

*From the Editors*

# Creating Points of Access: Strategies and Pedagogies

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In his 2013 State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama stressed the importance of education, noting “the more education you have, the more likely you are to have a job and work your way into the middle class.” Obama’s focus on the need for most people to have “some” higher education strikes a chord with one of the most pervasive characteristics of federal education policy—more is better. In a recent White House Statement, “Building American Skills through Community Colleges,” the Obama administration reiterated the President’s commitment to higher education through the establishment of two national goals to be met by 2020: (a) graduating the highest proportion of college students in the world and (b) encouraging community colleges to produce an additional 5 million graduates.

Obama’s strategy is, of course, nothing new. In fact, U.S. higher education has been operating in a mode of expansion since the Morrill Act of 1862. From that first federal legislative action, which laid the foundation for a national system of state-sponsored colleges and universities, to the 1944 G.I. Bill, the 1947 President’s Commission on Higher Education, and the Open Admissions policy originating at

CUNY in 1970, U.S. institutions of higher education have worked to incorporate and accommodate growing numbers of postsecondary students. These efforts did not just result in increasing class sizes or course offerings, but in finding ways to better respond to the broader needs and interests of college students at both two- and four-year institutions and to facilitate their transfer from one educational site to another.

This volume of *JCLL* responds to the growing population of college students, not within the discourse of unpreparedness, as is often the case, but rather in vein of responsive teaching. Each of the five articles included in this issue propose teaching approaches that actively invite students into the postsecondary literacy classroom to support their learning and achievement.

**Heather Neal’s** “Words that Matter: A Study of Situated Word Consciousness of Postsecondary Reading Students” offers sociocultural theory and the construct of *word consciousness* as a way to strengthen student vocabulary knowledge. Making connections between students’ existing social knowledge about the words they use and the need for vocabulary instruction in transitional reading environments, Neal advocates for the increased

use of meaningful learning contexts and generative opportunities for vocabulary building.

**Jeff Sommers** takes up the idea of responsive teaching directly in his article, “Response 2.0: Commentary on Student Writing for the New Millennium.” Through the use of recorded voice responses in multiple modes, a pedagogical practice he calls *Response 2.0*, Sommers argues that employing new technologies not only encourages deeper student engagement with college-level writing tasks, but also productively addresses many of the major challenges teachers face when responding to student texts.

In our *Theory to Practice* section, **Megan Paxton Wuebker** examines the efficacy of online course design and instruction in her article, “Adult Learners: Improving Persistence and Performance in Online Learning Environments.” Drawing on the theoretical perspective of andragogy, Wuebker provides a useable framework to improve classroom practices for online learners, with a particular focus on adult students. The popularity and proliferation of online courses makes this article a timely inquiry for instructors who work with adult learners in distance education programs.

A second *Theory to Practice* article, **Nicola Blake’s** “Negotiating Uncommon Spaces: Fostering Common Ground in a Summer Bridge Writing Classroom,” describes a summer bridge course that supports the writing development of students who are transitioning from high school to college. Leveraging Spellmeyer’s notion of *common ground* to scaffold student learning, Blake details a series of three writing activities that

promote critical inquiry through place-based pedagogies. In addition to offering practical advice, the article presents a compelling case for incorporating inquiry-based writing projects to foster student collaboration and create more opportunities for reciprocal learning.

The issue closes with a *Book Review* of Val Gerstle and Lynda Walsh’s (2011) edited collection, *Autism Spectrum Disorders in the College Composition Classroom: Making Writing Instruction More Accessible for All Students*. The volume addresses both institutional accommodations and pedagogical interventions that instructors can use as a way to advocate for first-year writing students who have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Reviewer **Patricia Houston** characterizes the book as not only helping instructors become more responsive to their students with ASD, but as also serving as a means to “craft a learning environment that better serves all students.”

Expanding higher education on the national scale means that teachers will need to continually find new ways to create points of access for the range of students who pass through their classrooms. We hope the articles in this issue inspire our *JCLL* readers to engage with responsive teaching strategies and pedagogies in their ongoing work with postsecondary literacy learners.

In the spirit of responsiveness, we would like to thank our *JCLL* reviewers for all of their hard work in providing thoughtful and timely feedback to the many authors who submit manuscripts to the journal. We have welcomed an increase in submissions over the past year and our reviewers have taken on the task in stride. **JCLL**

## References

Obama, Barack. (2013, February 13). State of the Union Address. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/state-of-the-union-2013>

Obama, Barack. (2013, February 22). Building American skills through community colleges. Retrieved from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education/building-american-skills-through-community-colleges>