

Remedial, Basic, Advanced: Evolving Frameworks for First-Year Composition at the California State University

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ABSTRACT: In this essay I conduct a Critical Discourse Analysis of the language surrounding the California State University (CSU) Chancellor's Office latest plan to curb remediation, the Early Start program. I consider Early Start in the context of what I argue is the evolution of three major frameworks for Basic Writing in the CSU: the CSU Chancellor's Office Remedial Writing Framework that focuses on deficiency and gatekeeping; the Basic Writing Framework that developed in the 1970s as a way for CSU's writing teachers to defend access for underserved students; and the emerging Advanced Writing Framework, which eliminates Basic Writing and redefines one semester of composition as advanced and a two semester stretch course as mainstream. I trace three themes in the "discourse event" of Early Start: Early Start's relation to historical discourse on remediation, replication of discourse norms by the media, and faculty complicity in the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework. Based on my analysis of the ways that it disrupts the dominant discourse of remediation and basic skills, I argue the Advanced Writing Framework provides hope of changing the nature of the discourse.

KEYWORDS: basic writing; remediation; mainstreaming; critical discourse analysis

California has played a central role in the national discourse about remediation and Basic Writing. From Mike Rose's analysis of "the language of exclusion" in the institutional discourse surrounding remediation at the University of California (UC), to Ed White and the California State University (CSU) English Council's politicking to prevent the CSU Chancellor's Office from implementing a multiple-choice test for college writing equivalency, to Tom Fox's defense of access for the diverse CSU student population, to Jane Stanley's analysis of the rhetoric of remediation at UC Berkeley, Basic Writing teachers in California have fought against manufactured literacy

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crises and the discourse of students as “deficient” and in need of “remediation” of “basic skills.”

Despite this continued resistance to the language of exclusion and despite the growth in the 1970s of extensive Basic Writing programs to support underserved students, writing teachers at the CSU have not been able to change an enduring remedial framework of deficiency and basic skills that to this day shapes the discourse of the CSU Chancellor’s Office, the Board of Trustees, the media, and even many CSU teachers. As Mary Kay Crouch and Gerry McNenny conclude in their overview of remediation in California, “Looking Back, Looking Forward,” “Looking historically at the CSU’s attempts to grapple with what it views as the ‘problem’ of remediation, we see that the solutions proposed during each cycle of concern have rarely varied” (64). Crouch and McNenny share my concern regarding the CSU’s history of top-down mandates that label students as deficient based on timed tests, but they stop short of arguing that much of this history has been shaped by a discursive framework that has endured despite the rise of Basic Writing programs. The latest effort of the Chancellor’s Office to curb remediation, the Early Start program, exemplifies the endurance of a remedial framework of deficiency and basic skills, the recycling of the same misguided solutions to the “problem” of remediation, the inability of CSU Basic Writing programs to change the discourse, and the unintentional complicity of CSU teachers in the language of exclusion.

The idea for Early Start began with the CSU Board of Trustees, and in 2010 Early Start came down as a mandate from the Chancellor’s Office and was implemented in 2012. Early Start forces students who score below the cut score of 147 on a timed writing test—the English Placement Test (EPT)—to engage in a “remediation” activity before their first semester of college. As Crouch and McNenny reference, at most CSUs nearly half of incoming students are placed into non-credit bearing “remedial” or Basic Writing courses, and now these students are being asked to take even more coursework at their own expense before the start of the regular semester. The Early Start activity that is required of students who score below 147 on the EPT can be a summer course at a CSU campus, a community college basic writing course, or a brief online course—all paid for by the student.

Through a Critical Discourse Analysis, I contrast the remediation and basic skills discourse of Early Start—what I refer to as the Remedial Writing Framework—with the discourse of an approach to first-year composition emerging in the CSU that involves replacing testing and tracking with Directed Self-Placement (DSP); shifting from a series of non-credit bearing Basic

Writing courses to a mainstream, two-semester cohorted stretch course; and relabeling the one-semester composition course as “advanced.” I refer to this emerging mainstreaming approach as the Advanced Writing Framework. The Advanced Writing Framework acknowledges that *most* CSU students will need more than one semester of composition to succeed, and it disrupts the discourse of remediation while retaining support for underserved students. I argue that the Advanced Writing Framework presents the best hope for CSU writing teachers of disrupting the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework that has endured despite the rise of Basic Writing programs. Although my focus is the CSU, the endurance of the Remedial Writing Framework, the complicity of Basic Writing teachers and other allies in this framework, and the emergence of the Advanced Writing Framework connects to national narratives on remediation, Basic Writing, and mainstreaming, as well as current scholarly discussions in the field of Basic Writing.

These scholarly discussions about the state of Basic Writing and basic writers often focus on the endurance of the language of remediation and basic skills—what Bruce Horner refers to as “a debilitating sense of having to keep fighting the same fights, making the same arguments, over and over again” (“Relocating” 6). Like Horner and Rose, I am interested in tracing the replication of the institutional discourse of remediation and the ways that discourse reduces students’ complex and fluid literacies to a static set of deficiencies in basic skills. I argue that Early Start is evidence that the language of remediation and basic skills will continue to endure and replicate despite the resistance of Basic Writing teachers and despite the support provided to underserved students by Basic Writing programs. I am especially interested in turning a spotlight on Basic Writing teachers’ unintentional complicity in the language of exclusion, since this complicity speaks to the pressing need for imagining alternatives to Basic Writing programs and the discourse that inevitably attaches to the Basic Writing enterprise, despite our best intentions.

In their article “In the Here and Now: Public Policy and Basic Writing,” Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington argue that “we need to develop rhetoric and action that will change the nature of the debate” (37) and work against the naturalized frames of students as deficient and remediation as a temporary problem to be solved. One way to change the naturalized frames of students as deficient is to consider models of mainstreaming alternatives to Basic Writing, as scholars such as David Bartholomae, Ira Shor, Mary Soliday, and Kelly Ritter have encouraged us to do. The Advanced Writing Framework is a unique model in that it has helped CSU

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writing teachers disrupt the language of exclusion not by mainstreaming “basic” students but by reframing the “mainstream” composition course as “advanced” and what is now labeled “basic” as mainstream—a move that I argue has the potential to change the nature of the discourse.

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR FIRST-YEAR WRITING AND REMEDIATION IN THE CSU

Before I contrast the discourses of the Early Start and Advanced Writing Frameworks, I want to offer a brief history of the evolution of Basic Writing in the CSU. The tone for the gatekeeping approach of the Remedial Writing Framework was set in the 1960 Master Plan for Higher Education in California. The Master Plan mandated that students’ writing abilities be tested before entering a UC or CSU and argued that standards should be high at the UC and the CSU since “the junior colleges relieve them of the burden of doing remedial work” (66). To help further relieve this “burden” of remediation, in the early 1970s the Chancellor’s Office and Board of Trustees began working on a plan to use a multiple-choice test designed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as a college writing equivalency that would have resulted in a large percentage of incoming students testing out of composition entirely. Ultimately, the Chancellor’s Office goal was to replace the teaching of composition with a test. This targeting of composition was met with outrage by the CSU English Council, a group of English Teachers across CSU campuses who rallied against the test and worked to persuade the Chancellor’s Office that the test was reductive and invalid. However, even when the Board of Trustees relented on the multiple-choice equivalency test after the public outcry of the English Council and granted permission for a placement test into Basic Writing courses, they retained the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework, proclaiming in 1975 that the new test and curriculum will involve “basic skills and remedial improvement” (CSU Task Force on Remediation 2).

Ed White was a faculty member at CSU San Bernardino at the time the Chancellor’s Office was planning to implement the ETS multiple-choice test, and he played a central role in persuading the CSU to instead adopt what was to evolve into the EPT, a placement test created by CSU writing teachers. The EPT, which combines indirect and direct assessment of student writing, was originally scored by CSU writing teachers and used to place students into either Basic Writing or mainstream courses based on cut scores. The rise of Basic Writing programs throughout the CSU system in the 1970s connects

to the implementation of the EPT as a placement tool. As White points out, “until the placement program began, the CSU was not authorized to offer writing courses below the regular freshman level” (79). The implementation of the EPT and the growth of Basic Writing programs in the late 1970s mark the emergence of what I am referring to as the Basic Writing Framework, a framework that works in opposition to the Chancellor’s Office Remedial Writing Framework and which is still the norm at most CSUs. Under this framework, Basic Writing teachers have been able to defend access to the CSU of underserved students by using the EPT as a tool to place students into one of a series of “basic” or “developmental” courses. Although White and other CSU writing teachers argued that Basic Writing courses should be credit-bearing, the Chancellor’s Office felt that this would lower CSU standards, and Basic Writing courses at the CSU remain non-credit bearing to this day—as they do at many institutions across the U.S.

Despite the victory of Basic Writing teachers in protecting access for underserved students, the Chancellor’s Office and Board of Trustees have continued their attempts to eliminate remediation. A report published in 1983 by the California Postsecondary Education Commission, *Promises to Keep*, bemoans the “decline in basic skills” (10) and recommends reducing remediation within the next five years. The 1987 review of the Master Plan creates a taxonomy of college writing where “pre-college” remediation is equated with “skill deficiencies,” and the plan recommends phasing out remediation at the CSU and UC. A 1995 report by the Committee on Education set as a goal that by Fall 2001 all entering CSU students would possess “basic skills.” Another report by the Chancellor’s Office and Board of Trustees aimed to reduce remediation to 10% by 2007 (LAO 2). These attempts reflect what Mike Rose refers to as the “myth of transience”: “if we can just do x or y , the problem will be solved—in five years, ten years, or a generation—and higher education will be able to return to its real work” (355).

A group of CSU WPA’s began to grow frustrated with both the misguided assumptions of the Chancellor’s Office ideology and the inability of Basic Writing programs to change this ideology, and in conversations at English Council meetings and their local campuses, they began to search for an alternative that would eliminate the stigma of remediation without denying support for underserved students. This alternative to the Remedial and Basic Writing Frameworks, which I refer to as the Advanced Writing Framework, has been implemented at a handful of CSU campuses that have replaced the EPT with Directed Self-Placement (DSP) and have eliminated Basic Writing by turning what was once considered the mainstream course—a one-semester

option—into an “advanced” writing course, and turning what was once labeled “basic” or “remedial”—a series of non-credit bearing courses—into a two-semester cohorted stretch course that is considered mainstream. The stretch course has the same outcomes and assignments as the advanced course, but a smaller class size and a slower pace. The Advanced Writing Framework changes the discourse associated with both the Remedial Writing Framework and the Basic Writing Framework by replacing the term “mainstream” with “advanced” and replacing the terms “basic” and “remedial” and “developmental” with “mainstream.” Because the Advanced Writing Framework relies on DSP, it also presents students and the general public with a more sophisticated definition of college writing than the multiple-choice “basic skills” assessment and formulaic timed writing of the EPT.

When considered in the context of the evolution of Basic Writing in the CSU, Early Start is of special interest because of the way it brings all three of the frameworks I outline into conflict: the recycling of the Chancellor’s Office Remedial Writing Framework; the response to this recycling from the teachers who developed the Basic Writing Framework; and the beginnings of a disruption of the discourse of Early Start and the Remedial Writing Framework by the emerging Advanced Writing Framework. A critical analysis of the discourse of Early Start reveals that despite the rise of Basic Writing in the CSU and the good intentions of Basic Writing teachers—and sometimes *because* of those good intentions—the discourse of remediation and basic skills remains dominant.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS AND BASIC WRITING

Critical analysis of public discourse has been a focus of a number of scholarly critiques of remediation. In addition to the work of Rose, Fox, and Stanley in California, Basic Writing scholars have focused on the ways that terms like “basic” and “remedial” have caused negative perceptions of underserved students and the programs developed to support them. Bruce Horner analyzes the ideology that informs the discourse surrounding Basic Writing, and especially its history at CUNY, in “Discoursing Basic Writing.” Horner warns against naturalizing basic writing and basic writers, and instead argues for a view of basic writing as a set of social practices, occurring in historical and political contexts, and not merely skills acquisition. Steve Lamos also looks at CUNY and the early discourse surrounding open admissions and uses a critical race lens in his analysis. Lamos encourages us to pay attention to the ways basic writing students are racialized in the open admissions debate

and how that racialized discourse maintains white power structures. Linda Adler-Kassner and Susanmarie Harrington analyze the dominant narratives surrounding basic writing in *The New York Times* and *Minneapolis Star Tribune* in *Basic Writing as a Political Act*. They argue that these narratives, which include the portrayal of literacy as an autonomous set of skills, are frames controlled by administrators and the media rather than teachers.

Another important critical analysis of remediation, and the one that most clearly paves the way for the Advanced Writing Framework, is Kelly Ritter's analysis of the discourse of Basic Writing at Yale and Harvard in *Before Shaughnessy*. Ritter questions definitions of Basic Writers and argues that basic writing is an institutional construct. Ritter argues for the "erasure of the label *basic* altogether" (129), and she proposes instead sequences of credit-bearing courses that are labeled only by numbers such as 1, 2, and 3. Each course in a sequence is considered "introductory" in the sense that all the courses are helping prepare students for complex academic literacies, and are not labeled "basic" or "developmental." Ritter's goal is to encourage a "model that eliminates the stigma, as much as possible, from different levels of preparedness in first-year writing" (141).

None of these authors who critically analyze public discourse on Basic Writing explicitly use a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, but all of them conduct a close analysis of the language we use to describe remediation and Basic Writing programs and students in order to focus on the problems with public perceptions and beliefs regarding these terms and concepts. CDA, with its central aim to "explicate abuses of power promoted by [texts] by analyzing the linguistic/semiotic details in light of the larger social and political contexts in which those texts circulate" (Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon 107), is an ideal approach for thinking about Basic Writing and remediation. Ruth Wodak describes the focus of CDA as analyzing "structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control when these are manifested in language" ("Critical Linguistics" 53). Along with Norman Fairclough, Wodak outlines a number of principles of CDA, including the assumption that discourse constitutes society and culture and always does ideological work, that discourse is historical, and that discourse is a form of social action ("What CDA is About" 271-80). With its focus on power and ideology, a CDA lens forces us to look at the language of remediation with a critical eye and consider the social and cultural consequences of the labels we use to describe college writing courses and college writers. Teun A. van Dijk asserts that the ultimate goal of CDA is to resist social inequality and push towards alternative paradigms for social problems (352-53). From

Rose to Horner to Adler-Kassner to Ritter, Basic Writing as a profession has been taking a critical perspective on the discourse of remediation in order to resist social inequality. Rarely, however, have scholars taken an *explicit* CDA approach to remediation and Basic Writing. It is also rare that scholars have included the language of Basic Writing teachers themselves in this critical analysis of the discourse of remediation.

I turn a CDA lens on Early Start with the ultimate goal of resisting the social inequality of the Remedial Writing Framework and showing the limits of the Basic Writing Framework's success in challenging the discourse of remediation of basic skills. An analysis of the discourse of Early Start reveals that only a change in the nature of the discourse will move us beyond the enduring Remedial Writing Framework.

CDA ANALYSIS OF EARLY START: HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND THE REPLICATION OF DISCOURSE NORMS

The documents from the Chancellor's Office promoting Early Start, the reaction to Early Start in campus and city newspapers, and the response to Early Start from faculty represent what discourse theorists such as Fairclough and Wodak refer to as a "discourse event." In the case of Early Start, the discourse event involves a series of intertextual executive orders, policies, press releases, newspaper articles, and resolutions that shape how students from socioeconomically marginalized groups are portrayed and that replicate norms from prior discourse surrounding remediation in California as well as the national discourse on remediation. A discourse analysis of Early Start reveals three primary themes: 1) Early Start as historical discourse, 2) the replication of discourse norms in the media reporting on Early Start, and 3) teacher complicity in the Remedial Writing Framework.

CDA often focuses on a corpus of interrelated texts (Huckin, Andrus, and Clary-Lemon). To illustrate the ways that Early Start reinforces the Remedial Writing Framework, I collected public documents associated with Early Start that I located through searches of the Chancellor's office website, CSU campus websites, and city and school newspapers. This corpus of texts includes the Chancellor's Office Executive Order implementing Early Start, press releases regarding Early Start from the Chancellor's Office, resolutions against Early Start from CSU academic senates, and twenty-three articles from campus and city newspapers across California published from 2010-2013.

I focus my analysis of these documents on the language of exclusion of the Remedial Writing Framework, and especially the familiar and enduring

language that points to the “semantic macrostructures” that dominate the discourse event: *remedial*, *deficient*, and *skills*. In discourse analysis, semantic macrostructures are the global meanings of discourse—the key words and concepts that point to broader themes (A. van Dijk “Multidisciplinary CDA” 99). As I traced the semantic macrostructures of *remedial*, *deficient*, and *skills* throughout the texts in my corpus, three themes emerged. Discourses are “always connected to other discourses which were produced earlier” (Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak 372), and one CDA theme that emerged in my research is the connection of the language of Early Start to prior Chancellor’s Office executive orders and reports, as well as national reports on alleged literacy crises. Wodak emphasizes “the mediating and constructing role of the media” (7) in discourse events, and another theme in the discourse event of Early Start is the way the language of the Chancellor’s Office press releases was uncritically replicated in campus and city newspapers.

The language of exclusion of the Chancellor’s Office was also replicated by CSU teachers. Allan Luke argues that communities both resist and become “complicit in their own moral regulation” (9). Luke says about this complicity, “When and where these discourses are internalized by the subject as her or his own constitute the moment of noncoercive discipline par excellence” (9). CSU teachers and activists were often unintentionally complicit in the replication of the Remedial Writing framework, and this complicity—this “noncoercive discipline”—is the final theme I trace in my discussion of Early Start. Teacher complicity is also the most troubling theme, since a change in the discourse is unlikely to occur if even Basic Writing teachers reinforce the Remedial Writing Framework.

Early Start as Historical Discourse

The language of Early Start, Executive Order 1048, is what CDA theorists refer to as “historical discourse” in that it echoes the discourse of earlier executive orders. The semantic macrostructures of the language of exclusion of the Remedial Writing Framework is prominent throughout EO 1048. EO 1048 states that “incoming freshmen who have not demonstrated proficiency in English and/or mathematics will be required to begin remediation prior to the term for which they have been admitted.” In the discourse of Early Start, as in the language of exclusion in the UC system that Rose critiqued, remediation is a “scholastic quarantine” for entering first-year students “until their disease can be diagnosed and remedied” (Rose 352). That diagnosis is the EPT, and it is assumed by EO 1048 that a timed impromptu test is a

valid measurement of “proficiency in English.” EO 1048 highlights the fact that “Deficiencies in mathematics and/or English are to be determined by test scores.” Students who are not considered proficient are to be segregated into a remedial activity so that they can begin “addressing deficiencies in mathematics and/or English.”

This discourse of EO 1048 echoes the ideology of deficiency and basic skills of earlier executive orders, such as EO514, passed in 1989, which states that “students who do not demonstrate the requisite competence are required to enroll in a CSU Writing Skills program to correct deficiencies before undertaking baccalaureate English courses.” EO665, which was passed in 1997, requires students to complete remediation in one year in order to “ensure that deficiencies in student writing skills are corrected as efficiently and expeditiously as possible.” This discourse of deficiency also echoes prior reports involving the Chancellor’s Office, such as the “CSU Plan to Reduce Remedial Activity, 1985-1990,” which recommends diagnostic testing in high school to “alert students to their deficiencies,” and the 1987 California *Master Plan Renewed*, which describes remedial students as, “Students who are nearly college ready, but exhibit serious multiple skills deficiencies that require instruction at two levels below the Freshman level in English” (52).

The discourse of Early Start is not only a replication of the historical discourse of Chancellor’s Office executive orders and reports, but also a replication of national metanarratives about remediation. In recent national reports that manufacture literacy crises such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s *A Nation at Risk*, the Spelling’s report *A Test of Leadership*, and the Education Commission of the States’ *Blueprint for College Readiness*, declining scores on standardized tests are cited as evidence of the failure of students to learn basic skills in K-12, and remediation is portrayed as a waste of taxpayer dollars. *A Nation at Risk* cites the need for “remedial” courses in “basic skills” in English as one indicator of risk for American education, while at the same time calling for more standardized testing to track students into “remedial interventions.” *A Test of Leadership* bemoans the decline in literacy and the number of college students wasting taxpayer dollars in “remediation” mastering English “skills” that “should have been learned in high school” (viii). *Blueprint for College Readiness* cites the “alarmingly high” number of students with “academic deficits” who are in “remedial” courses (31). The historical discourse of the CSU Chancellor’s office is shaped by the semantic macrostructures of the national discourse on remediation that has remained virtually unchanged since the first college writing “remedial intervention,” English A at Harvard, in the late 1800s.

Replication of Discourse Norms in the Media

Following the establishment of EO 1048, the Chancellor's Office released a series of press releases that contain the semantic macrostructures of the language of exclusion: *remedial*, *deficient*, and *skills*. The goal of Early Start, according to the Chancellor's Office press releases, is to "begin the skills-building process before students arrive on campus for their freshman year" (par. 1). The press releases say that Early Start is designed for students "who need to improve their skills in English" with the goal of "addressing deficiencies earlier." In the discourse of the Chancellor's Office, echoing the national narratives of *A Nation at Risk* and the Spelling's report, the writing "deficiencies" are located within the student, not within the socioeconomic circumstances of the CSU's primarily working-class population. These deficiencies can be addressed by improving "skills," which can somehow be accomplished once and for all in a shortened summer course.

The discourse of EO 1048 and the Early Start press releases was replicated throughout articles in campus and city newspapers, either through direct quotations or paraphrase by journalists who adopted the language of the Remedial Writing Framework as the "common sense" (Luke 12) discourse on the subject. For example, the word "remediation," and the attendant concept that students labeled remedial are deficient, was replicated in many of the titles of the articles:

- CSU Launches Program To Alleviate Remedial Student Issues (Addison)
- Cal State Campuses Overwhelmed by Remedial Needs (Krupnick)
- California State University Wants Struggling Students to Take Remedial Courses Prior to Freshman Year (Krieger)
- University to Force Remediation (Bailey)

These titles reinforce the idea that the problem resides within the students—they are "struggling" and "remedial." The CSU system is portrayed as "overwhelmed" by these remedial students, without any acknowledgment that underserved students are the norm at an institution whose alleged mission is to serve working-class Californians. As Horner argues, basic writing students' "location on the periphery is ideological, obtaining even in institutions where basic writers constitute the statistical norm" ("Relocating" 9). At some CSU campuses, the EPT places nearly 70% of students in remediation, making them peripheral in name only.

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Replication of the Remedial Writing Framework's discourse norms occurred in many newspaper articles, reinforcing the notion of Early Start as a discourse event with limited and limiting semantic macrostructures. The italics I added in the following excerpts from campus and local newspaper articles indicate language lifted directly from or paraphrased from the Chancellor's Office press releases:

Approximately half of CSU's regularly admitted freshmen are *not proficient* in math and/or English and are required to take *developmental courses* during their initial year of college.

Wracked with frustration over the state's legions of *unprepared* high school graduates, the California State University system next summer will force freshmen with *remedial* needs to brush up on math or English before arriving on campus.

The Cal State system's *remedial* pressures have, for the past few years, led many students to take *basic* classes at community colleges.

Instead of combining *remedial* courses with normal courses during the student's first year, the goal is to have the student take those courses beforehand during the summer.

In addition to replicating the semantic macrostructures of the language of exclusion, the media replicates the Remedial Writing Framework's contrast between "remedial" and "developmental" and "basic" courses with "normal" courses. This basic/normal distinction is both informed by and reinforces the portrayal of "the legions of unprepared high school graduates" as inherently deficient and in need of quarantine until they can learn basic skills to "brush up" on their "remedial needs."

Bartholomae argues that this basic/normal distinction is what we have "learned to think through and by" in the field of Basic Writing (8), and although most CSUS Basic Writing teachers resist this way of thinking, in California the media has certainly learned to think of college students in terms of this dichotomy. When CSU composition teachers created "basic" and "developmental" writing programs in the 70s, they intended, like Mina Shaughnessy at CUNY, to replace the language of "remedial" and "deficient" with less oppressive terms. However, the discourse event of Early Start reveals that basic and developmental writing have been coopted by the Remedial Writing Framework. The names of CSU's "basic writing" and "developmental

writing” programs reinforce a basic/normal dichotomy—an issue that leads us to consider teacher complicity in the language of exclusion.

Complicity of CSU Teachers in the Remedial Writing Framework

Luke argues that complicity in oppressive discourse is not “simple top-down ideological manipulation” (9). Communities participate in discourse in ways that involve both working against the discourse and becoming complicit in their own oppression. Luke explains that when discourses are internalized, then noncoercive discipline has been achieved by those in power (9). The problem of complicity in dominant discourse and internalization by teachers of the language of exclusion is illustrated in the voices of faculty quoted in articles about Early Start. A few faculty members quoted in the articles, for example, simply reiterate the Chancellor’s Office view that students are deficient. In this section of the essay I once again italicize the language of the Remedial Writing Framework to highlight the ways CSU teachers are caught in this historical discourse.

One composition instructor was quoted in an article as saying, “Obviously, there are an awful lot of entering students who do need *remediation*” (qtd. in Carmona). A remediation director at another college was quoted as saying, “We’re all trying to figure out how to handle these students who are woefully *unprepared*” (qtd. in Krupnick). The use of the term “remediation” and the idea that there are an overwhelming number of students that need remediation was not just stated by faculty who spoke in favor of Early Start. Other faculty quoted in newspaper articles offer strong critiques of Early Start, but do so using terms from the language of exclusion of the Remedial Writing Framework. One educator and activist who has been a staunch defender of the CSU’s mission to serve diverse, first-generation college students was quoted as saying, “*Remedial* students did not fail to prepare for CSU. *Remedial* students are the majority. *Remediation* can be seen as a social justice remedy because if *remedial* education was not available in the CSU then many fewer students would have access to a college education in California” (qtd. in Bordas). Another teacher known for her leadership role in composition throughout the CSU was quoted as saying, “I do not believe this program will be effective. I definitely don’t think it will be more effective than what we already do....If we don’t have it our students would be fine. They aren’t going to improve in any way that’s measurable and that’s going to reduce their time in *remediation*” (qtd. in Kernes).

The language of exclusion was also replicated by faculty in resolutions against Early Start. Consider this excerpt from the CSU Academic Senate's resolution against Early Start:

The Academic Senate of the California State University (ASCSU) recognizes the value of diverse campus approaches to moving fully qualified first-time freshmen (FTF) who require additional *skill acquisition (remediation)* in English or mathematics to achieve *proficiency* either prior to, or during, their first year of enrollment.

In this resolution, composition is conceived of as "skill acquisition" and students are expected to become proficient in these basic skills by the end of their first year, as if writing is a finite set of skills that can be completed in a few semesters. The sentence above was repeated verbatim in a number of CSU campus Faculty Senate resolutions against Early Start. The resolution against Early Start passed by the Faculty Senate at San Jose State University contains sentences that reproduce the language of the Remedial Writing Framework:

In particular, there is a disproportionate percentage of underrepresented students requiring *remediation* and the Early Start requirement further reinforces the message that they don't belong at the University; and San José State already has effective *remediation* programs directed and taught by experts in the field.

Many in the *remedial* education community feel that there is an eternal existence of *remedial* students despite manifold attempts to "fix" them. *Remediation* has always had more to do with how these students are labeled and perceived than who they actually are. (2)

The discourse of these resolutions reinforce the concept of the internal remedial student, and it speaks to Victor Villanueva's argument that it is time "to move away from the concept that basic writers are in need of remedies" (97). Part of moving away from this concept of students perpetually in need of a remedy is getting beyond the language of remediation that teachers as well as administrators and the media continue to replicate. Even as they work against Early Start, faculty are trapped in the semantic macrostructures of the language of exclusion of the Remedial Writing Framework: *basic*, *remedial*, and *skills*. The language used by CSU faculty to critique Early Start supports Rose's point that "we end up arguing with words that sabotage our argument" (342). What the CSU needs to truly disentangle itself from the

Remedial Writing Framework is new words, and a new discourse framework.

THE ADVANCED WRITING FRAMEWORK: DISRUPTING THE DISCOURSE

The required first-year composition course has its roots in remediation, and the language of exclusion is not unique to courses labeled “basic” or “developmental.” As Mathew Pavesich argues, “Built into the very fiber of composition, and its *raison d’être*, is the notion of remedial normalization as crisis response” (91). Sharon Crowley’s abolitionist argument—that first-year writing will not lose its remedial status until the requirement itself is eliminated—presents one alternative to the Basic Writing Framework. A possible abolitionist solution for the CSU would be to eliminate both Basic Writing and first-year composition and encourage campuses to see writing as a shared responsibility through writing across the curriculum or writing in the disciplines programs. Another way of framing the issue, however, is to make the argument that most students need more than a single semester of focused, integrated reading and writing instruction by a composition specialist to help prepare for the complexities of academic literacies. A handful of CSUs have persuaded their campuses that a single semester of composition should not be considered mainstream but advanced.

There are five campuses that have made this shift away from the EPT and the basic/normal dichotomy. These five campuses—San Francisco State University, Fresno State University, CSU Channel Islands, CSU San Bernardino, and CSU Sacramento—ask students to complete a Directed Self-Placement (DSP) survey rather than using their EPT cut score for placement. Students may choose to take either a one-semester course that is considered an advanced writing experience or a two-semester cohorted stretch course which is considered the mainstream option, with additional adjunct tutoring options for students in either path. Fairclough argues that an important part of critical discourse analysis is finding “resistant texts” and “alternative representations” (134), and I argue that the Advanced Writing Framework presents alternative semantic macrostructures that disrupt Early Start and the Remedial Writing Framework and help CSU teachers break from historical discourse norms of deficiency, skills, and testing.

The curriculum structure of the Advanced Writing Framework combines a variety of the models that William Lalicker outlines in “A Basic Introduction to Basic Writing Program Structures,” and the inspiration for the approach at these five CSU campuses certainly comes from Basic

Writing theory and practice. It is critical to note, however, that none of these campuses perceives of or labels the stretch course as Basic Writing. Lalicker is not alone in associating stretch courses with Basic Writing. Adler Kassner and Harrington in *Basic Writing as a Political Act*, George Otte and Rebecca Williams Mlynarczyk in “The Future of Basic Writing,” and Greg Glau in his articles about the stretch program at Arizona State University, all associate stretch with basic writing. This is not a criticism of these authors: most stretch programs are associated with Basic Writing and “basic” writers. Pavesich argues that DSP and remediation alternatives like stretch and studio are problematic when they lead students to place themselves in courses that are not considered “normal,” and this is where the reframing of the one-semester course is key.

By introducing discourse that defines the one-semester course as “advanced” or “accelerated” and the stretch course as mainstream, these five CSU campuses have accomplished what Ritter calls “a shift in program design that does not eliminate necessary assistance for these writers but also does not rhetorically separate them from other writers in the university” (13). To discuss the effects of the shift from the Basic Writing Framework to the Advanced Writing Framework, I cite the language used on the DSP and first-year writing program websites and brochures of these five campuses.

The Discourse of the Advanced Writing Framework

At both CSU Channel Islands and CSU Sacramento, the dominant discourse that the EPT is a valid way to measure writing ability and place students into composition courses is explicitly disrupted. The welcoming letter that the CSU Channel Islands writing program includes on their DSP website lets students know that “at CSUCI, we don't believe single timed essays can reliably predict how students will perform in writing classes. We believe students and writing are far more complex than any single score can suggest.” The letter goes on to assure students, “You'll certainly do a better job of placing yourself than a single timed test would.” The CSU Sacramento DSP website explains that “Sac State students used to enroll in first-year composition courses based on their scores on the English Placement Test (EPT). We do not, however, believe that a multiple-choice, timed exam is the best way to determine a student's skills and placement.”

In addition to challenging the validity of the timed impromptu test, the discourse of mainstreaming at these CSU campuses challenges the “normal/basic” dichotomy and instead introduces the terms “strong” and “average” to

define the differences between the one-semester course and the two-semester stretch course. This is evident in the DSP placement survey instruments of Fresno State, Channel Islands, and San Francisco State. All three institutions use the phrase “I think of myself as a strong reader and writer” as the first criterion for self-placement into the one-semester course, and “I think of myself as an average reader and writer” for self-placement into the two-semester course. The literacy self-survey that is a part of the CSU Sacramento DSP instrument asks students if they have “more than average” experience reading and “more than average” experience writing. The one-semester composition courses at these CSU campuses are for “strong” students, and the two-semester option is the average. Otte and Williams Mlynarczyk say of DSP: “With this model, entering students are advised of the availability of basic writing courses and left to make their own decision as to whether to take BW or regular composition” (17). In the Advanced Writing Framework, there is no basic/regular dichotomy for DSP. As the DSP brochure of CSU Channel Islands states: “There are no remedial writing courses at CSUCI, so whichever choice you make, you’ll be in a course that counts toward graduation and in which you will be expected to produce college-level writing.”

This distinction of “strong” versus “average,” as opposed to “normal” versus “basic,” is reinforced in the titles of the first-year writing courses. At Fresno State, the course title of the one-semester composition option is “Accelerated Academic Literacy.” In their DSP brochure, Fresno State says of their stretch course: “Unless you really excel in English, we suggest this option.” The brochure warns students that the one-semester course “is an advanced class, and to choose this option you need to be a very competent reader and writer, ready to read complex essays, develop research supported analyses and complete assignments at a faster pace.” The course title of the one-semester composition option at San Bernardino is “Advanced Composition.” On the DSP website, it is labeled as the “most aggressively paced first-year writing option.” The one-semester course is described as “intended for students who are confident, flexible readers and writers, have familiarity with academic conventions and habits of mind, and are self-directed and self-motivated.” It is important to note that despite the similar language used, this kind of reframing is quite different from Peter Adams’ Accelerated Writing Program, which involves accelerating Basic Writing through a specific kind of mainstreaming but does not focus on redefining the one-semester course as accelerated or advanced for all students and does not necessarily use DSP.

The DSP survey instruments and websites from all four institutions do recognize that mainstream first-year writers at an institution such as the

CSU, which has an explicit mission of access to college for first-generation students, will not always have the same literacy backgrounds as the students entering the University of California system or private institutions like Stanford. The stretch courses are for students who are “unsure what to do when confronted with difficult texts,” “have trouble coming up with good topics and ideas,” “need to learn how to use outside sources,” and “could use some brushing up on grammar and punctuation.” These are not the qualities of “remedial” or “basic” students but of typical CSU students. CSU San Bernardino describes the stretch course option that lasts three academic quarters as:

Intended for the typical entering college students who may feel somewhat nervous about reading and writing at the college level and/or whose previous writing experiences have focused primarily on forms of writing, like the 5 paragraph format, Schaffer paragraphs, and other systematic approaches to writing development.

Despite this acknowledgment that the expectations of college-level writing will be a challenge for *most* entering students at the CSU (and not just those labeled remedial by a timed test), DSP recognizes the assets students bring with them to college writing. The DSP website at CSU San Bernardino states that “students who are admitted to CSUSB have successfully met expectations for high school writing; they are college-ready students.” CSU Sacramento emphasizes that “students enter the university already having a variety of writing skills and strategies. It is our mission to build upon these to prepare students for the complex reading, thinking, and writing tasks that will await them in their university classes and beyond.” The CSU Sacramento DSP website also makes an effort to discuss multilingual students’ assets. It states that the multilingual versions of each course “focus on the experiences and languages that multilingual students bring to the classroom—using them as a resource for learning and refining students’ academic reading and writing.”

Unlike the basic skills language of the discourse of Early Start, the language of DSP and stretch composition presents a more nuanced view of college reading and writing, in large part because the terms are in the control of composition specialists rather than ETS or the Chancellor’s Office. With the discourse in the control of writing teachers, students who were once labeled “remedial” or “basic” can now be more accurately labeled as “typical,” and what was once wrongly labeled mainstream—a mere one semester

of composition instruction—can be more properly labeled as “advanced” or “accelerated.”

Table 1 outlines the ways in which the discourse of the Advanced Writing Framework disrupts both the Remedial and Basic Writing Frameworks. It summarizes the evolution in the teaching of composition in the CSU from indirect assessment to direct assessment to self-assessment; from testing and tracking to choosing; from composition as a remedial basic skills course to composition as an advanced course in complex academic literacies; and from a separate writing curriculum for remedial and mainstream to an integrated writing curriculum.

Table 1: Comparison of Writing Frameworks in the CSU

Remedial Writing Framework	Basic Writing Framework	Advanced Writing Framework
Indirect assessment of writing ability through a multiple-choice test designed and scored by ETS	Direct assessment of writing ability through a timed writing test designed and scored by CSU writing teachers	Self-assessment of writing processes and habits through DSP activities designed by CSU writing teachers
Testing to exclude	Testing to sort	Self-assessment to choose
Targeted population of students labeled “remedial” writers	Targeted population of students labeled “basic” or “developmental” writers	All students labeled “college writers”
One-semester first-year composition course as “normal,” preparatory courses as “remedial”	One-semester first-year composition course as “mainstream,” preparatory courses as “basic” or “developmental”	One-semester first-year composition course as “advanced,” stretch course as “mainstream”
Different curriculum in “normal” and “remedial” courses	Different curriculum in “mainstream” and “basic” courses	Different pacing in one-semester and stretch courses but the same curriculum

Table 1 reveals how the Advanced Writing framework disrupts the discourse of the Remedial Writing framework in ways that the Basic Writing Framework was not able to: by eliminating the semantic macrostructures “remedial” and “basic” and “skills”; by eliminating high stakes timed testing as a tool to track and label students; by erasing the basic/normal dichotomy; and by

making two semesters of composition the mainstream and one semester advanced. Composition teachers who are concerned about being complicit in the discourse of remediation and basic skills can reflect on Table 1 to consider which column their own programs align with and what steps they can take to move their programs away from testing, tracking, and the normal/basic distinction.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD AGAIN: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

My argument for the Advanced Writing Framework is not a criticism of the work of the first generation of CSU Basic Writing teachers; nor is it a dismissal of what has been the strategic benefit of the term and the concept of “Basic Writing” in protecting resources for underserved students in the CSU. Shaughnessy’s relabeling of remediation as “Basic Writing” was a savvy rhetorical move away from exclusionary language that CSU writing teachers were wise to adapt at the time. Shaughnessy’s intention was to avoid both the term “remedial” (with its emphasis on personal defects) and “developmental” (with its implications that students are cognitively stunted). Deborah Mutnick argues that “basic writing, for all its internal contradictions, has played a vital role in increasing access to higher education” (72), and the creation of Basic Writing programs in the CSU system in the 1960s and 70s was a savvy move to protect access for socioeconomically disadvantaged students and provide them the support they needed to succeed in college writing. The recent creation of alternatives to non-credit bearing remedial coursework under the Advanced Writing Framework has been a savvy move as well, and one that has helped save the resources garnered by Basic Writing programs from right-wing attacks on access and entitlement and from budget cuts that have decimated state support for remediation in the past decade. I believe Basic Writing programs across the country can take away a number of lessons from the current evolution in first-year composition in the CSU, and I believe the Advanced Writing Framework represents more than just a rhetorically savvy move; it represents the possibility of escape from the “political-semantic web” (Rose 342) of the language of exclusion.

Changing the Nature of the Discourse

Based on my analysis of the emerging Advanced Writing Framework in the CSU, I feel there are strategies WPAs and writing teachers can use to help change the nature of the debate and disrupt the discourse of the Remedial

Writing Framework that endures not just in California but across the United States. The most important of these strategies is to avoid labeling college writing courses or programs “remedial,” “developmental,” or “basic.” There are times that it may be strategically necessary to use these terms and concepts to ensure the survival of a program, but it is up to composition teachers to remove these semantic macrostructures from the discourse norms. The discourse event of Early Start reinforces that if we continue using these terms, the Remedial Writing Framework will endure and replicate in the language of administrators and the public.

I believe it is also important for WPAs and writing teachers not to be complicit in labeling students “remedial,” “developmental,” or “basic” when discussing college writers and college writing courses with faculty, administration, and the media or when designing writing assessment and placement. As the CSU faculty quoted in campus and city newspapers reporting on Early Start and the faculty senate resolutions against Early Start reveal, as long as teachers use the language of exclusion, we unintentionally replicate the dominant discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework even as we argue against it. In an Advanced Writing Framework, the current writing assessment best practice that works against labels that stigmatize college writers in the minds of the public is Directed Self Placement. The history of Basic Writing in the CSU reveals that regardless of who designs the content of a timed writing test, who scores the test, or what the placement nuances are, administrators, faculty, students, and the public will associate a timed test with passing or failing, and with sorting the “normal” students from the “deficient” students. As my analysis of the emerging Advanced Writing Framework in the CSU emphasizes, DSP helps ensure that writing teachers control the discourse of assessment and placement. It can be a challenge to argue for DSP in the context of national and local discourses that assume that timed writing tests are valid indicators of college readiness and that “remedial” students won’t be capable of making decisions about which writing course is best for them. At the CSU it took decades of politicking through English Council and at local campuses to persuade the Chancellor’s Office to allow DSP to replace the EPT. WPAs who are working to change a remedial framework that dominates both nationally and locally at most institutions cannot expect change to happen overnight.

At most institutions of higher education, a one semester composition course is considered mainstream, and typically more than one semester of preparation in first-year composition is labeled “basic” or “developmental” or “remedial.” The Advanced Writing Framework makes the case that one

way to disrupt the normalized discourse of alleged literacy crises and legions of underprepared students draining taxpayer money is to rethink how much coursework in composition *most* entering college students will need to prepare for complex academic literacies. Rather than defining one semester of first-year composition as “mainstream” or the “norm,” we should define it as “advanced” or “accelerated.” We need to disabuse administrators and the public of the normalized discourse that fifteen weeks of reading and writing instruction from a composition expert is enough for most students to make the transition from high school to college literacies. Connected to this recommendation is the strategy of labeling anything beyond one semester of composition—whether it is stretch or studio or some other configuration—as “mainstream” rather than “basic” or “developmental” or “remedial.” By defining the stretch course as the mainstream option, the CSU campuses in my study have worked toward eliminating the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework without eliminating the amount of instruction and support most students will need to succeed in college reading and writing.

The experience of the CSU system shows that we can change the discourse of our curriculum, our professional identities, and our disciplinary and public conversations. We can stop using terms like “remedial” or “basic” or “developmental.” We can frame our research on the assets diverse students bring to college writing and less on the challenges and problems the students we label “basic writers” present. We can resist the urge to track and separate the “basic” from the mainstream—in our curriculum, in our research, at our conferences, and in our journals.

The shift from the Remedial Writing Framework to the Basic Writing Framework in the 1970s was important and necessary, and this shift protected access for underserved students, but the discourse event of Early Start further emphasizes that what this shift failed to do was change the nature of the discourse of remediation and basic skills. To truly disrupt the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework, we need to recognize our own complicity in this discourse and work to move beyond the discursive limits of the Basic Writing Framework. Replacing the language of exclusion and the discourse of the Remedial Writing Framework will not be easy or fast. But if administrators, politicians, the media, and our fellow faculty can so quickly and easily adopt and replicate the language of exclusion that we ourselves have at times been complicit in supporting, there is reason to believe that they will adopt new assumptions and a new discourse if we lead the way.

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