

WRITING ABOUT WRITING  
IN BASIC WRITING:

*A Teacher/Researcher/Activist Narrative*

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VOLUME 8-9 (2009/2010): DOUBLE ISSUE

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In her introduction to this provocative 2009/2010 Double Issue, co-editor Susan Naomi Bernstein offers a new and productive metaphor to describe basic writing (BW): *an old growth forest*. In the pages that follow, I'd like to call your attention to yet another perspective on the "old growth forest" represented in *BWe* 8/9: the activist stance I see embedded in a writing-about-writing approach to BW--both in the classroom and, by extension, through more explicitly activist projects like the [Council of Writing Program Administrator's](#) National Conversation on Writing ([NCoW](#)).

Accordingly, engaging students and the general public in writing studies as a *discipline* may offer a critical path in the old growth forest--labeling the trees, perhaps, and offering hikers guides that foreground the various ecosystems and living histories previous researchers have discovered there. Many of the articles in *BWe* 8/9 follow this path, as you will see.

The intended audience for this narrative is dedicated writing teachers not already immersed in the various communities and conversations discussed below, though I hope that even those deeply familiar with these issues will find a fresh perspective here as well. It is a personal tale but I'd like to suggest that through such retellings of our individual stories may emerge the *collective* stories inhabiting the "old growth forest" we call BW.

***Public Perceptions of Writing  
and Writing Instruction***

*Many stories in the media  
would have us think of writing as  
a one-size-fits-all skill, learned  
once and used repeatedly, a skill  
used only in school or at work.*

*Many stories . . . continue to  
bemoan the declining writing  
skills of students and graduates.*

*[S]tories [like these] are  
creating generations of  
"battered writers" who fear or  
resist writing, see no value in  
writing, and do not consider  
themselves to be writers. We  
want to change these stories and  
their results.*

**Their Story:**

Since the 1975 *Newsweek* cover story that asked "Why Johnny Can't Write," the American public has been deluged with one set of messages, messages that haven't really asked WHY Johnny can't write, but proclaimed that he just can't. And those messages clearly point a finger at the work of literacy educators at all levels of the U. S. educational system.

"Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semi-literates."  
*Newsweek*, December 1975

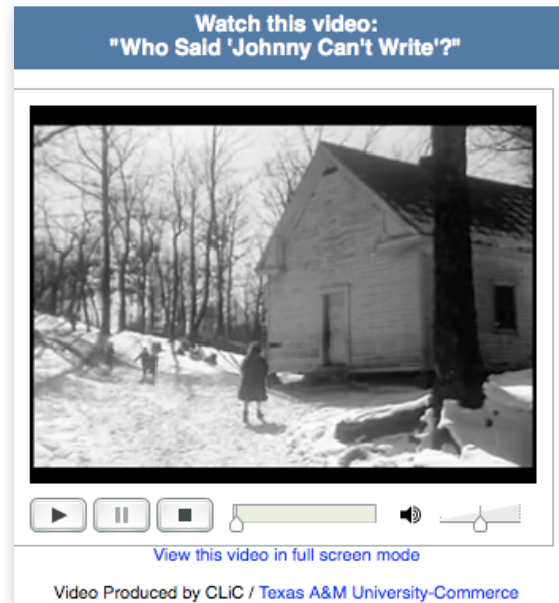


--National Conversation on  
Writing ([NCoW](#)), "We Believe" ([NCoW.org](#) 2006)

From its inception, Basic Writing has been about writing. BW teachers teach writing. BW programs help struggling writers succeed in academic contexts. BW research informs teachers and programs in this important work.

Yet as simple as that may sound to outsiders, our readers know better. As we know quite well, teaching writing is actually far from “simple,” even in the best of circumstances. Of course few of our readers are likely to describe BW’s situation today as “the best of circumstances,” especially as we struggle against increasingly invasive top-down policies and dwindling budgets. Our readers have seen model BW programs dismantled, BW students blocked from full admittance to college despite sophisticated performances as writers, BW courses forced into mediocrity by increasingly invasive testing practices uninformed by decades of research in BW and related fields.

For us, the extreme disconnect between the realities of writing and public perceptions is more than a mere *inconvenience*. Public perceptions often help shape public policy, which in turn, affect institutional choices and, far too often, our BW classrooms and students. As long as public perceptions of writing remain uninformed by the day-to-day and research-based realities of writing, our remaining BW students will continue to suffer.



--National Conversation on Writing, “Who Said ‘Johnny Can’t Write’?” ([video](#)).

**Our Story:**

Johnny ~~can't~~ write

~~Johnny~~ can write

Everyone ~~can~~ write

**Everyone is a writer!**

**As teachers of writing, we have different stories to tell:**

Though the indictment has centered on literacy educators and “the U. S. educational system,” professionals in our field know that this monolithic indictment does not tell the whole story. Despite the very real challenges of writing instruction, this crisis mentality fails to reveal the serious work in literacy education—and the real commitment to writing among our students—that exists on every day in schools and colleges all around the U. S. We know that students do write, in many modes and for many purposes.

**Our stories need to be told.**

--NCoW, “Their Story/Our Story: Who Said ‘Johnny Can’t Write’?” ([Campaign](#))

Indeed, as a new WPA less than ten years ago, I too struggled to find practical solutions to the complex problems I found in our BW program at a regional public, PhD-granting university in Texas. My struggles taught me the strategic value of writing about writing (WAW), talking about writing (NCoW), and the vibrant communities that surround and inform these efforts (including the [Writing About Writing Network](#) and the [National Conversation on Writing](#)). In short, writing about writing taught me I was not alone. I share my story as a way to introduce the pedagogy and practice of writing about writing represented by several of the articles in this issue (see especially Bird, J. Charlton, and C. Charlton). I would like to suggest the activist potential I see embedded in such projects, at least as I’ve experienced them.

## Writing About Writing

[A writing-about-writing approach] seeks . . . to improve students' understanding of writing, rhetoric, language, and literacy in a course that is topically oriented to reading and writing as scholarly inquiry and encouraging more realistic understandings of writing. (Downs and Wardle 553)

For decades, the core activity in most writing courses has been writing. Just as writing teachers teach writing, writing students write. Just as painting teachers teach painting, painting students paint. But while research in writing studies has always informed many writing teachers, few students populating these introductory courses knew such research even existed. First-year composition students were rarely made

A writing-about-writing approach (WAW) foregrounds research in writing and related studies by asking students to read and discuss key research in the discipline and contribute to the scholarly conversation themselves.

aware of any of the numerous and extensive studies of individual writing processes (including Emig 1971; Perl 1979; Flower 1981) or longitudinal studies of developing writers across multiple years (like Sternglass 1997; Sommers 2006). Few BW students were introduced to studies of the complex ways literacy and numeracy function in the everyday lives of ordinary people (Brandt 1990, 2001, 2009; Selfe and Hawisher 2004; Heath 1983; Saxe 1988; Barton and Hamilton 1998). Rarely did

students in our general education courses hear about Mina Shaughnessy's extensive study of common errors creeping into the writing of struggling college students (*Errors and Expectations* 1977). Given that such information is rarely included in introductory course materials, it is little wonder the general population knows so very little about our discipline.

A few years ago, writing teachers, scholars, and administrators across the country began to change that<sup>1</sup> --some working together, some working independently, but many now aligning themselves with an informal community called the Writing About Writing Network (WAWN), which I'll discuss more in a moment. A writing-about-writing *approach* foregrounds research in writing and related studies by asking students to read and discuss key research in the discipline and contribute to the scholarly conversation themselves.

Though it would be some years before I would know to call it "writing about writing" (WAW) or even that such a movement existed, I arrived at a WAW approach rather abruptly soon after taking my first tenure-track post as graduate faculty, administrator, and teacher trainer at a small BW program in Texas. The political constraints placed on public schools and universities in Texas are well known and I have written about them extensively elsewhere (see Carter "Redefining," Carter *The Way Literacy Lives*, and Carter "Living Inside"), so I will refrain from rehearsing these arguments here. Suffice it to say that the BW program I inherited in 2001 was well

. . . our cornerstone course must resist conventional but inaccurate models of writing. A [writing about writing approach to FYC] shifts the central goal from teaching "academic writing" to teaching realistic and useful conceptions of writing—perhaps the most significant of which would be that writing is neither basic nor universal but content- and context-contingent and irreducibly complex. (Downs and Wardle 2007)

I wanted . . . new tutors and teachers to have a broader understanding of how writing works and what the research tells us about how to best support developing writers.

informed by what the research tells us about how writing works, yet public perceptions and policies continued to work against our program, our teachers, and, most regrettably, our students.

Most pressing for me was to train our brand new teachers and tutors to provide the best instruction possible. Almost without fail, these educators were committed to BW. They cared

<sup>1</sup> One of the earliest proponents of such an approach may be Nancy DeJoy, as cogently described in her accessible and provocatively titled *Process This*. (2002). Also important is Susan Miller's *Textual Carnivals*.

deeply about the students and worked very hard to ensure their success. However, very few had any previous training in writing studies. Thus my original decision to switch our curriculum to one more directly and obviously *about* writing was a practical one: I wanted these new teachers and tutors to know something of the key research informing our BW program's philosophy and best practices, and the

As Mike Rose explains in *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (2005), when we dismiss the intelligence necessary to install a new toilet in an older home, color hair without drying it out, or effectively serve a restaurant full of hungry customers, we "develop limited educational programs and fail to make fresh and meaningful connections among disparate kinds of skill and knowledge" (216).

quickest way to get this information to these educators was to embed it in the course materials they used to prepare for the BW classes and writing groups they led. I wanted them to know something about why asking these struggling writers to read difficult texts might actually help them "make meaning" (see Bird in this issue). I wanted these new teachers to understand the deep connections between reading and writing and the pedagogical value of sequenced writing assignments (see especially Barthomae and Petrosky's *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts*). I wanted them to listen carefully for unexpected (but smart!) interpretations their students might provide (Rose and Hull, "This Wooden Shack Place"; DiPardo, "Lessons From Fan-

nie"). I wanted them to know something about unique role of the tutor (Harris, "Talking in the Middle") and the complexity of the writing process (Rose, "Narrowing the Mind and Page") and correctness (Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations*; Hartwell, "Grammar, Grammars"; Williams, "The Phenomenology of Error"). In short, I wanted these new tutors and teachers to have a broader understanding of how writing works and what the research tells us about how to best support developing writers.

Very quickly, however, I learned that our BW students benefited from this subject matter as well (see especially J. Charlton's essay in this issue). Of course they all had previous experiences as writers although, not unlike BW students across the country, few brought into our BW program many *successful* experiences as writers in academic contexts. When we began asking them to write about their own experiences as writers and draw that into conversation with research on literacy practices in video games (Gee), manual and service labor (Rose) and metaphors in activity theory like "ball-using" (Russell) and "flow" (Smith and Wilhelm), our BW students became increasingly empowered. It seemed we were onto something (see Carter "Basic Writing" and "Redefining Literacy").

Unaware that a movement informed by similar arguments and research was growing in strength--albeit relatively scattered in other programs and classrooms across the country--and unable to find course materials for BW that seemed obviously and explicitly informed by the theoretical framework I was building for our program (largely emerging from research in New Literacy Studies and activity theory), I wrote a textbook--first for our in-house use (in 2005), then for the market, which led to my first scholarly publications in BW (for *Journal of Basic Writing* in 2006, *College English* in 2007, and SUNY P in 2008). It seemed to me

I was onto something, though it is interesting to note that these scholarly activities began with my desire for a *practical* solution to a vexing problem. It is easy to forget that research often begins with the practical. That certainly has been the case for me, and I suspect it might be the case for many of our readers. That's my point: research does *not* remove us from our classrooms and students--at least not always. As the articles in this *BWe* issue attest, often research is what enables more purposeful

Though we complain about public misconceptions of writing and of our discipline, our field has not seriously considered radically reimagining the mission of the very course where misconceptions are born and/or reinforced; we have not yet imagined moving first-year composition from teaching "how to write in college" to teaching *about* writing--[. . .] to acting as if writing studies is a discipline with content knowledge to which students should be introduced, thereby changing their understandings about writing and thus changing the ways they write. Here we champion such a radical move by proposing, theorizing, demonstrating, and reporting early results from an "Intro to Writing Studies" FYC pedagogy. (Downs and Wardle 553).

deliberation of practical, day-to-day classroom matters. A wonderful bonus for me was that these resulting publications helped make an excellent case for both tenure and promotion, which I earned easily, and the building of additional programs and resources to support our students (see especially our argument for CLiC, Carter and Dunbar Odom 2009). In short, that same research yielded practical solutions for our BW program and the tenure (coupled with the relevant publications) I needed to help push our programs further.

In that research, I also found a vibrant community of scholars, teachers, and administrators in the growing movement surrounding what became known as “Writing About Writing.” As a way to introduce potential newcomers to this community, I hope you’ll indulge me as I continue this narrative about my own entry into it.

### *Practical Research, Practical Activism*

If, as I have suggested, research often begins with a vexing and practical problem without an obvious solution, many times activism begins with the practical, as well. That was true for me as I became involved in the National Conversation on Writing and with what would become the Writing About Writing movement. Eventually I was introduced to the way Elizabeth Wardle and Doug Downs were imagining the phenomenon of writing as subject of introductory writing courses. Wardle had seen the table of contents of the custom textbook I’d put together for our first-year program (see email request above) and generously shared with me a copy of her article that was to be published by CCC the following June: Downs and Wardle’s “Teaching About Writing, Right Misconceptions” (2007).

I was hooked. It made perfect sense to me. I hadn’t known it, but *this* was what I’d been looking for. Or at least this was one of the important things I was looking for.



PHOTOGRAPH: A few of our excellent Teaching Assistants during the Fall 2009 TA Orientation. T-Shirts read “You don’t have to be crazy to work here. They’ll train you,” which they’d found pre-printed locally and decided were perfect to wear to our orientation where these experienced TAs would be meeting a number of our newest TAs for the first time. These t-shirts were a big hit with all of us.

When I took over as Director of FYC a few months later (January 2007), I included a pre-publication

Subject: Fieldwork in FYC (textbook query)  
From: Shannon Carter  
Reply-To: Writing Program Administration  
Date: Thu, 2 Nov 2006 12:51:41 -0600

It's that time again: gotta order textbooks for next term (fyc program).

Any advice would be most welcome!

I am looking for a rhetoric to support students in doing ethnographic analyses of literacies in context (see table of contents below for reader--LITERACIES IN CONTEXT, Fountain Press, 2007). I really want something that will help students do field research and library research focusing on a somewhat familiar context (making the familiar strange . . . then attempting to draw new conclusions within that context). [ . . . ] If you have used FIELDWORKING before, I'd love to hear from you. If you have other suggestions, I'd love to hear that, too.

Thanks for your help!  
--Shannon



version of “Teaching About Writing, Righting Misconceptions” as part of our training packet for the [TA Orientation](#) in order to help introduce teachers and tutors to our then brand new FYC curriculum (see *Literacies in Context*). Soon, our entire Writing Program was about writing as both subject and activity: from Basic Writing to First-Year Composition. Since the vast majority of our graduate students teach writing through our Writing Center and/or in our BW or FYC programs, we could be certain that they were all increasingly familiar with some of the key scholarship informing our discipline. Since the culminating activity for our all students in our First-Year Composition program is a campus-wide [Celebration of Student Writing](#) (CSW established 2007) and since our CSW is always very well attended by campus administrators and community members, increasingly individuals not directly connected to our Writing Programs as students or teachers are becoming familiar with our discipline and often use terms like “ethnography” and “lived experiences” and “literacies” rather than “correctness” and “deficit” when describing our program and our students.<sup>2</sup>

In short, a writing-about-writing approach can make writing itself more visible. No doubt writing on college campuses is always important and ubiquitous. Like trees in that old growth forest, however, ubiquity does not always demand visibility. For us, this attention to writing *as a discipline*--coupled with local, community-wide celebrations of writing like the CSW and our local enactment of the [National Day on Writing](#) (see [Commerce Week on Writing](#))--draws attention to the trees that may have been otherwise obscured by the forest.

I do not wish to imply that Downs and Wardle’s article was the magic elixir. As convincing as I’ve found it to be, their article hasn’t always produce the desired or expected results when shared with others—at least not for me. In the years since I first learned of its existence, I have required dozens upon dozens of our MA and PhD students to read it and explore its relevance for our program and our students. Many “get” it right away. Many don’t. Others find it downright off-putting. We press on anyway, and even those most resisting our program’s WAW approach usually prove themselves to be amazing writing teachers anyway. As convincing as I find their article, I cannot use it to convince policy makers, administrators, and colleagues of a WAW approach—at least not directly. Everyone is very busy, and few have any time to (or interest in) read scholarship not directly related to their own work. As convincing as I’ve found it and the scores of other articles and scholarly manuscripts informing my approach and own research, I cannot rely on *any* of it—at least not by itself--to convince others not already immersed in these conversations.

My point is not to convince you that WAW is *the way* to teach writing. Lots of very effective ways exist, many of which look little like the programs I’m describing here or even those you will find in WAW-informed programs included in this issue of *BWe*.

WAW is simply *one way* I found particularly useful, not just in the classroom but across our writing programs and the entire campus. WAW is simply *one way* I have found particularly useful. Given that most of the thousands of first-year students entering our public, Ph-D granting institution take BW or FYC in their first year of college, given that I direct/have directed those programs, given that I am drawn to a WAW approach and have found the results to be convincing, given that most of our BW and FYC teachers and Writing Center tutors are graduate students trained in a WAW approach to these introductory courses, given that all of these conditions mean that most of our entering first-year students and the vast majority of our Department’s graduate students (regardless of specialization) will be introduced to writing studies through our writing program, I feel confident that a large number of our university’s students will have had some exposure our field’s key research. My story is simply *one* story, however. I share it because I believe sharing our individual stories can be important.

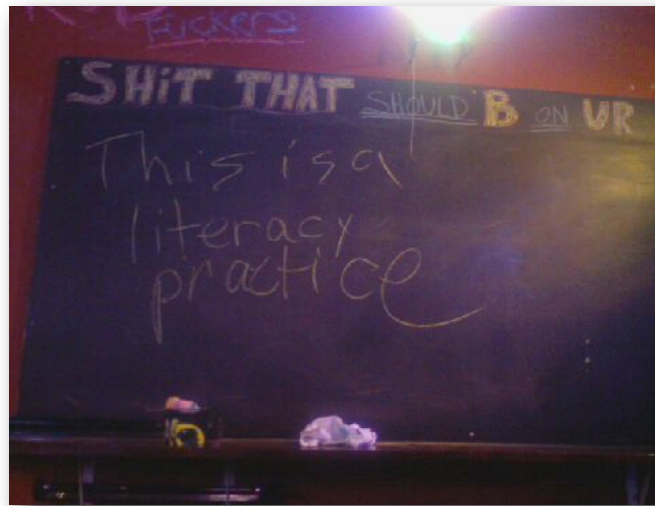
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<sup>2</sup> In a 2003 *WPA* article, Adler-Kassner describe this “shared language” as a major goal of their Celebration of Student Writing. For more about this national trend, see Rose’s recent “Campus Celebrations of Student Writing” (June 2010).

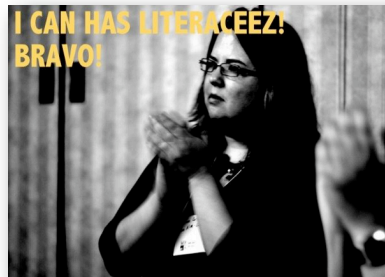
This issue of *BWe* is filled with other stories--of the lived experiences of our students (see Mutnick's "Still Strangers," C. Charlton's "Forgetting Developmental," and Terrick's essay about her award-winning BW program), of their teachers (see J. Charlton's "Seeing is Believing") and of our discipline. I continue here with a place-based teacher narrative about the potential impact of our discipline, at least as we've experienced it in my university town.

### *Local Literacies*

A local Starbucks includes on its community bulletin board a thank you letter from a first-year student who researched literacy practices among that location's baristas. Another first-year student is celebrated across campus upon publication of his study "[Punk Literacy in 1980s Waco](#)" in the national, peer-reviewed journal *Young Scholars in Writing: Undergraduate Research in Rhetoric and Writing* (Pleasant 2007). Other first-years present their research on local literacies at area conferences or expand on it for honors theses. A graduate student and writing instructor for our program circulates a photograph of the sentence "This is a literacy practice," as found on a community blackboard inviting contributions at a popular bar in our university town. Identifying local literacy practices is a major theme of our English 102 program, which makes this found object all the more satisfying to me.



Literacy studies even inspired a sample [lolcat](#) or "micro cat" variation<sup>3</sup> a writing instructor in our program created as an example for an end-of-term party inviting similarly inspired variations on other department members. Okay, perhaps not literacy studies *per se*, but certainly one faculty member's enthusiasm for it. Some references to our discipline amuse, providing further evidence of its level of embeddedness in our local culture.



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<sup>3</sup> Photograph (remixed as "I can has literaceez," above right) taken following a particularly provocative keynote address on our campus by influential scholar Deborah Brandt during our 2009 [Federation Rhetoric Symposium](#). "I can has cheezburger?" is the now canonical image for micro cat phenomenon. See especially [www.icanhascheezburger.com](http://www.icanhascheezburger.com).

“All language use . . . is an invention of a particular social milieu, not a natural phenomenon” (21). In fact, “discourses operate at the hands and the will of a *people*, rather than instruments or forces of nature.” (Royster, emphasis in original).

More significantly, perhaps, our campus administrators and faculty in departments across the campus often offer more research-based references to writing and writing instruction than before, regardless of whether they have read any of our field’s research themselves.

The ubiquity on our campus of some aspects of our field’s key research seems to have suggested to some of those who hold the purse strings that writing studies *is* a discipline—at least one fundamental way status is determined in academic contexts.

Tangible results of this status are hard to spot and we certainly cannot assume that a WAW approach is directly responsible for any additional resources we’ve obtained, however limited they may be. Money is not pouring into our writing programs. However, even with extensive cuts and massive reallocations across our campus these last few years, budgets associated with our writing programs have grown (albeit only slightly) and resources now include additional Writing Center support, better wages for tutors, new tenure-line faculty, new research assistants, and new equipment. We were even able to begin developing a research center (CLiC) and professional development opportunities for area teachers and community members. In short, things are looking good for us. We aren’t getting everything we need or want, but we have more resources than we did before at a time when many programs must get by with less.

As I said, WAW is not magic. No single approach will work everywhere and all the time for all programs, and even those of us willing to call ourselves staunch advocates of WAW disagree on the specifics of its implementation. Like most things, of course, local contexts matter.

At Taylor University in the BW classes under Barbara Bird’s direction, WAW means one thing. At University of Texas-Pan Am in the BW program under Colin Charlton’s direction, WAW means something else (see “Forgetting Developmental English” in this issue). In her BW class at Long Island University, Mutnick offers yet another variation of WAW (see “Still Strangers” in this issue). At the writing programs under my direction at Texas A&M-Commerce, WAW differs still further.<sup>4</sup> Though we all treat writing as both subject and core activity, none of us agree on what, exactly, that approach should look like. Even so we are likely to agree that it looks something like what we’ve seen and heard from our colleagues across the country who are all equally committed to this approach—as varied as we know such approaches will be.

It is also important to note that the researchers, administrators, and teachers beholden to a WAW approach make up only a portion of the scholarly and

From: Writing Program Administration on behalf of xxx  
Sent: Sun 7/15/2007 6:22 PM  
To: [WPA-L@asu.edu](mailto:WPA-L@asu.edu)  
Subject: FYC as an intro to writing studies

Dear WPA colleagues,

Every once in awhile an essay comes along that signals a seismic shift in the way we think about our field. I just finished reading the June issue of CCC, and the lead article, by Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle just knocked my socks off. Maybe it’s because I’ve been thinking a lot lately about the major and talking with folks who have majors of various stripes, or maybe it’s because we’ve all been talking about comp/rhet as an emerging discipline as we note how many writing programs are breaking away from English. Whatever the reason, I have a hunch that this article signals what may be the Next Big Thing in our field, teaching FYC as an introduction to writing studies. I’ve heard Doug and Liz present at the Cs and was, I admit, a little skeptical about the notion; perhaps as a devotee of WAC I was also resistant. But this article has me convinced, and if I were still running a writing program I’d go back to my department in a flash and put together a committee to start talking about revising our curriculum accordingly. [. . .]

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<sup>4</sup> After Spring 2010, I am no longer a WPA. Instead I direct the Converging Literacies Center (CLiC), working closely with our new WPA and others on our faculty to create an even more cohesive and supportive program and research center.



professional communities informing writing studies. In advocating a WAW approach, I was exhilarated to learn I was not alone. Yet even as we learn we are not alone, we must understand that within any community as large and diverse as those surrounding and supporting writing teachers, administrators and scholars, disagreement will ensue, and often in fundamental ways. That informed and research-based disagreement matters and sharpens our various approaches to the teaching of writing in significant and fundamental ways.

My experiences with WAW and my reading of others engaging this approach on other campuses have convinced me that WAW can be an activist project—a campaign for public awareness.

That, in fact, is the nature of the cycle that feeds research and practice in any discipline as dynamic as writing studies. Yet as long as we keep these conversations to ourselves—in our classrooms, our journals, and our conferences—public policy and mainstream perceptions of writing are unlikely to be deeply influenced by our field's best research (Adler-Kassner, *Activist WPA*).

In the last few years, a number of movements have been working to change that. This story continues with my introduction to just one of these: the Council of Writing Program Administrator's initiative called the [National Conversation on Writing](#) (NCoW), established in 2006.

### Talking About Writing



--National Conversation on Writing, "Everyone is a Writer!" ([video](#))

The National Conversation on Writing (NCoW) is a collection of artifacts and oral histories about writing and writers. Projects like the [NCTE's National Day on Writing \(NDoW\)](#) and the Ohio State University's Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives ([DALN](#)) weave together with projects like NCoW to foreground writing and its role in our everyday lives--NDoW by celebrating writing and highlighting its ubiquity through the collection of writing samples from across the nation to feature in the first National Gallery on Writing ([NGoW](#)); DALN by collecting literacy narratives and archiving them for future researchers and students.

In short, there is just something about writing (about writing). As writing teachers, we've known this for some time. Now many professional organizations and campuses have begun to convince the general

My involvement in the National Conversation on Writing came about much more swiftly than my involvement in WAW.<sup>5</sup> In fact the former happened one day in November at an [NCTE](#) session in New York City back in 2007. I'd heard of NCoW before and thought I'd like to be involved, but I didn't really know what that might mean for me or the programs I represent.

“Featured Session—Reading, Writing, Composing: The Movie(s)” (Linda Adler-Kassner, Session Chair and organizer) was a film festival of sorts, including videos about writing and writers from all walks of life and across the country. My little film “[Standardized](#)”—about my brother’s literacy experiences in Texas and California—meant a lot to me, so I was very glad to share it. But far more impressive were excerpts from documentaries about high school students and their expectations about college writing (in Pennsylvania, by DelliCarpini), working class college students and their experiences with literacy (in Michigan, by Bump Halbritter with Julie Lindquist), faculty and undergraduates at a university on the Mexican border (in Texas, by Colin and Jonnika Charlton), and first-year writers celebrating student writing (also in Michigan, by Krause).

This smart remixing of interviews with writers from across the country helps viewers understand that *everyone* is a writer. Everyone! Coupled with the other stories about writers in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Texas and Linda AK and Dominic's introductory discussion of NCoW's origins and purpose, NCoW became something in which I couldn't help but get involved.

It had voice. It had passion. It was activist. It was political. But it was also quite practical. And heck, I love movies. I love making videos and I sure as heck love watching videos. Videos about writing and writers? All the better!

*But how?*

[illegible]

<sup>5</sup> The pages that follow were drawn from my blog post at [NCoW.org/blog](http://NCoW.org/blog) (Carter, “NCoW”).

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- teachers at the Coastal Bend Writing Project in Corpus Christi, Texas (see “Spotlight On: the National Writing Project”)
- tutors at the South Central Writing Centers Association conference (see “Spotlight On: Writing Centers” for this Texas A&M University podcast)
- BW teachers and administrators at the 2008 meeting of the Council of Basic Writing (see “Spotlight On: Basic Writing”)

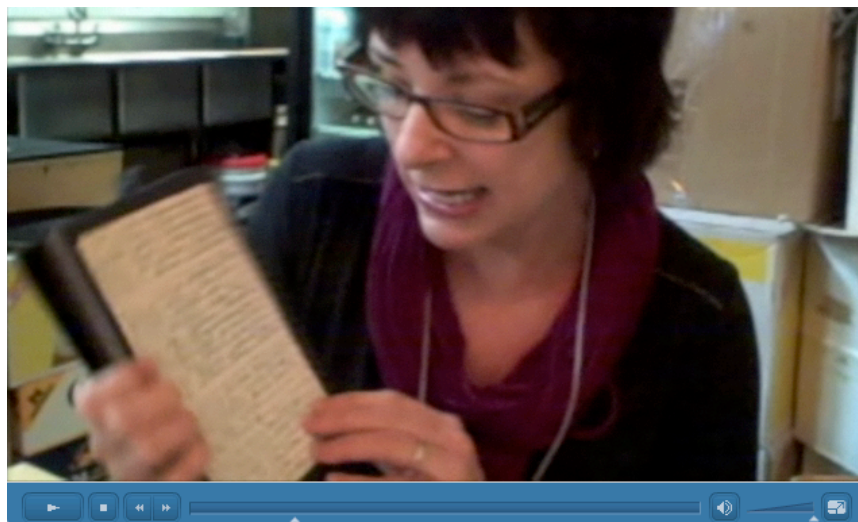
Basic writing programs across the country are often underfunded and under appreciated, even as they do some of the most important work a writing program can do--help struggling writers succeed in academic contexts.

--"Spotlight On: Basic Writing," NCoW

### *Basic Writing Joins the National Conversation on Writing*

At the 2008 Conference on Basic Writing in San Francisco, I asked BW professionals to officially join the National Conversation on Writing by [interviewing](#) one another about their students and themselves as writers. Interviews took place in lobbies and other common areas throughout the Hilton conference hotel in downtown SF. Equipment used included Flip Cameras (provided by the A&M-Commerce's Converging Literacies Center) and other cameras provided by members of the CBW Executive Board.

More than a dozen workshop participants recorded these interviews where they described their experiences as writers and writing teachers. Together with colleagues J'Non Whitlark and Joanna Thrift, we remixed this footage into a video essay about writing.



--"What's So Basic About Writing, Anyway?": Basic Writing Teachers Talk about Writing and Writers" ([video](#))

Modeled after NCoW's inaugural video *Who is a Writer?* (Bowden and Vandenberg), this video brings together interview footage from the 2009 CBW Workshop in order to further the national conversation on writing via stories from writers working closely with at-risk writers.

NCoW is committed to BW. Alongside similar activist and research-based projects like DALN and the National Day on Writing, NCoW reminds us that sometimes our lived experiences and the stories we tell about them can be the most convincing evidence for change. These stories can help change the national conversation on writing, which may lead to better conditions for BW and the students we serve.


We hope so.

No doubt, times are hard. For everyone, perhaps especially those students marked as BW.

At the very least, sharing stories like these reminds all of us that we aren't alone. You are not alone in your commitment to BW, and CBW is committed to providing you with resources and support to help you help BW.

Read on. Enjoy. Join. Listen. Share.

Together, we can make a difference. Together, we already have.



The **National Conversation on Writing** (NCoW) is a digital archive of stories about writing and writers.

*NCoW wants your story!*

Basic writing teachers and students have much to teach all of us about writing and writers. We are looking for interviews with basic writing teachers and their students to be developed into a digital story about students called basic writers and basic writing teachers as writers.

**NCoW Purpose:** Via the Network for Media Action (NMA), the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA) argues that “everyone is a writer.” The National Conversation on Writing is a WPA-NMA initiative that attempts to prove exactly that by collecting stories about writing and writers from across the country.

In short, NCoW is a digital archive of oral histories and other artifacts about writing and writers.



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Writing About Writing Network ([WAWN](#))

#### **[Writing-About-Writing Network] History**

##### **Co-coordinators** (March 2009-March 2011)

Kathleen Blake Yancey, Florida State University (2009-2011)

David Slomp, University of Ottawa (2009-2010)

##### **Founding Coordinator** (2008-2009)

M. Elizabeth (Betsy) Sargent, University of Alberta

##### **Initial Board of Consultants**

Members of the initial WAWN Board of Consultants had been trying this approach and presenting or publishing about it; all were either facilitators or active participants at the 2008 CCCC all-day workshop on First-year Composition as Writing Studies: Implementing a Writing-about-Writing Pedagogy. The following (in addition to current and past SIG coordinators) agreed to be listed as consultants on the initial WAWN Board: Barbara Bird, Shannon Carter, Debra Dew, Doug Downs, and Leah Zuidema. (WAWN, "[Consultants](#)")