

Review Process for *JTW* Article

Reviewer Response Letters to Author

To the author of "The Problem That Has No Name":

I was delighted to read this essay in my most recent pack of submissions to *JTW*. I think what you've written is important for a number of reasons. First, though many writing teachers might want to teach feminist theory in the writing classes, they fear the very thing that happened to you. Second, you worked your way through the problem and eventually came to an approach that integrated writing with the explosive materials you were teaching. Recently on the Women's Studies e-mail conference, there has been a lengthy thread about this very situation. People responded passionately. Some very experienced teachers underwent the same kind of trial by fire semester by semester (or quarter by quarter) and never discovered an appropriate response.

I've taught some of the same work, including Spender, but in a slightly different frame, a Women's Studies course on Language and Gender. While the hostility about "this isn't about me so why am I reading it?" is usually initially apparent, as a sociolinguist, I can claim empirical evidence to support Spender and others on my syllabus. I send them out to tape cross-sex conversations and classroom discussions, and then I put them to work counting simple things: who interrupts whom, who has the most turns, who talks the longest. Very few are hostile after that exercise. One of my graduate students here has turned that project into a writing class by making women's language the theme of her Intermediate Expository Writing class. In groups, students go out to collect the information and then they share across the group. Then individually students interpret the data that they have collected. I think what you have learned to do is more difficult and more likely to result in personal growth. You're confronting the issues directly in theory form. As you

note, the belief in the neutrality of science allows students to continue to hold some beliefs that shout for denial.

I think our readers need it, whether they too have the reactions that your students did. A good read!

Gail Stygall
University of Washington

To the writer of “The Problem That Has No Name: Student Barriers to Feminism”:

I was especially interested in your essay since my graduate course just finished reading Kathleen Weiler’s book, *Teaching for Change*. Certainly feminist pedagogy is an important area for research and writing—and a provocative one, perhaps best evidenced by Lynn Cheney’s vituperative response to Dale Bauer’s *College English* article. You ask questions that relate to the concerns of many feminist or socially conscious teachers, and you incorporate the research well; I felt well-informed after reading it.

But I also felt dissatisfied with the lack of attention to writing and the role of writing. Other than the course title, *Women and Writing*, one paragraph summarizing Strickland’s ideas (not until page 13), and one sentence about implementing portfolios, writing plays only a bit part in this narrative. While you imply that getting students to write and share writing held the “solution” to your problem, that point is never expanded and doesn’t constitute enough of a focus. This could be accomplished, in one way, by placing the section on writing as casualty earlier in the paper and expanding that discussion—perhaps to generalize about all (writing) courses in which we ask students to struggle with ideas that lay bare their assumptions and challenge their beliefs.

I also want to suggest, for any revision you might do, that you spend far more time on the resolution—analyzing why things turned around—and spend less time setting up the problem. It is, after all, a familiar scenario to many teachers who bring political issues into the classroom, and while your subject position as inexperienced (and idealistic) does make your story “different,” the telling of it is overdone. At the same time, the resolution comes far too quickly and easily for all the tension you’ve built up.

Finally, I'm a little troubled by the ways you characterize your students. You describe them as all alike, completely sheltered from "the real world" (as in the U of Michigan?), and disadvantaged because they weren't privileged enough to attend a politically-aware high school. Though I'm sure you don't intend this, you come off sounding quite superior to your backwoods' students. In addition, I think you make some overgeneralizations about them that could easily be qualified. (For example, I find it hard to believe that every single student reacted "violently" to your readings. Wasn't there even one quiet student sitting back and taking it all in, reserving judgment?) Even if your narrative loses some of its rhetorical impact, I want to suggest a little more sensitivity to or acceptance of these students—especially in light of your important point about resistance on page 12.

Nedra Reynolds
University of Rhode Island

Editor's Letter to the Author

May 30, 1993

Johanna W. Atwood
Department of English and Comparative Literature
P.O. Box 413
Curtin Hall
The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
Milwaukee, WI 53201

Dear Professor Atwood:

Thank you for submitting "The Problem That Has No Name: Student Barriers to Feminism" to the *Journal of Teaching Writing*. As you can read in the enclosed reviews, both readers were sympathetic to the concerns that you addressed in your piece. We would like to publish your piece if you are willing to consider some revisions that will make it more useful to our readers.

Gail Stygall and Nedra Reynolds both point to potential changes should you choose to revise. Gail's sharing of her pedagogical moves demonstrates her sense that solutions to the problem are important to explore. Nedra identifies three areas for consideration. First, the weight of the piece now resides in describing the problem whereas the way in which you handled the problem seems underanalyzed. Because other feminist teachers have had similar difficulties, they will benefit from more attention to your shifts in pedagogy as they confront their own classroom decisions. This point echoes Gail's emphasis on solutions. Second, the place of writing in your class, both in the kinds of writing done and the ways in which the writing became a means of addressing the problems, needs more emphasis for our audience. In fact, because many of our readers will not have a feminist perspective, you might consider Nedra's suggestion of extending your application to other writing class situations that would challenge students' biases. Third, you may want to read your piece from the perspective of your students. How would they regard your characterization of them? Are you fair to each of them in your categorizations?

I hope that you will choose to revise this piece for publication in the *Journal of Teaching Writing*. Please notify me if

you plan to revise and when you might have your piece completed (317/274-0092). I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Barbara L. Cambridge
Editor

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Author's Letter to the Editor

September 28, 1993

Barbara L. Cambridge, editor
Journal of Teaching Writing
425 University Blvd.
Indianapolis, IN 46202

Dear Dr. Cambridge:

Enclosed is the revised version of "The Problem That Has No Name: Student Barriers to Feminism," which has been retitled "Good Intentions, Dangerous Territory: Student Resistance in Feminist Writing Classes." I hope this revision will be satisfactory. If I can be of further assistance, please let me know. My office number is (414) 555-5016 and my home number is (414) 555-0803. Thank you for your helpful comments.

Sincerely,

Johanna W. Atwood

