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Editorial: The Challenge That Won't Go Away

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The Challenge That Won't Go Away

More than two decades ago I led a workshop several times at the Ohio Writing Project site in Oxford, Ohio. I entitled the workshop “The Problem That Won't Go Away.” One day as I was setting up, an early arrival looked at the title of the session and asked me, “This is about grading papers, isn't it?” And it was.

I would retitl e that workshop now by substituting *challenge* for *problem*, but terminology aside, those of us who teach writing courses are fully aware of how much time and energy we invest in responding to our students' written work: writing or recording comments, conferencing with authors, assigning grades to final drafts. That workshop led eventually to a publication in a special issue of *TETYC* (“Grades and Context: An Experiment and a Commentary,” 20.4 [May 1992], 263–74), but the challenge hasn't gone away.

In this issue we feature two essays that tackle the challenges in different ways: a traditional research study and a classroom research project. In “Conversing in Marginal Spaces: Developmental Writers' Responses to Teacher Comments,” Carolyn Calhoon–Dillahunt and Dodie Forrest examine an understudied population in the response literature: developmental writers. And in her Instructional Note, “Colorful Revision: Color-Coded Comments Connected to Instruction,” Nancy Mack explores an innovative response practice and its reception by her students.

Both essays grow out of reflective practitioners' concern with finding better ways to meet the challenge that won't go away. Whatever the theoretical grounding we may bring to the writing classroom, instructors inevitably participate in two activities, one at either end of the students' writing processes: we “commission” their writing in the first place, and subsequently we assess that writing. Mack wisely quotes Knoblauch and Brannon's seminal observation that “Any remark on a student essay, whatever its form, finally owes its meaning and impact to the governing dialogue that influences some student's reaction to it (2).” The reality is that the ways we respond to students' writing and the ways we subsequently respond to their reactions help shape and remake that governing dialogue.

The essay engendered by my long-ago workshop appeared in a special issue on response to student writing, but I continue to believe that any issue of *TETYC* that can provide thoughtful work on writing response is indeed a special issue—like this one.

—J.S.