplemental instruction is limited here to one additional writing course beyond the required composition course, as opposed to the multiple supplemental opportunities afforded in the old liberal arts colleges, this supplement nevertheless takes place after the required composition course, not as a stop-gap before it. Furthermore, the course’s emphasis on practice assumes that students who enroll in the course are not deficient in literacy skills but rather novices in need of additional time and support in order to develop skills, notably a dominant theme in Shaughnessy’s “foundational” basic writing pedagogy.

In the 1916-1917 College Catalog, another course takes the place of “Practice in Writing English”: English 100, “Fundamentals in English.” Instead of the primary emphasis on a need for more writing practice, “Fundamentals in English” focuses on what the student is lacking and is a requisite to the required composition course upon placement into English 100:

This course is designed primarily for persons whose previous training in English has been inadequate as a preparation for carrying English 1. Practice in composition will be an important feature of the work. This is not a substitute for any of the 'required English' courses. Three meetings per week, each semester. (71-172).

The rise of writing remediation at Washington State University during these years illustrates the rise in literacy stakes that Brandt discusses in her work. As the need for specialized literacies rise and develop as an economic resource, the land-grant university develops as a literacy sponsor. In order to gain access to such specialized literacies, one had to master the most "basic" kind of literacy offered at the university, the "fundamentals of English." Thus remedial writing course, such as "Fundamentals of English" offered at Washington State University, formed to manage academic literacy sponsored by universities mirrored economic industrial development. Such courses and their future counterparts "positioned and repositioned, seized and relinquished control over meanings and materials of literacy as part of [the] struggle" ("Changing" 248) surrounding escalating literacy demands among new economic development within the rise of a new national capital order.

The World Wars

The years before, after, and in between World War I and World War II bring a number of significant changes to the Department of English at Washington State University. The number of literature courses continues to rise, as do courses in journalism until 1956 when the Department of Communications is established and all English

journalism courses disappear. Before this disappearance, journalism courses account for a significant segment of the courses offered through the Department of English, designated one of three educational needs the department serves throughout the 1940s and 1950s: “the work in this department is designed to serve the needs of three classes of students: those who desire a broad general training, emphasizing literature, those whose major emphasis is in journalism, and those who wish specific training to teach English in public schools” (*College Catalog* 1952/1954:146). This is also the era that “modern composition-rhetoric” dominates in the classroom, what Connors dubs the rise and reign of current-traditional rhetoric (*Composition-Rhetoric* 326).

The departmental description in the annual catalogs differs significantly during this period from earlier nationalistic emphases on the uses and expression of the English language and the reading of literature as the inculcation of the best ideas of the Anglo-Saxon race. The emphasis on the training of pragmatic professional skills and subsequent de-emphasis on the study of literature as a means to gain white, elite cultural capital is striking. In short, the differences in departmental descriptions point to changing assumptions, perhaps, about the social, racial, and national identities of entering students. Most notable is the rhetorically juxtaposed class distinction. The professional class (or would-be professional class) targeted in these course catalogs is mired in the language of training while the professional class targeted earlier at the turn of the century is represented more in terms of taste.

Certainly, one explanation for this rhetorical shift can be accounted for in Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s analysis of racial formation in the United States. They identify racial formation as “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are

created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (55). According to Omi and Winant, racial dictatorship, ruled by coercion, existed in the United States before the civil war. After the civil war, racism did not disappear, yet “hegemonic forms of racial rule,” began to replace overt racist tactics of force, such as slavery and legalized segregation. Under hegemonic rule, racism continues less overtly, through civilian consent¹⁷, “by simultaneously structuring and signifying” (68)—rhetorically, that is. Omi and Winant read the end of World War II as the cumulative break from racial coercion to hegemonic racial rule, so the years surrounding the world wars illustrate distinct, national racial patterns. Yet, as Manning Marable notes, racism cannot be understood outside of class structures as well: “the American state apparatus is capitalist and racist in its operations and social trajectory, yet it also manifests the class contradictions and struggles which are always present within bourgeois civil society as a whole” (257). Thus, while the mission of the department of English at Washington State University at the turn of the century reflects the English language as tied to white class mobility enveloped in cultural residual of slavery’s racial dictatorship, the department’s mission during the years surrounding World War I and World War II reflects renewed literacy anxieties as both racial and economic reformation was taking place in a similar yet distinct war-torn climate.

According to Connors, “composition-rhetoric was forced by cultural pressures to insist more and more strongly on formal and mechanical correctness after 1900, and this formal obsession became the hallmark” (*Composition-Rhetoric* 327) of the freshman composition course during this era. We see this influence in particular in the remedial

¹⁷ It is important to note that this change did not happen suddenly, that is a cultural process of contradictions still in the making and remaking, not linear so much as cyclical. For example, the Japanese internment camps during World War II certainly qualify as coercion even though their inception is chronologically closer to the 1960s civil rights movement than the legalized slavery that was state sanctioned from 1607 to 1865.

writing course that emerged at Washington State University, “Fundamentals in English.” Over the decades and up until the late 1950s, “Fundamentals in English” remains a staple course offered through the Department of English. Throughout the years, the course description becomes more skills laden with respect to its goals. The course description in 1927 adds “practice in grammar and composition” to the description, while “silent reading” is added in 1938, when the course description reads as follows:

Fundamentals of English. *Each semester. No credit. Two class periods per week.*

Mr. Kies, assisted by the Staff. For persons whose previous training in English has been inadequate as a preparation for carrying English 1. Grammar, composition, and practice in silent reading. This is not a substitute for any part of the required eight hours of English. (*College Catalog* 1938/1939: 183).

This course description reveals the kinds of remedial assumptions and practices that early basic writing scholarship often critiques, such as is evident in the work of Mike Rose, Shaughnessy, and others. What is less available in this scholarship, however, is a comprehensive analysis of how and why such curriculum formed in relation to precursory remedial practices, such as the earlier structural connection between Washington State University’s preparatory school and the Department of English as a literacy program. That is to say, our scholarship accurately describes how remediation came to function as inequality in relationship to composition within the discipline and academic literacy standards at the institutional level, but there is little sustained discussion of the effects that brought this function about in the first place.

We need more historical analysis concerning how remedial practices, and subsequently basic writing as remedial practice, function as both cause and effect in

literacy formation as it has developed in and among the various kinds higher education institutions within the United States. To illustrate, I uncover a more historically and materially comprehensive understanding of how the above remediation curriculum, and others like it, developed in accordance with the social and economic formation that contributed to World War I and World War II, and how these structural changes in civil society shaped literacy demands both inside and outside academia at Washington State university.

According to Berlin, in the years before World War I the theory of “social efficiency” took hold in civil society and expanded to influence public schools and we see, perhaps, this efficiency influence in the common remedial writing course at the university during this period, the course that exists in limbo between high school and university writing curriculum. Social efficiency, which argued that schools meet the future social needs of students, grew out of a desire to prepare students for life as social citizens while also taking into account developmental psychological models that argued attention be given to the individual and developmental learning of students. It is important to point out that this educational reform rhetoric did not exist in isolation to the material realities of U.S. workers at this time. As Berlin notes, social efficiency developed throughout the schools because of “the attempt to control the vagaries of competitive capitalism through a planned economy managed by corporations and government” (“Writing Instruction” 192). No doubt, the attempts to control capitalist vagaries at this time were directly tied to economic turbulences contributed by the war.

A similar initiative occurred near the end of World War II. The life adjustment initiative, spurred by the 1944 report *Education for All American Youth* argued for

schools to better prepare students for life experiences—that is, the experiences they would most likely come across outside of and beyond school. This initiative mostly affected writing instruction at secondary schools, the results of which reduced writing instruction, in the service of citizenship and social rhetoric, to the realm of utilitarianism and efficiency (“Writing Instruction” 201). In short, the uses of writing for citizenship became synonymous with using writing to become a useful and productive worker. These economically motivated theories, existing simultaneously in contradiction, opposition, and sometimes along with expressionist and individualistic theories in higher education affected often incompatible messages societal messages that were managed rhetorically through the promise of education. For example, as Marable notes of Black education in the mid-20th century, “education was viewed as a decisive means to end the vicious cycle of racial underdevelopment” (216) even as the realities of how education was itself implicated in maintaining racial inequality were evident to Black Americans.

At the same time, rather than acknowledge the complex ways in which economic realities shaped as well as were shaped by cultural formations such as education and literacy expectations, American ideology assisted to secure the belief that education in-and-of itself could play a direct role in upward mobility. Consequently, “the assumption was that a rhetoric committed to a disinterested objectivity would inevitably discover the validity of the U.S. economic, social, and political arrangements” (“Writing Instruction” 202) rather than an understanding of how the economic and the educational were interdependent of one another. As mentioned above, while social efficiency and life adjustment theoretically dominated writing instruction in the public and secondary schools, in many ways motivated by a more explicitly revealed relationship to civil

society and economic trends, theoretical trends in higher education focused on either the social or the individual, developing and promoting writing curriculum that furthered one agenda or the other.

Interestingly, these theoretical and pedagogical movements functioned as rhetorics of reform while the actual practice within university freshman composition continued to be dominated by current-traditional rhetoric, as Connors notes. He writes, “though [current-traditional rhetoric] was criticized by the journals that began to spring up in the early part of the century, this static form of composition-rhetoric flourished and spread to generation after generation of new composition teachers—usually graduate students—who knew no other rhetorical or pedagogical way” (*Composition Rhetoric* 327-328). As the curricular space that acted as the transition from high school writing to college-level writing, basic writing courses, such as Washington State University’s “Fundamentals in English,” functioned, arguably, as mediation between these overlapping and competing literacy philosophies and policies that developed in conjunction with economic ebb and flow produced by World War I and World War II.

The Rise of Remediation

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, common understandings of the relationship between literacy crises and remediation tend toward functionalist perspectives in composition studies. Functionalist perspectives about remediation argue against remediation’s gatekeeping functions in order to deconstruct the naturalness of remediation—a worthy cause, indeed—yet such arguments often fail to adequately address the complexity of how and why remediation has developed to function in this

way, how the development of remediation in the university is mediated by economic and cultural changes in civil society. Consequently, our understanding of the cultural formation of remediation in academia is limited.

This chapter reads against the traditional selective historical process that produced such readings of remediation in order to better examine one particular historical tradition among composition and remediation, its evolution at a land-grant university over the course of the 20th century. I elaborated the story of the history of remediation at Washington State University, a land-grant institution located in the Pacific Northwest, through an examination and analysis of course catalogs, institutional documents, and published works dating from 1893 to the early 1960s. In doing so, I uncovered how changes in course descriptions, departmental curriculum, and programs can be read as mediated responses to larger cultural as well as economic changes in society. Therefore, I presented one example of the embeddedness of the economy to U.S. literacy patterns by mapping the specific formation of composition and remediation at this institution. Consequently, rather than seeing composition, remediation, and basic writing as academic formations that are related yet distinct from one another, through this analysis—and others like it—we are better positioned as a field to recognize their explicit interconnectedness within academic and societal literacy formation.

CHAPTER SIX

REHISTORICIZING BASIC WRITING

Our challenge is to interpret society in order to change it.

--Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*

The anti-ideological task of those concerned with literacy is to understand how literacy figures into repression and how literacy can change goals. This is to say that we must understand our world in order to do something about our literacy, two tasks that proceed simultaneously.

--J. Elspeth Stuckey, *The Violence of Literacy*

In *Terms of Work for Composition*, Horner offers a cultural materialist critique of composition, a critique that redefines and resituates the work of composition in light of its often elusive and dematerialized representation in our scholarship. “I argue for redefining [composition] sites,” he writes, “in ways that confront their materiality, acknowledging both the power of existing material conditions to shape the work we do in composition and the history of those conditions—that is their susceptibility to changing consciousness and action” (xvi). In other words, Horner calls for a recognition of the ways in which composition’s materiality, because it is process and activity always in the making, affords “counterhegemonic potential” (xvi) within the hegemonic structures of academic writing instruction.

I have attempted a similar critique in my analysis of basic writing by examining rhetorics of basic writing in view of basic writings’ historical cultural formation as active

process. In particular, I argue that in fashioning distinct breaks between composition, remediation, and basic writing, we divorce basic writing from the historical forces and conditions that produce it—from its materiality, that is. The consequences for doing so mean that we misread both the depths of its hegemonic character and the opportunity to genuinely effect social change in the enterprise of basic writing. In moving toward a political economy of basic writing, I have argued the need to reinterpret the hegemonic discourse of basic writing in light of its materiality in order to grasp a more complete understanding of both the hegemonic and the counterhegemonic in basic writing practice.

To do so, as I have at least partially illustrated, requires a much more comprehensive understanding of basic writing formation than we currently recognize. It requires an understanding of hegemony as complex processes: an understanding of hegemony as rhetorical, an understanding of hegemony's embroilment in the material, an understanding of how hegemony as a process embodies the dialectic among the rhetorical and the material in the making of history. Our current discourse of basic writing, however, even when it does attend to the hegemonic in basic writing, tends to reduce the complexity of basic writing formation by, more often than not, eliding or simplifying this dialectic. As a result, conversations have tended to dematerialize rather than materialize basic writing, even among Marxist critiques.

In developing a political economy of basic writing, I have examined the historical formation of basic writing at one land-grant university, Washington State University, uncovering a number of economic and material conditions that affected how remediation and basic writing came about at this particular geographical and historical locale. Furthermore, I have illustrated how this material process, and subsequently other basic

writing material histories, is either not represented or greatly simplified in rhetorics of basic writing, the hegemonic discourse of the field.

Within the discourse of basic writing, a number of overlapping and competing definitions and connotations of basic writing exist, each of which contributes to the formation of the field. Basic writing is at once a program, a classroom, a pedagogy, a practice of a certain kind of student. As embodied in Shaughnessy's legacy, basic writing represents a critique of remediation, a critique that at once comes to be read as transformative and assimilationist, a politics of access and a politics of identity. And while these competing definitions exist because of distinct and often contradictory material forces that have shaped basic writing as a literacy commodity within and without academia across the U.S., our discourse on basic writing, without a comprehensive historical mapping, conflates rather than exploits these distinctions.

Certainly, the political economy of basic writing that I elaborate here is only a beginning in the recuperation and recovery of basic writing formation that needs to happen within the field. In rehistoricizing the field of basic writing, we must work to uncover histories of basic writing and remediation at other kinds of academic institutions, most specifically at community colleges and four-year colleges, the kinds of institutions that are often invisible in our research, yet the kinds of institutions where the majority of basic writing instruction occurs. We must also work to recuperate earlier "basic writing" pedagogies, pedagogies where the rhetorical is emphasized and an understanding of language as situational is made transparent, counterhegemonic moments in the material history of basic writing, such as the likes of Fred Newton Scott's program at University of Michigan during the early part of the 20th century. Furthermore, we need to look to the

counterhegemonic among contemporary composition theory, such as the work of Geneva Smitherman and others in the development of the Students Right to Their Own Language policy. In what follows, I briefly sketch how a political economy of such work might begin.

Basic Writing and Two-Year Colleges

As illustrated earlier, contemporary basic writing pedagogy evolved out of the university at a particular historical moment. Tied to issues of educational reform and committed to assisting students in gaining the skills and conventions of academic discourse, the implied goal is a four-year degree. As such, it makes sense, perhaps, that basic writing theory is concerned with the four-year university experience rather than the two-year college experience. And as Lynn Quitman Troyka pointed out years ago, “most authors who research about basic writing teach in four year colleges. When they write about their own students, which they usually do, the students are not representative of the diversity of basic writers in our college classes” (9). Yet the majority of basic writing classrooms in the United States are, most certainly, located within two-year colleges, so more discussion about basic writing in these locales needs to take place, discussion that moves beyond conventional arguments about how two-year colleges function only to maintain societal hierarchies.

While the issues surrounding basic writing in the university are similar to those surrounding it at the two-year college in that both kinds of institutions are concerned with introduction to academic literacy in basic writing classrooms, the contexts of the institutions vary significantly. The greatest distinctions between these various kinds of

basic writing experiences are the local material conditions and the cultural climate of the two-year college versus the university. A political economy of basic writing, therefore, needs to explore how the cultural formation of two-year institutions has affected, and continues to affect, basic writing programs, curriculum, and pedagogy found at such distinct institutions.

Pinpointing the beginning of community colleges in the U.S. is a difficult task because of the varied transformations and purposes of two-year colleges over the years. As mentioned earlier, Kitzhaber documents the rise of community colleges during the 1960s, yet two-year institutions existed long before this period. In *The American Community College*, Arthur M. Cohen and Florence B. Brawer identify the early to mid 1900s as the historical development of community colleges, also known at the time as junior colleges. These junior colleges developed to accommodate the rising percentages of high school graduates seeking admittance to higher education. One major argument for the building of junior colleges rather than the expansion of enrollment at universities was the pressure from prominent contemporary educators that junior colleges might relieve universities of the burden of teaching general education. Thus, this move would allow universities to better focus on scholarship and research (6). Early on, then, a distinction between the work of teaching general education and scholarship divided community colleges into alternative institutions that lacked the professionalization that scholarship afforded university faculty. This distinction ties directly to Troyka's observation that the scholarship surrounding basic writing theory usually comes out of universities where such work is expected and valued as cultural capital. Two-year college

instructors, however, are not often rewarded for or expected to produce scholarship in the same ways. To do so, they must make time among a teaching schedule that often includes up to five courses per semester (Alford and Kroll v).

With community colleges being developed in order to serve the needs to the universities in their early years, they also evolved into secondary school extensions. At the same time that community colleges were being slated to prepare students for university work, Cohen and Brawer report that educators also imagined these two-year colleges might provide some students with terminal vocational training (8). Interestingly, then, the community college originated with the vision of serving young students, students transitioning between the borders of adolescence and adulthood. This borderland metaphor continues in the contemporary community college experience, but instead of signaling a borderland for traditional students, today it more often constitutes a borderland for nontraditional students: returning students, displaced workers, folks lacking the academic skills for entry into university work. This distinction from universities, the community colleges commitment to a nontraditional and diverse student population, further illuminates why basic writing theory has not found a firm grounding in the community college classroom. While university basic writing works toward the main goal of success within the university community, the goals of the community college basic writing classroom are guided by the mission of the community college enterprise. A political economy of basic writing must examine how the distinct student population at two-year institutions, as well as such institutions' distinct missions, contribute to basic writing as it is practiced in community colleges.

In “Community College Literacy: is the Middle Right,” Joseph Howard and Wayne S. Obetz describe the mission of community colleges in five goals: preparing students for transfer to universities, preparing students for careers, remediating basic skills, providing general education, and offering community services (126). Consequently, community colleges attract diverse and variant students which come to the colleges with various degrees of college level/academic skills. The conflict between vocational and university training illustrates the contradictory nature that arises within community colleges as they focus on multiple missions. As Villanueva observes in *Bootstraps*, “the community is not college in the same way the University is. The community college is torn between vocational training and preparing the underprepared for traditional university work. And it seems unable to resolve the conflict” (69). In terms of outcomes, university training at the two-year college offers the promise of upward mobility, the opportunity to rise in class rank. In other words, it offers access to the American dream. On the other hand, the simultaneous emphasis on vocational training at such institutions more often than not appears to serve the status quo. It affords the impression of offering the American dream and class mobility while in reality it supports class, race, and even gender hierarchies. This assumption is most prominent in how the mission of “remediating basic skills”—particularly literacy skills—dovetails with the others mentioned above. Seemingly, students are trained in functional literacies in order to supply the capitalist enterprise with laborers.

This contradiction speaks to what Charles Reitz, in “Elements of Education: Critical Pedagogy and the Community College,” names as the stated and unstated functions of community colleges: “the schools maintain illusions of equal opportunity

and unimpeded mobility even while they program students for different roles in an unequal society: sorting, selecting, and channeling them in ways that preserve the current class system” (198). A political economy of basic writing, however, might interrogate these functionalist assumptions by examining the ways in which universities and two-year college literacy instruction are both affected by the rise of the knowledge economy, albeit in distinct ways.

As mentioned earlier, little basic writing scholarship concerns itself with the two-year experience. When it does, however, a major theme focuses on the gatekeeping function of the two-year institution. In “The Struggle for Mobility in the Contact Zone of Basic Writing,” Stanford T. Goto addresses this issue. Returning to the early days of open admissions, Goto states that the high drop out rates at community colleges amidst the seeming success of diverse student bodies resulted in cynical references to open-door policies as “revolving doors” (41). Obligated to let anyone attend in the name of educational equality, community colleges simultaneously found that they served a “cooling out” function in a society of limited opportunities.

Similar to conversations surrounding literacy thresholds at universities, standards became an issue when mass numbers of underprepared students attempted to move through the educational system; however, in this instance the two-year college became the gatekeeper to the university. Instead of questioning whether or not basic writing should exist at all—as has been the case within most universities since the 1960s or so—as mentioned above, community colleges embraced the work of remediation as unquestionably part of the institution’s mission. While nontraditional students in the universities were labeled as basic writers, a label that historically worked to designate

folks as “other than” even as the goal of basic writing pedagogy was educational equality, the same did not occur at community colleges because the majority of the students at the community colleges *were* nontraditional. Thus, the two-year college “could act like a conduit, taking in underprepared students and allowing them to be successful in regular academic work,” and at the same time the larger educational system “would live up to the promise of open access without having to change standards of academic excellence” (41). In turn, however, in an unequal educational system, the two-year college became the logical place to hold and “fix” these unskilled students. Yet a political economy of basic writing that focuses on social material practice might work to recuperate counterhegemonic pedagogical practices among this dominant hegemonic process. At the very least, a political economy of basic writing must attend to the cultural and economic contradictions that produced the formation and reformation of two-year colleges in relations to universities.

Fred Newton Scott at University of Michigan

As noted earlier, the composition history we are most familiar with is the story of Harvard. Yet alongside this Harvard tradition, the work of Fred Newton Scott at University of Michigan reveals a progressive pedagogy that speaks to many of the contemporary concerns surrounding the teaching of basic writing today. Of Scott’s work, Kitzhaber writes, “students coming to him who had been trained to look at language as primarily a matter of technical correctness found that Scott had a more functionalist view. Correctness was necessary but far from being the chief purpose of composition work” (*Rhetoric* 71). In particular, then, Scott focused on the rhetorical nature of writing and

emphasized this point in his pedagogy. While Scott's work must also be read as part of the tradition of composition, a cultural material analysis of his contributions might provide some insight into an alternative basic writing legacy.

Scott's work at the University of Michigan included active participation in the University's secondary school where "the linguistic shortcomings of entering freshman" were addressed and lamented (*Rhetoric* 72). Rather than blaming the students for their perceived shortcomings, Scott focused on the institutional relationships among universities and high school, arguing that by working together, teachers at both institutions might better assist students with their composition skills. A political economy of basic writing would examine the transgressive potential in Scott's work, working to recover a counterhegemonic tradition in remediation practices in order to interrogate the ubiquitousness of the Harvard model.

Students' Right to Their Own Language

In *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, Harris notes that Shaughnessy's 'discovery' of basic writing pedagogy is not necessarily historically accurate. He writes:

the 'frontier' Shaughnessy claimed to stumble upon was already quite well developed, that even though the field of composition was not disciplined or professionalized in the same ways it is now, many teachers and writers had for some time been dealing with much the same sorts of issues. (79)

In particular, Harris cites Geneva Smitherman's work with language education as an example of one scholar addressing issues of language competency and pedagogy. And to be sure, Smitherman's scholarly work has both recuperated and furthered critical study

on the relationship between linguistics, composition, and pedagogy as they relate to assumptions about academic literacy, standards, and language policies in higher education, particularly with respect to students of color. Specifically, Smitherman's "The Historical Struggle for Language Rights in CCCC" provides a historical overview of the language policy debates that spurred the Students' Right to Their Own Language resolution, published in *CCCC* in 1974.

The resolution is worth quoting in full for what it implies about how writing pedagogy ought to be approached:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language (xv).

Like Shaughnessy's basic writing pedagogy, the resolution argues against a student language deficit model and, furthermore, proposes that it is *how* teachers teach rather than *how* students come to the classroom that ought to be significantly revamped. Unlike Shaughnessy's pedagogy, however, the resolution does not succumb to a focus on surface errors in its implications for academic writing. Instead, the resolution implies a focus on

what Smitherman calls “communicative competence”: the assumption that the “the ability to communicate effectively” (*Talkin and Testifyin* 228-229) depends on a whole range of rhetorical contexts and considerations, acknowledging that academic discourse is certainly one such discourse but not the only one, not a superior one, and certainly not the standard one. A political economy of basic writing might uncover the social-historical processes that brought Shaughnessy’s pedagogy to the forefront in basic writing while Students’ Right to Their Own Language initiatives enjoyed rhetorical favor with little material changes actually occurring within the field as a result.

Toward a Political Economy

Reading basic writing as a political economy means attending to the whole range of economic, cultural, and social factors that have contributed to the formation of basic writing as an academic literacy that is continuously made and remade in relation to civil society. Consequently, we must also learn to read students enrolled in basic writing classrooms as workers negotiating the contradictions of capitalism, as citizens shaped by and shaping the economic and cultural forces, as people marked by the landscape of history. Doing so, as Mark Jury suggests, means that we must “recognize students not as helpless in the face of change, but instead as a legitimate part of the processes that influence change” (237). In this regard, basic writing courses need to be understood in their full cultural contexts as courses in academic literacy, courses where students are introduced to academic writing yet also equipped with the ability to critique it, to recognize it for what it is: an economy. And our best bet in assisting students in this process is to reinterpret our field’s understanding of basic writing. That is, we must

interrogate our rhetorics of basic writing in light of basic writing's economic and historical cultural formation. A political economy of basic writing moves us in this direction.

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