Conference on Composition and Communication  
Chicago, March 22-25, 2006  
Notes from Vivette Beuster

Coming to Terms: Implications of Labeling Practices for Second-Language Writers  
(Presenters: Paul Matsuda, Diane Belcher, Jean Hall, Shondel Nero)

- Teacher attitudes (e.g., formed through training, society, contact with other teachers) affect how they assess student papers.
- The labels that we give certain students also elicit attitudes. The presenters explained two kinds of labels we give non-native English speakers
  - Folk: E.g., the labels ESL (English as a second language) or ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) are linked to students who are immigrants or refugees. These students are often disempowered (had to leave their countries for political or economic reasons) and are studying English through US funded programs. There is often also a class issue (unemployed or lower status jobs).
  - Elite: E.g., IESL (intensive English as a second language), IEP (intensive English preparation), or EFL (English as a foreign language). These acronyms often refer to academic preparation programs for international students who choose to come to the US and will go back to their countries when they complete their studies. They are financially independent.
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- Teachers often grade on what students do not know and not on what they know. This has a negative affect how we grade student work.
- According to one of their studies, teachers often referred to the racial groups (e.g., Haitian) when dealing with weak students, but when they dealt with stronger students, race was not mentioned.

Emotional Labor: The Work of Teaching  
(Presenters: Devon Cook, Darrell Fike, Stephanie Cox)

- We might want to consider responding to student papers with more compassion and this can be done through
  - Acknowledgement—making students see that you understand where they are coming from
  - Empathy—responding to them as human beings
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• Emotion labor/work (based upon the work of Arlie Hochschild—The Managed Heart). There are two kinds of emotion labor we do in the class
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• When we do not do emotion work, consequences are unhappy students, students who do not learn, and bad teacher evaluations
• How to do deep acting?
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  o Approach all students as “interesting”
  o Think about the students as if they were your children (find a space where you can do deep acting)
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• Create a virtual student (let your students name her/him) and use this student as a conversation partner in class to act out some of your frustrations (e.g., let the virtual student ask dumb questions, hand in papers late, give lame excuses for bad assignments and then respond to her/him)

Creating a Common Space for Native and Nonnative English Speakers in Composition
(Presenters: Margaret Rustick, Sarah Nielsen, Kimberly Contino, Sunny Hyon)

• The advantages of ‘native’ and ‘nonnative’ TAs
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- **Troyka**: We need to promote the two-year college mission to graduate schools so that they can better prepare graduate students for the unique challenges they will face when teaching in community colleges.

- **Bodmer**: We need to closely integrate and synthesize the three areas of faculty, students, and curriculum. The boundaries between these three areas need to blur more than they have in the past.

- **Newman**: As Troyka noted, we need to do more with helping graduate students prepare to teach in the community college system. What and who we teach in community colleges needs to be part of the curriculum offered to graduate students who plan to teach at a community college.

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- **Wooten**: There needs to be an increased focus on mentoring first generation college students. Given a recent research study done by Penrose on the literature published about first generation college students, community colleges need to do more to respond to the needs of these students. Mentoring is a key part of how we need to respond.

- **Wiley**: We as educators at two-year colleges need to continue to challenge the realities that are perpetuated regarding community colleges in order to help our communities have a broader and more realistic vision of what community colleges can do and who they can serve.

- **Q&A**: There was a lively discussion that followed the panelists’ presentations, and it focused primarily on part-time faculty. The consensus was that we need to do more to mentor part-time faculty. This could take many forms including such things as providing full-time faculty mentors to each part-time faculty member, offering part-time faculty memberships to professional organizations and money to attend conferences so as to help them stay current in their field, and mentoring part-time faculty through the application and hiring process for full-time positions.
2) Another session that I attended that related directly to assessment was one in which a panel of speakers from a variety of four-year schools reflected on the benefits of assessment on their writing programs. Some of their comments are as follows:

- **Benefits to Program:** Portfolios can be used to assess a program and whether or not students are exiting as “ready,” and this can benefit the program. The program benefits because there is a clearer knowledge amongst faculty within the program as to the specific strengths and weaknesses of students’ skills and abilities. For example at the University of Rhode Island they discovered that there were places in their curriculum where they reinforced writing outcomes too repetitively and other places where they expected students to know outcomes that had not been introduced previously in the curriculum. Their assessment work has helped them to strengthen their programmatic curriculum by adding outcomes and sometimes whole courses where there were gaps between what they wanted students to learn and what they were providing through instruction.

- **Benefits to Students:** In addition, the students also benefit when the process of reflection asks them to make conscious what they learned and are still in the process of learning. The students also benefit from the process of re-seeing the texts in their portfolio as they further revise them, select pieces for the portfolio, and decide how to arrange those pieces in the portfolio. While we here at GRCC have focused a lot on the benefits of assessment to teachers and programs, we haven’t really focused on the benefits to students. This panel highlighted how assessment can benefit multiple players within the educational system.

- **Emerging Questions from Panel:** Given the reports from these schools, I left wondering if GRCC needs to revisit its Written Communication Outcome Competencies in order to make them more inclusive. For example, when the University of Rhode Island shared their writing outcomes, they included such things as reflective learning and ability to evaluate and respond to the writing of others (peer review). I have a full list of their outcomes on a handout should GRCC want to see them, but they are broader than ours and may give us ideas should we want to add to or revise the ones we have.

3) I also attended a session on rubrics. This was led by a panelist of instructors from three universities in Arizona and one instructor from the University of Miami. The panelists from Arizona described a project they did between the three major Arizona universities in which they were trying to develop common outcomes for their English 101 courses. They build a common rubric, collected student work from a sample of English 101 classes at each university, and assessed the samples to determine student levels and outcomes learned in the various sections of the course. The panelist from the U. of Miami focused on what instructors in his program have learned about the value of using rubrics both in the classroom and across classes at the program level. The following are some benefits that all panelists noted:

- **Rubrics are most valid when they are highly contextualized and tailored by the specific group that plans to use it.**
- **Assessment using rubrics is most useful and accurate when it is localized and addresses the following questions:** What is it that you want to know about/from the teachers and students? How will you gather the information? Who will use the information? Will there be a report? What will ensure accuracy? How will the assessment help the institution? Who will be impacted by the assessment project and will these individuals have a say in
the process? What institutional restraints and/or resource restraints constrain the assessment? Note: I thought these questions were great ones to apply to all assessment projects at GRCC, too!

- Rubrics can help us define what makes effective writing.
- Rubrics’ value is to help create a dialogue and start a conversation. Sometimes it’s not the answer as much as the conversation that helps us better define our understanding, and rubrics help us to have that conversation.
- Students learn from rubrics in a variety of ways. They learn what to focus on in their writing. They learn the criteria that can help them improve their writing, which helps them focus their efforts in the writing classroom. Rubrics can be great guides for peer review because they provide the questions one needs to ask of their writing. Specific feedback given via a rubric can help students build confidence in their writing as they learn what they need to focus on to improve as well as what they are already doing well. Rubrics help students understand the meaning behind grades. Note: Again, this focus on benefits to students is a good one and is one that GRCC could try to engage better in its assessment work.
- Rubrics are best when they are adapted for each assignment and purpose.

My Overall Reflections on Assessment:

Three primary things struck me as I listened to different presentations on assessment at CCCCs. The first thing that struck me was how many different colleges are doing assessment. It’s not just community colleges in our state that have state mandates requiring assessment work; four-year and two-year colleges across the nation are having to do this. Furthermore there are quite a few commonalities between what we are doing, which include gathering student work and using rubrics to assess that work at the classroom level, program level, and even between colleges. Therefore, I think we are on track at GRCC with our assessment efforts.

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Finally, I was struck by how other schools have emphasized student reactions to assessment. This is an area for GRCC to explore and perhaps add to its current assessment work. We need to explore questions like, “Is assessment making a difference for students? How?” Perhaps this is something we can integrate into our assessment work in the next few years.
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Longitudinal Studies: Tales from the Field
(Presenters: Anne Herrington, Anne Beaufort, Nancy Sommers, Andrea Lunsford)

- **Herrington:** In her talk, titled “Challenges in Longitudinal Case Studies,” Harrington pointed out that longitudinal studies sound very comprehensive, but she explained that her experience has showed they are partial as well. She called them studies of “persons in process,” and she says this influences the decisions about the type of study. For Harrington, four groups or four individuals seem to be the “magic number” in terms of manageability. In her talk, she said that her task in the longitudinal study she conducted at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, was to construct an “interpretive tale” that described students in enough detail to ensure that her readers would recognize “their” students in the research. Another challenge that she and her researchers faced then were their own subject positions as they positioned themselves alongside the students as an ally. To illustrate, she gave an example of a “telling moment” in her research when a student subject asked her, “What’s an essay?” Herrington realized that that was the key question they were all trying to answer. She concluded by calling writing teachers to strengthen the research component of our field and develop the link between research and practice.

- **Beaufort:** Beaufort conducted an ethnography in the workplace—she followed five writers through college and then interviewed them two years later (they had saved their writing from college.) She quoted Andrea Fishman, saying, “Ethnography is more than description. It makes the invisible visible.” This sort of research articulates the ineffable, and implicit—explicit.

- **Sommers:** At Harvard, Sommers tracked the writing experiences of 400 students, a quarter of the class of 2001, through a combination of surveys, in-depth interviews, and analysis of individual essays. One of Sommers most interesting claims was when she said, “the reason you do a longitudinal study is for the students.” She discussed how they cultivated a study loyalty in the participating students with free pizza, gift baskets during finals week (with chocolate!), etc., but the happy irony is that the researchers ended up developing a study loyalty themselves! Sommers described the interviews as a “rare hour in an over-subscribed university life,” where students “seduced us with their passions” and discussed “a full range of life experiences and writing difficulties.” She also pointed out that the researchers had to struggle not to influence students’ progress.

- **Lunsford:** Referring to something that Herrington had said in her talk, Lunsford claimed that she was in a “Muddled” state regarding the longitudinal study she is currently conducting at Stanford. She says it’s important to “think meta”—very important—but hard to sustain. According to Lunsford, “The questions students ask mirror our own.”
Condon began by introducing Walter Ong’s claim in *Orality and Textuality*, where Ong identifies the Greek innovation of vowels as the turning point that democratized writing. Vowels allowed writers to render the sound of their language in writing, which meant that for the first time in history, a writer could communicate with a wide audience, one that did not share the high level of pre-existing context that would allow the reader to know that “evltn” is supposed to mean "evaluation," not "evolution." If vowels democratized writing, Condon stated, then the European Enlightenment movement to enforce correctness had the effect of reversing that democratization. For more than two hundred years, this essentially conservative demand for correctness has returned writing to the domain of the elite—just at a point in history when print might well have completed the democratizing influence that vowels began.

As a culture, Condon said, we cannot allow this trend to continue. He claims “it is time we admitted that this creature of a white European male Enlightenment was a major wrong turn. In an America with an ever-increasing set of dialects, in a world where the linguistic reality of World Englishes is rapidly coming into its own, Western culture can no longer afford to enforce narrow ideas of "standard" or "edited" or simply “correct” English.”

Condon points out that it’s not hard to share, quoting Joe Harris in *A Teaching Subject* and Beason in “Ethos and Error,” claiming that an open sharing of language will push the focus from correctness in writing to an emphasis on substance and clarity. If our focus shifts to the ability to understand the *substance* of writing, Condon claims, then correctness is “way down on that list.” He claims that correctness “needs assessment,” and that we need to find out what our students know—not what they don’t know.

He also pointed out that we have been placing students for a long time when they enter the university, but since we use vertical structures (often based on correctness) we don’t have many places in which to place students. For example, at Condon’s institution, Washington State University, they cannot teach developmental reading and writing because they are a state university—the legislature will not fund them for it. He urges us to think about what it would mean to place students horizontally.

Another interesting point he made was that students make mistakes; in fact, learners of any language make mistakes, and the international community has provisions for errors. To illustrate, he pointed out that English is the language of science. In Condon’s experience, science faculty were much more tolerant, in general, of language variation than our colleagues in the humanities are—since scientists are accustomed to accommodating the Englishes spoken by their colleagues and graduate students. He said, “We need to know what students know how to do so we can help them figure out what they need to learn.” He also urged us to work harder to spread the writing throughout the curriculum. Condon concluded by saying that as we admit that—whether we like it or want it or not—English does and will have many forms, both within a single diverse nation and around the world, then we will have to devise needs assessments in order to know what degree of understandability a given student needs to develop. Our
assessment instruments and our curriculum must grow more student-centered. Thus, in taking what might seem a step backward to a time when non-standard English did not exist—because there was no *standard* English to diverge from—we actually take many steps forward, in directions we have long been moving.

**How Assessment Can Promote WAC and Faculty Development: A Coalition of Administration and Faculty**  
(Presenters: John Bean, Carol Rutz, and Jackie Lauer-Glebov)

*Bean:* John Bean presented the results of an assessment project conducted in the English department at Seattle University. First, he described the process the English faculty used to assess research papers written by seniors in upper division literature courses. During Fall and Winter quarters of 2004 to 2005, twelve English faculty used rubrics to assess the quality of research papers written for embedded assignments in their upper division literature courses. Each faculty member reported his or her scoring of students’ papers with three broad categories: “strong,” “good/ok,” and “weak/marginal.”

During Stage Two of the process, four professors submitted to the Curriculum and Assessment Committee an example of “strong,” “good/ok,” and “weak/marginal” paper; three of the professors submitted papers in one or two of the categories. These papers (N=16) were coded with the students’ and professors names’ removed and scored by two-person faculty teams using a rubric. A third reader examined the papers for adherence to MLA documentation. The third and final stage involved a discussion of the results by the Curriculum and Assessment Committee and then by the department as a whole at its all-day meeting on June 10th, 2005.

In a handout, Bean discussed the results of the overall assessment of the quality of the papers: Faculty rated 46% of the papers as “strong,” 43% as “good/ok,” and 11% as “weak/marginal.” Another finding I found interesting was the correlation of instructor scores with blind team-scoring: of the 16 papers that were blind-scored, 12 received the same score as those given by the instructor. In three cases, the blind-scoring was lower than the instructor’s score; in one case the blind scoring was higher.

Bean also discussed the results of the assessment in terms of adherence to MLA conventions for citations and document design. Of the 16 papers submitted, six followed MLA conventions for “first page” format and eight followed conventions for appearance of a “Works Cited.” Fourteen papers followed MLA conventions for internal citations.

When the faculty discussed the results of the assessment project, they seemed “reasonably pleased” with the quality of the senior work. The results of the blind scoring suggest that faculty are consistent in their grading standards. Because the rubric used emphasizes advanced conceptual skills (articulating an interpretive problem, formulating a contestable thesis, etc.) the department felt it was setting the bar at the appropriate level. Another interesting finding Bean pointed out was the faculty realized that there was not department consensus on asking students to follow genre conventions for MLA document design.

The faculty decided to use the results to...
o form subcommittees to meet during summer 2005 to develop examples of appropriate kinds of writing assignments for the 200-level, 300-level, and 400-level courses and to specify specific learning outcomes associated with each level.

o To present subcommittee findings at the plenary department meeting in the fall.

o To adopt with modifications the rubric used in the blind scoring for 400-level research papers

o To develop a plan to identify weak writers in the 200-level “reading” courses and hold departmental meetings on how to provide extra help/mentoring/coursework for them.

During the Q&A session, another colleague from a community college asked how these projects might be adapted for students at a two-year college. When I added to her question, briefly summarizing our upcoming assessment work on the Campus Wide Writing Outcomes, John Bean said he would be happy to work with us as we develop our project.

**Rutz:** Rutz began by giving us the Associate Dean of Carleton College’s 10 Principles for Administrators:

1) Be there for faculty
2) Support faculty development initiatives that bring faculty together in a low stakes environment.
3) Listen to faculty; listen and connect; put complaints to work.
4) Be a matchmaker; remember who is talking about X and put interested parties together.
5) Offer logistical support, from setting up a meeting to funding a speaker or pointing toward a grant opportunity.
6) Bring in external speakers and hold workshops; learning communities are as good for faculty as they are for students.
7) Cultivate faculty leadership to avoid “boutique” operations that wither when their originators lost interest or leave the college.
8) Be alert; be ready to break logjams by reminding all parties of common purposes.
9) Be the voice of reason; idealistic faculty will want to do all things, and sustainable limits must be observed.
10) Remember assessment; even mandates can be faculty development bonanzas.

She also explained the faculty development connected to their sophomore portfolio:

- Reading placement exams for new students each August
- Annual workshops on Writing Across the Curriculum (December)
- Annual portfolio scoring sessions in June
- Summer grants to develop or revise courses using writing
- Summer grants to publish about new/revised courses
- Brown bag sessions for informal discussion
- Speaker series
Rutz also presented a series of graphs showing 1) The Threshold Effect of Faculty Development, and 2) Sustaining a Relationship Between Faculty Development and Student Performance. The first graph showed the mean number of papers appearing in student portfolios and the number of faculty development events participated in. Both numbers have been steadily climbing since the advent of the sophomore portfolio. The second graph showed the mean number of assignments in portfolios since 2003, along with the number of faculty development events participated in since 2000—again both numbers climbed steadily. Rutz used these graphs to show that the more faculty development events faculty participated in, the more likely students were to use work from their course in the student portfolios.

*Lauer-Glebov:* Lauer-Glebov showed us a visual of the double-helix model they had used at Carleton as a metaphor for the process of the faculty development portfolio. She explained that quality is a major retention issue, and that traditional forms of assessment were missing the faculty development piece. Lauer-Glebov made it clear that in order for assessment to close the loop, faculty development must be sustained. She also showed us how, when using the double-helix model for other assessment projects, the way that the different pieces (teaching, student performance, assessment, faculty development, curriculum, and learning outcomes) fit into the structure in a completely different order.