

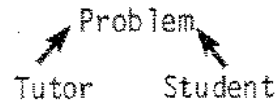
With winter break and the holidays so close, we are all in a countdown stage, ticking off the days until vacation. One way to get a perspective on these last few hectic months is to poll everyone in the lab and select your greatest successes and your most difficult cases. Who tops the list of students you've helped? Is it the indifferent writer who vowed he was there only because his teacher forced him to come and then left with ideas for a paper he genuinely wanted to write? Or the writer of fragments who seemed doomed to write fragments forever--until that magic day she appeared at the door of the lab with a huge grin and a B+ on her last paper? And who was your greatest problem writer? Was it that student who kept strolling in twenty-five minutes or more after the beginning of her appointment with neither a paper to work on nor any idea of her next assignment? Was it the quiet foreign student who smiled and smiled--and smiled--and agreed with everything you said (even when you explained that your pet ferret just died)? Or did you try to work with a car addict who turned every writing assignment into another discussion of his '81 Mustang?

And what are your favorite teacher comments scrawled on student papers that come to the lab? My nomination for the "Most Informative" award goes to the following: "Your writing has problems. Try the Writing Lab." And the "Practice-What- Thou-Preacheth" award was clearly won by the teacher who noted that "the passive is not to be used."

Let us hear from you if you're willing to share your successes, problem cases, and favorite grading comments. And, of course, keep sending your announcements, articles, reviews, names of new members, and yearly \$5 donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University) to me: Muriel Harris, editor
WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

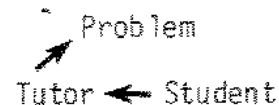
RE-EVALUATION OF THE QUESTION AS A TEACHING TOOL

When a student arrives at a tutoring session, she brings a mass of confusing information plus a lack of, or loss of, strategies for problem solving. When she presents this information to the tutor, the focus of attention looks somewhat like this:



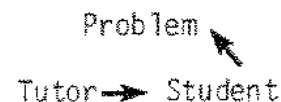
with both tutor and student focused on the problem.

After a few moments of questioning by the tutor, the model changes to this:



because the tutor has become engaged with the problem by becoming aware of the point of error and has then begun to untangle the problem while the student's attention is now focused on the tutor and his problem solving strategy.

But if the student is to develop her own strategies, the model should take this shape:



with the student addressing the problem and the tutor listening to the student.

These three models of a tutoring conference deserve our attention because they show the position of a necessary component in the process of a learning experience. We often refer to it as having a questioning attitude. Jean Piaget in more clinical

terms called it dissonance, an imbalance that needs to be set right. No matter what our semantic choices are, we can see in the first model the presence of dissonance more in the tutor than the student. At this point the tutor genuinely feels a need to know. The student, on the other hand, has given up on her own questioning strategies, thus the reason for her visit to the lab. In the second model, the tutor has found the source of the dissonance and is totally engaged with her need to correct the imbalance by using her problem solving strategies. Unfortunately, the student is also engaged in the tutor's strategies. The third model is reversed, with the student engaged with the source of dissonance, thus developing her own problem solving strategies, and the tutor is observing the student.

Psychologists such as L. S. Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Carl Rogers and Jerome Bruner have brought into sharper focus a key concept of cognition that is of major importance to our understanding of the relationship between the question and learning. By various paths of approach, each of the above psychologists has linked the conception of learning involvement with an awareness of dissonance, or a need that takes its shape in a puzzlement or question within the individual. It is an accepted principle that the degree of learning is directly related to the degree of the learner's involvement; however, we find that creating that involvement in another person is difficult, if not perhaps impossible. Since we are aware that the learner must question herself, we as tutors try to create a questioning attitude by asking questions--which we should not do.

In The University of Akron Writing Laboratory, it has been our practice to use the question not only as a measuring device to determine the student's level of knowledge but as a means of encouraging the student to verbalize or elaborate on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of her work. In an attempt to evaluate the success of our practice, a small study was planned.

An analysis of randomly taped sessions at the Writing Lab proved enlightening; certain patterns began to appear. For instance, a short answer pattern was established in a first meeting when, in an attempt to create some measure of rapport, a tutor asked get-acquainted questions about the student's hometown, course of study, future goals, and

the like. And though these questions were intermingled with relaxed personal reflections from the tutor, they received only short, specific answers from the student. The lab tapes also revealed that the type of questions most used in relation to the student's work were those requesting short answers. Out of this sample of 232 questions, 64% were requests for factual information and 23% were requests for some type of analysis or evaluation; the remaining 13% were requests for paraphrasing or re-reading or were answered in haste by the tutor. If the information was known by the student, the answer came quickly but was limited. At other times no answer was given and the resulting tension remained high until the silence was broken. Significantly, it was the tutor who most often broke the silence, and very often with another question.

Disappointed with the large percentage of fact-requesting questions, I made the question the next target of study. I found that if we accept the theory that learning begins at the point of dissonance or felt need within the learner, then the often used technique of questioning the learner in an attempt to create learning is not a valid tool for two reasons: (1) the power within the structure of a question and the restrictions of its response can be inhibiting, and (2) the necessary felt need for learning involvement is misplaced. I found that questions have an inhibiting power through the nature of their structure. They require, if not demand, a response for closure; otherwise, the tension created by the question remains high and unresolved. An additional tension is created simply by responding to the question, for responses have limitations or boundaries. The question requiring factual answers is limited to a response known only by the questioner, the responder, or possibly by both questioner and responder. An analysis or evaluation response is limited through the available information from which to work, and until the responder receives some signal from the questioner that she has given a satisfactory response, the danger of error remains high. Consequently, the inhibiting power of the question plus the boundary limitations of the response restrict thinking rather than release it. In an article "Using Questions to Depress Student Thought," J. T. Dillon cites eleven studies that show question responses are typically brief, a single word or phrase, and as further questions are posed, responses tend to become shorter (p. 56).

Some types of questions, it seems, have a more inhibiting nature than others because decoding carries an emotional as well as informational message. For instance, the "Why" question often receives a hesitant answer or an "I don't know," possibly because it seems to imply error before an analysis has begun. In The Helping Interview, Alfred Benjamin gives an interesting theory for this phenomenon. It appears this is generally the first question asked of a child when he has done something wrong, reminding us of the theory that memory apparently travels along affective paths, with "feeling generating memory and memory generating feeling." We are all too familiar with the overriding power of the emotional message as opposed to the informational message of a teacher's marginal notes or questions on a returned paper, which students assume are harshly critical even without reading them. Furthermore, understanding what the question means is sometimes difficult for the student. After all, there are innumerable decoding possibilities based on what the student brings to the conference, and the inhibiting power of a question can be intensified by the student's reasoning at that moment. She may decode the question with another question composed around a concern for the reason for the tutor's question. A chained sequence of decodings, such as, "Why is he asking that question?" or "Why is he asking me that question?" is an intrusion into any problem solving strategies the student may have had, and the tutor's question now has become "Threatening, paralyzing, embarrassing or even may be considered an attack" (Dillon, 1982 p. 138). Janet Morsund points out that the student who hears the question "is not a passive machine, carrying on a running translation of sound. Listening is an active process in which every message fragment is screened and either accepted or rejected (possibly highlighted) so as to fit whatever else is going on in the listener's thoughts and feelings" (p. 83). The tutor has no way of knowing at what emotional level the student is attending the question.

The Writing Lab tapes also revealed a separate yet related area of inhibition, the amount of wait-time permitted by the questioner between question and response. In 1974, Mary Budd Rowe published the results of a six year investigation into the influence of teacher/pupil wait-time. A group of teachers were trained to progressively increase wait-time from 0.9 seconds to 3 to

5 seconds. Then, recorded classroom sessions were analyzed and revealed that student response changed in ten variables, eight of which apply directly to the conferencing session. She found that with increased wait-time: (1) the length of response increased; (2) unsolicited but appropriate responses increased; (3) failure to respond decreased; (4) confidence, as reflected in response, increased; (5) speculative responses increased; (6) evidence inferences increased; (7) student questions increased; and (8) responses from students rated as slow increased. Rowe also found that as wait-time increased, the length of student response increased concurrently with inferences connected to evidence. She stated, "It is as though the mapping of experience and thought into language proceeds in pieces. Intrusion between the bursts by another person prevents the expression of a complete sequence" (p. 87). Clearly, then, giving students enough time to respond is an important part of teaching, and we should stretch that time as much as we can, to give our students opportunity to think.

There are many ways of cutting off wait time, but I believe the question, by its very nature, is extremely intrusive. It places an extra decoding burden on the student, resulting in various degrees of cognitive strain. When the student is slow to respond, often the tutor interrupts the student's cognitive activity with further questioning in an attempt to clarify, or questions are interjected in anticipation of response-close, intensifying the cognitive strain by layering decoding on top of encoding processes. If the concepts within the original question are new to the student, his decoding processes are somewhat slower, and the encoding into a syntactically acceptable response will need more time. Intrusive questions simply add extra message sets to be decoded before the student has completed the first. It seems reasonable to assume then, that unsolicited interference in the student's cognitive activity is counter-productive to the intended goal of student cognitive involvement, and that longer wait-time has a positive measurable influence on student response; therefore, we should not interrupt our student's thinking with further questions.

The second major reason the question is not a valid tool for creating dissonance in the learner is the needs location. When the tutor composes a question for the student,

it is based on the tutor's perception of need within the student; consequently, the attention of both student and tutor are focused on what the tutor chooses as need. If, on the other hand, the student composes the question, it is based on what she chooses as need. For instance, if the tutor asks, "Why did you put a comma here?" it draws attention to error, or it requests an answer that is rule bound. If however, the student asks, "Do I need a comma here?" she has chosen the point of discussion that is at that moment her felt need.

Most literature dealing with the question as a teaching tool, concentrates on the cognitive level of expected response, claiming that questions structured a given way will elicit responses on a desired level; however, in his very informative article, "The Effects of Questions in Education and Other Enterprises," Dillon sheds doubt on the question as a catalyst for predetermined cognitive activity in anyone other than the questioner. He notes that most study results are given in total averages and the results of paired question/responses are not considered. Students often respond on a different level than expected, giving a short answer when a long evaluation is desired, so there is no guarantee that a question will cause a predetermined level of response.

Dillon points out that education is the only profession that considers the question a stimulant for higher levels of thinking (p. 129). Professionals such as pollsters or court room attorneys use the question to control or inhibit thinking. In contrast, professionals such as the personal interviewer or psychotherapists, who have a similar purpose as educators to free expression of thought, tactically avoid the question because it inhibits thought and responses.

Since there are so many negative qualities to the question, it would seem logical to avoid it, as much as possible, in a tutoring session. But how? Dillon and others found that the statement created longer, more reflective responses. At Akron University we find paraphrasing by the tutor is excellent because it forces the student to consider deep structures, highlighting the success or failure of various sections of a written piece. However, the imperative

structure is the most productive for a writing conference. If a student is told to explain the assignment made by the teacher, read a section aloud, point to the places that are creating discomfort or experiment by writing an idea in different structural styles, then she will be dealing with her needs by elaborating, manipulating and developing strategies for the identification and solving of her writing problems, and that is the goal of a writing conference. Asking questions has been a major portion of our teaching strategies; however, if the student is to become involved with the learning experience in a productive manner, the questions must come from her.

Joann B. Johnson
The University of Akron

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JOB OPENING

Queen's University at Kingston invites applications and nominations for the position of Director of the Writing Program. The Director will be responsible for establishing and administering a Writing Program and Centre, and for coordinating with the Queen's Writing Committee the instruction of writing skills across the curriculum.

The successful candidate must be able to provide leadership in the development of an effective writing program across the University. Responsibilities will include: developing the Centre's program of activities; hiring and training professional tutors; managing resources (budget); developing instructional services for student writing in all disciplines; developing approaches to the teaching of writing in all disciplines, and assisting the teaching of writing throughout the University.

The Director will be a member of an academic department such as English but with primary responsibilities in Writing Centre administration and secondary responsibilities in teaching and research. The possibility exists of a tenure-track appointment for a suitably qualified candidate.

Applicants' preparation should include: experience in academic administration (preferably in relation to curriculum); demonstrated success in teaching or tutoring writing at the undergraduate level or beyond (preferably in more contexts than English departmental courses); significant scholarly publications (or other significant experience as a writer). Applicants should be familiar with recent theory and practice in the field of writing across the curriculum. Most important, candidates must have a clear vision of a writing program that significantly benefits writers and teachers of writing, along with a coherent approach to developing a writing centre.

In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements, this advertisement is particularly directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Candidates of both sexes are equally encouraged to apply.

Each application should include a

curriculum vitae and the names of three referees. It should be sent by February 1, 1986 to the Chairman of the Search Committee to advise the Principal:

Dr. R.D. Fraser, Dean
Faculty of Arts and
Science
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3N6

CALL FOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS

Sixth Annual
DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING CONFERENCE
Old Dominion University
Norfolk, Virginia 23508
April 4, 1986

Faculty and administrators who work with developmental writing are invited to submit proposals. The theme for this year's conference is Writing Across the Curriculum. Proposals on this theme will be given priority; however, all proposals dealing with any aspect of developmental writing will be considered.

The deadline for receiving proposals is December 20, 1985. Please address inquiries to:

J. Steven Fletcher, Coordinator
Developmental Writing Conference
Writing Center
Old Dominion University
1501 West 49th Street
Norfolk, Virginia 23508

Telephone (804) 440-4112

The strongest drive is not
sex or greed. It is one person's
need to ~~change~~ ^{amend} another's copy.

after *change* *REVISE*
change *qualify*
MODIFY *change* *STET*

from

Simply Stated 55

"DO YOU OBJECT TO TUTORS ASSISTING YOUR
STUDENTS WITH THEIR WRITING?"

It has always come as a surprise to me when any of my colleagues do not share my enthusiasm and convictions about our Writing Center. I have also been somewhat intrigued. The benefits seem so self-evident. Any response to our Center other than vigorous adoration puzzled me. So I decided to survey the faculty to find out just what my constituency was thinking and feeling. I posed this question to them: "Do you object to tutors assisting your students with their writing?" I was asking, in effect, "Do you object to the Writing Center?" I expected to find a generally homogeneous attitude. I found, instead, a remarkable diversity of opinion.

Here is a representative sampling of the responses:

"I don't object because my philosophy is that we should try to teach students writing, not punish them for their past laziness or poor training."

"My own tutoring of students almost inevitably involves correcting their papers even though I try to keep my advice general. So long as I am warned that tutoring has been given, I am prepared to take it into account. Most students probably get some kind of help from other students anyway. In either situation, some kind of learning is taking place."

"I don't approve of their editing final drafts."

"Yes. The students don't always clearly understand what they're supposed to do--they can't, then, tell the tutor. I would prefer to have troubled students talk to me. Also, tutors often raise the tone of a student's paper in identifiable spots by use of terminology and phrasing which the student can't use on his or her own and doesn't elsewhere in the paper."

"I don't object if I am made aware of the nature of the help."

"I do object. My Vietnamese student who came in to see you received much too much help with his composition--even suggestions for ideas to be incorporated into the paper. In cases where a student has serious grammatical and organizational problems, I would even prefer he or she not take a draft of the paper to the Center at all, but rather get help through the use of verb exercises, etc. I realize it's a problem because the students themselves haven't the time or motivation to devote to learning what they should have learned years ago. But if they simply come to you with drafts and ask you to "O.K." them, then they aren't learning anything."

"No. I assume the tutors have a professional attitude. Besides, I work with students on planning and revision myself. When students learn to accept the suggestions that help them most, it seems to me the beginning of discrimination, and the first step towards being able to criticize and improve their own work. The students who passively accept "correction" without struggling to understand the reasons behind it soon lose any temporary grade advantage they gain. To encourage students to improve takes time--which is why the Resource Center is needed."

Some of this variety can be attributed to personal teaching philosophies. But this variety also can be attributed to varying degrees of awareness about what the Center does and doesn't do. There was a direct relationship in my survey between knowledge about the Center and reservations about its usefulness. The reservations about the Center came almost exclusively from instructors who I knew were less informed about the Center than many of the others. As a general

rule, I found that the more a faculty member knew about the Center, the more he or she appreciated it.

The most significant finding of the survey is that the faculty which the writing center serves needs to be informed in detail about what a particular writing center does and doesn't do. We must also recognize that some of the faculty needs to be convinced about the efficacy of writing centers. Writing centers are a new phenomenon in the academic community. And to some instructors writing centers are an untrustworthy enigma. Some instructors believe that writing centers are grievance depots staffed by unskilled and untrained sophomores. We cannot just assume, as many of us I think do, that all instructors share our enthusiasm and convictions about the tutoring process. We need to advertise, explain, and demonstrate the value of the services we provide. To build trust we need to demonstrate (not just assume) our value.

This is, however, no easy task. And the problems are compounded for those of us who work at large universities. The logistics can seem intimidating. The faculty can seem infinitely diverse. Usually, we have to settle for distributing P. R. brochures (which traditionally give only basic information). This strategy, however, seems like such a meager response to such an important task. There is, happily, more that we can do.

All writing centers should establish a policy statement in which the modus operandi of the center is set forth in detail. A policy statement should address possible or frequently encountered misconceptions and trepidations about the writing center. A policy statement should also establish the center's credentials. We discuss how tutors are selected (writing sample, two recommendations, academic record, personal interview) and how tutors are trained. A policy statement should also include a statement of purpose. We inform instructors that our purpose, as we define it, is to give students a sense of what a good paper should be. We suggest that anytime a student sits down with a tutor, growth will (in some form or measure) result. We describe ourselves as a support service. We reassure professors that we don't discuss grades and that we don't "proofread" (that is, we don't offer correction without instruction). A policy statement should include a description of a typical tutoring session. A policy statement

should also include a brief review of recent scholarship on the theory of composition. The statement should be a persuasive document and should be as informative as possible. And it should be distributed to the entire faculty.

Every faculty member won't read the policy statement, of course. But many will. And rest assured: those faculty members who don't read it are usually apprised of its contents one way or another. I have found that after a statement like this is distributed to the faculty, there is usually a week of general discussion and acknowledgement of the document among different departments and faculty members. It is surprising how quickly and thoroughly information like this becomes part of the general consciousness of a faculty.

All writing center directors should maintain an active and imaginative advertising program. The most convincing endorsement for a writing center is a student whose writing has improved. The more students we help, the more the good word spreads. Advertising also helps us reach a greater variety of students. And since most writing centers are run by English departments, advertising can help dispel the usual notion that a writing center is a place to get help with English papers only. Students, like professors, also need to know how a writing center can help them. Advertising can accomplish this. It is important to advertise extensively.

Here are a few of the ways in which we advertise:

1. We received permission from the managers of the campus bookstore to place Writing Center "Fact Sheets" (folded one page announcements) in student text books. Since all freshmen are required to take English 105, we only stuff these books and still reach every freshman. Last year I stuffed all the books myself (some 2000). It took me about 3 hours. This year the bookstore offered to do the stuffing for me. This is a very effective form of advertising.
2. We had a Writing Center T-shirt made up. We keep them on sale during the school year. We sold about 100 of these to students and faculty last year.
3. We use the standard glass display cases usually found in well-travelled

places such as the student union and the library.

4. We put posters in the shuttle buses which run regular routes around campus.
5. We advertise in the daily campus newspaper. We try to make our advertisements entertaining. We've used testimonials from students and professors, comic strips, and "Dear Abbey" burlesques. Students enjoy these ads because they are funny. This was our most effective form of advertising last year. 100 new students came to the center because of these ads.
6. We have a radio station on campus, and our advertisement about the center has been placed in the station's public service announcement file. Our advertisement is read about every two weeks.
7. Every incoming freshman is given an orientation packet of materials. We drop off about 2000 copies of our "Fact Sheet" and the co-ordinator of the program includes them in the packets. Every incoming freshman receives one. Between stuffing 105 books and including the "Fact Sheet" in the orientation packet, we are relatively sure that every freshman will encounter our flyer.
8. We regularly place posters and announcements in strategic positions around campus like the pub, the library, and the student union.
9. We have had self-adhering stickers made up which are distributed to every university instructor. The stickers contain the following message: "I recommend that you consult with a tutor at the Writing Resource Center before you write your next paper." The stickers facilitate referral of students to the Center.
10. We also have a Writing Center brochure.

This kind of advertising does not require a large budget. We purchased the stickers, for example, from a mail order firm for \$5. Advertising in the campus newspaper cost us approximately \$30 a month last year. Money

spent on advertising is money well spent. Our advertising program is directly and demonstrably responsible for our growth as a center.

It should also be noted that writing center directors need a market research tool. It is important that we know what advertising techniques are working best. A tutor report sheet can fulfill this function. We have students fill in most of the logistic information on our sheets after the tutoring session. One of the questions we ask the student to respond to is "How did you find out about the center?" As the sheets accumulate over the weeks, we get a good idea of which advertising channels are most effective. This is very good information to have.

Every writing center director should develop a mechanism whereby instructors are informed about any help their students receive at the Writing Center. Each time a student works with one of our tutors, the tutor completes a report sheet which will be forwarded at the end of the day to the student's instructor. Such a procedure has a number of benefits. This procedure enhances the student-instructor relationship. Professors find that receiving any additional "data" (as one instructor put it) on students is, in itself, helpful. Professors also like to see that students are concerned enough about their writing to seek extra help. Most instructors applaud a student's efforts to improve, and most, therefore, respond in some degree more favorably to students who have visited a writing center and made an extra effort to improve. This procedure also builds rapport with the faculty. These forms are an indication of a center's good will and of a center's commitment to function as an accessory to the instructor. A professional relationship is established. Without the report sheets, the writing center functions in a vacuum, literally divorced from the rest of the faculty.

My primary argument is that writing center directors must recognize the necessity of communicating with the faculty. Assumptions and misconceptions can only hinder our effectiveness. If we communicate effectively, there will be few instructors who will object to our tutors assisting students with their writing.

Patrick Sullivan
University of
Connecticut

Book Review

Beverly Lyon Clark, Talking About Writing:
A Guide for Tutor and Teacher
Conferences. Ann Arbor: Univ. of
Michigan Press, 1985. \$9.95.

"Good advice," one of my best students noted last semester, "is never from someone to anyone." Beverly Lyon Clark is Director of the Peer Tutoring Program and Writing Room at Wheaton College, and in her excellent Talking about Writing she offers good advice to those of us who teach writing one-to-one, whether in a tutorial center, a faculty office, or a classroom. Based on her own experience and that of the many peer tutors quoted in the text, this highly readable book is a storehouse of practical wisdom for tutors, teachers, and students themselves.

Clark divides her book into three parts: What to Tutor, How to Tutor, and Beyond Tutoring. In the first section, she urges tutors and teachers to begin with global matters--generating ideas and organizing material--before moving to local errors in grammar, mechanics, usage, and style. She presents a host of strategies for getting students to explore ideas, from unstructured listing, freewriting, and freedrawing (it works) to the rigors of Burke's pentad. Moreover, we see theory put into practice when Clark quotes peer tutors who have used each technique. Following Mina Shaughnessy, Clark argues that "errors are not signs of a student's stupidity but guides to her attempts to learn." As such, even garden-variety mistakes yield opportunities for exploration, she and her colleagues demonstrate. What's more, her chapter on mechanics contains a handy its/it's test (p. 60) that beats any other I know.

Clark's advice is no less good in Part II when she turns from doing to being. "How to Tutor" opens with two paradigmatic versions of a single conference ("Coach or Dictator?"). In this and subsequent chapters on "Getting Started" and "Down to Business" Clark's experience as a writing center administrator serves her readers well. Like a good tutor/teacher, she is authoritative without being authoritarian. She knows the value of asking the right questions--and of keeping silent so that a shy or pensive writer can think before answering. The "you" and "I" in her text are authentic, as

are the tutors whose journals she liberally quotes. "I have said many times in the past, 'I can't write, I can't spell, and I want to go to sleep,'" Beth Brown writes. "Maybe that's why I enjoy tutoring; I've been there."

Those who've been there, side by side at the writing table as tutor or tutee, will find that Clark confirms their instincts and understands the constraints they face. Time is always short; the tutor who is also the teacher must play umpire as well as coach. She candidly discusses problems not covered in standard handbooks: writing anxiety, aloofness, hostility, and prejudice. Her forthright and flexible approach to these matters makes even the worst of them seem manageable. The section closes with a chapter on "Evaluating Tutoring" that does justice to a complex task in ways that grade checks and body counts do not. In addition to a provocative self-evaluation checklist for tutors, Clark offers tips on using interviews and videotapes to assess one-to-one instruction.

What lies "Beyond Tutoring?" In her third section, Clark takes up tutors' journals (amply illustrated), the perils of tutoring (including that dread condition tutor's block), and ways by which one-to-one teachers can reach a broader audience: offering workshops, posting flyers, publishing articles in Writing Lab Newsletter. The book closes with appendixes keyed to the exercises and a judicious annotated bibliography.

"I made a point to caution her that it was her proposal and that she should only accept the advice which seemed most appropriate," Terry Wood recalls of a tutorial session. Thanks to Beverly Lyon Clark's understanding of her students and her craft, Talking About Writing requires no such warning. Her good advice will speak worlds to the tutor, teacher, or writer willing and able to listen.

William L. Stull
The University of Hartford

The Tutor's Corner

WHY I'M A WRITING TUTOR

"I know how to write--I got an A on my last poli-sci paper. I wrote it just like my English teacher said to back in high school: five paragraphs with an introduction, a body and a conclusion." This student is following a formula, not learning! High school was for memorizing these writing commandments; college is for understanding and expanding on them.

A simple example illustrates the difference between rules and understanding. Suppose I measured the times it took a ball to drop from various heights. I could then go to my desk and find a mathematical equation which very accurately fits this data. I could write this equation on a chalkboard and tell you that it described the motion of a falling body. I could even show you a few examples of how to apply this equation successfully. But do you know why this particular equation fits and others don't? Of course not. All you know is that it works.

Even today, the ultimate reason that this equation works is still not known. But the point of this story is that physicists are

not content to simply know an equation fits--they want to know why. They see rules as only a starting point. Why should we look at writing any differently?

Getting others to see that writing has a rational structure is my most important job at the Writing Center. How can I do this? I have the author read his paper aloud, and when I have trouble understanding it, I speak up and we try to identify the problem. Perhaps the writer assumed his reader knew too much, or he forgot to include part of his argument. I rarely mention inverted pyramids or introductions, bodies and conclusions. I want the writer to see why his paper is not getting its point across, not give the problem a name and a rule for how to avoid it. I teach the writer to read his paper--not to proofread it--but to be sure it makes sense to the reader. Each time a person realizes that making sense is the only "rule" of writing, I feel I've done my job.

Jon Stewart
Bucknell University

WHAT DO WRITING LAB DIRECTORS DO?

Among their countless other tasks, responsibilities, and activities, writing lab directors obviously write texts. Jeanette Harris, the director of the writing center at Texas Tech University, and Ann Moseley, the director of the East Texas State University writing center, have recently completed Contexts: Writing and Reading (published by Houghton Mifflin), a text that integrates writing and reading instruction. Patrick Bizzaro, the director of the East Carolina University writing lab, along with his colleagues at East Carolina, James Kirkland and Collett B. Delworth, Jr., have written Writing and Revising: A Modern College Workbook (published by D.C. Heath), a workbook that can be used independently and as a companion volume to the Concise English Handbook. And Practice for a Purpose (published by Houghton Mifflin), written by Muriel Harris, director of the writing lab at Purdue University, is a book of writing exercises that can be used inde-

pendently or as a companion volume to McCrimmon's Writing with a Purpose.

And directors also write books for teachers and tutors. Beverly Lyon Clark, director of the writing center at Wheaton College, has recently completed Talking About Writing: A Guide for Tutor and Teacher Conferences (published by the University of Michigan Press), a book which is reviewed in this issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter. Irene L. Clark, director of the writing lab at the University of Southern California, has written Writing in the Center: Teaching in a Writing Center Setting (published by Kendall/Hunt), to be reviewed in a future issue of the newsletter. And Muriel Harris, director of Purdue University's writing lab, has recently completed Teaching Writing One-to-One (to be published by NCTE), a book on the conference method of teaching writing for teachers and tutors.

PEER TUTORS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the June 1985 issue of the Writing Lab Newsletter, after describing accurately the student population of two-year colleges, their open door policy, and the resulting skepticism of instructors, Betty Neumann questions the feasibility of peer tutors in two-year colleges. I answer Neumann's query with a resounding YES! Community colleges should employ peer tutors. We at Allan Hancock College, a community college on the central coast of California, have used peer tutors successfully since our writing center opened its doors in 1976.

8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and two nights weekly, 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Each tutor is limited to twenty hours per week.

Our tutors prefer money over credits, especially credits that will not transfer. They attend college on limited funds, so they are interested in money to pay rent, cover tuition, or buy books. Most hold other jobs and attend class 12-15 hours per week.

Identification

Training

Our means of identification, then and now, is very simple: recommendation from an instructor. We follow the procedure established by our tutorial center.

We do very little training. Most tutors know how the center operates. They were tutees just the semester before. Most tutors know what is required for successful completion of specific courses within the composition program. They have taken the classes. For example, one tutor, Judy, was my student for two semesters, taking a pre-101 course and then 101. As a 101 student, she became our center clerk, recording attendance, filing folders, etc. Then as a 102 student, she became my classroom tutor and a writing center tutor. She trained on the job, just as I did my first year teaching composition.

Experience

Because 60% of our new students place into the pre-college composition course, most of our tutors have completed this prerequisite to English 101, the typical freshman composition course. After completing the pre-college course, our tutors enroll in 101 and tutor in the center. Thus, our tutors have successfully completed the courses for which they are tutors. In fact, these tutors are usually our most effective tutors; they know well the course their tutees are struggling through. However, we do employ tutors who score directly into freshman composition, who have AA or BA degrees, or who have professional writing experience. Within the community college lies a wealth of student potential, especially the re-entry student who has returned to school after rearing a family or who is making a career change or who has retired from a successful career.

Working from a list of students recommended to her by instructors, our center director hires the tutors and works out their schedule. She also assigns our classroom tutors if we have not located our own. Some tutors like Judy work in the classroom and in the center. The director reviews procedure with them and administers a tutor test developed by several English instructors. This test includes a short section on subject-verb identification and punctuation and a longer section on prewriting strategies and revision problems. Our center director handles all tutor problems. Instructors with complaints take them to her, not to the tutor. Tutors, too, seek out the center director with their questions though many feel comfortable asking help from instructors.

Compensation

Our tutors are paid out of the tutorial center budget since all students seeking help with their writing assignments must come to the writing center for assistance. In other words, a student who needs help in psychology reports to the tutorial center for a tutor assignment; a student who needs help with writing comes to the writing center. Three "professionals" (two center staff members and one full-time instructor) and one tutor work in the center each hour,

Several years ago we tried tutor meetings weekly, then bi-weekly, and finally monthly. Though the tutors and the center staff found them helpful, sharing problems and complaints and learning new techniques, we encountered difficulty finding a time when most tutors could attend.

Tutoring

Our tutors assist in all areas. They work with students on prewriting, writing, and revising. They locate specific skill exercises and assign them to students. They answer questions about WANDAH, a computer-assisted writing program. Because we have instructors in the center with them, our tutors do not hesitate to seek help if they are unsure or don't know. We have certain "checkpoints," steps in the writing process of each assignment, which only the classroom instructor may check. Though the tutors assist students with these points, they do not sign off on them. Instead they remind students that they must see their instructor at this point. This system assures that students in the center do not avoid their instructors until the final draft. More important, these checkpoints serve as a check on tutors. Misinformation can be caught, and the tutor helped.

"Two-Year" Misnomer

"Two-year" really is a misnomer for our institution and for many similar colleges throughout the nation. Students who work 30+ hours per week, students with families, and students with skill deficiencies are with us for several years, not two. The terms freshman and sophomore tend to blur. Our best tutor begins her third year with us this fall (and with an additional role, a new bride!). Another tutor, a student in the Learning Assistance Program, begins her fourth year at the college--two years bringing her skills up, another with personal commitments, and now on track and almost ready to transfer. She will be a new tutor for us this fall. Still another tutor, a woman with a family and little interest in transferring, has been with us for several years. She enrolls in enough units each semester to qualify as a tutor. And, yes, we have excellent tutors move on after a year or two, but we have always found excellent replacements.

Credibility?

Qualified tutors are readily accepted by the students. They enjoy working with these tutors who just last semester or year were sitting in their seats asking for help with their writing problems. Tutors are great listeners, sympathizers. They understand;

they have been through it.

Skeptical Instructors

My instructors are not skeptical about peer tutors. I do have instructors who do not request tutors for their classes; they just like to "go it on their own." However, these same instructors gladly welcome tutors into the writing center. They know, as we all know at Hancock, that our writing center could not serve our student population unless we employed peer tutors.

Judy Markline
Allan Hancock College

THE ETERNAL ROUGH DRAFT: A METAPHOR FOR TRAINING PEER TUTORS

As professional teachers and tutors of writing, one of our biggest obstacles is our proficiency in writing. We may or may not be published poets, short story writers, or critics, but we are at ease with written language; we move toward it naturally. We are so accustomed to this ease that we have no memory of learning to write. The rungs on our developmental ladder are broken behind us; we stand at the top, secure and capable but unable to go back. And because of this ease, many of us do not follow a clear process model when we write; our pre-writing may take place unconsciously or through dialogue with colleagues. So we don't know what struggling students are going through.

This is why peer tutors can be so effective. Their "peeriness," at least age-wise, is not as important as their peeriness developmentally as writers: a good peer tutor should be cognizant of her learning process; this process should be taking place now with many of the steps still caught in the rerun section of recent memory. Therefore a good peer tutor does not have to be an excellent, polished writer. Indeed, clear advantages exist in her not being an excellent, polished writer. (Much of the

growing literature about peer tutor selection and training proposes academic excellence in composition courses as a major criterion for tutors. At the University of Akron Writing Lab we look for tutors who are not necessarily natural writers but who have had to learn to write. Our preference is usually for successful basic writing students.)

I base much of my peer tutor training program on this assumption: that my tutors know effective learning strategies; they know them without reading Elbow, Shaughnessy, Macrorie, et al. (In fact, reading the experts, at least in the beginning of training, can be dangerous since it introduces tutors to teacher talk and obscures their natural expression of learning strategies). And tutors know these strategies in a language, often unformed, that is much closer to the language of tutees than are the strategies of the experts.

So we begin our training program by writing. (I am using "we" here to stress that I write with the tutors). First we write with the goal of generating ideas and producing clear, focused paragraphs. Often we use the same topics that our tutees (all of whom are basic writing students) will be writing about that semester. Then, when we have produced finished paragraphs, we write about and discuss how we got to where we got: what processes and strategies did we use? Which were dead ends, which were entrance ramps? Which strategies were easy and which were difficult? The tutors are encouraged to write about and discuss these strategies in their own language, not trying to fit them into already existing academic models.

Ideas and strategies (raw heuristics) are plentiful with every group of tutors. Most of their ideas with slight variations do fit into academic models, but it is essential that tutors hear the strategies discussed in their language first. Also important is the sense of discovery they feel in finding strategies. Everyone uses some form of pre-writing, most of it being semi-free writing: some use dialogue naturally at first, some do lists, some tell stories, some use a modified cubing process. This discovery--that everyone uses some form of pre-writing--leads to an excellent discussion of why pre-writing is necessary. This is also a good beginning for a discussion of writing as process, something all good tutors know intuitively

but need to discuss again and again.

At this point in training (the first couple of sessions) I ask tutors to start keeping a list or journal of strategies for getting started or unblocked, probably the two biggest problems our tutees face. I ask them to think about their writing process in everything they write for the next few weeks. At each meeting we share discoveries, and each tutor begins a list of strategies to experiment with. We also write about ways to introduce a specific strategy to a specific tutee. We write about what kinds of tutees might benefit from different strategies and why. I encourage them to show how they would or do use these strategies; this often leads to written dialogues or scripts, not only to expository writing. And from any script or dialogue the group is easily off to a discussion of tutor-tutee interaction and approaches for getting sessions started, something all tutors need help with.

Another interesting exercise we do very early in training is this: I have everyone write about "nothing." We start with the word "nothing" on our blank papers, and we write for ten minutes. Then we read and analyze the writings. Everyone ends up with something interesting--maybe an idea or possible focus; sometimes a whole page or paragraph emerges. We talk about how we got there: how we transformed nothing into a topic or focus. (Transforming teachers' topics is one of the biggest problems tutees have. Somehow successful students make a teacher's topic their own). We discuss how it's natural to move toward something, to focus, to give examples, to make sense. This exercise shows them that writing is thinking, that it's an ordering process, that the human mind fights boredom, abhors a vacuum. Eventually we write a paragraph or paper that came from this ten minute freewriting. The finished writings are always interesting.

What emerges from all this writing is a model of tutoring and writing as a process. Both require endless refocusing and countless new beginnings; both need constant revision and editing; and both tutoring and writing are enhanced by frequent peer discussion and collaboration. So our training program becomes a model, a process one engages in to become a better tutor.

After the first six or seven meetings, all of which ideally are at least two hours

long, our meetings usually settle at about one hour per week. We start these meetings by discussing problems tutors are having either with specific students or in general. One tutor presents a problem to the group. After a couple of minutes of informal discussion, I ask the group to write responses to the problem situation. What would you do if the student was your tutee? How have you overcome a similar barrier? What might be the cause of this problem? By now tutors know that they need to show solutions, not just tell them, having discovered that tutoring is a skill rarely learned by simple telling. Each member of the group reads her response, and we discuss which solution or approach is best for a specific tutee or situation. Again, tutoring is being reinforced as a revision process. A metaphor emerges: tutoring is an eternal rough draft--like any good writing, it is never finished.

Often the responses tutors make to these problem situations set an agenda for the meeting or reveal trouble spots requiring specific information or exercises for later meetings. From these responses I often learn what types of articles might help the group at a particular point in training. So much of the literature on tutoring and

composition theory is only helpful when read at a moment when we are ripe to learn, when our frustration is high or a problem has finally reached articulation.

I do not mean to imply here that all we do in our training program is write. We do role plays, have department professors lecture on sentence-combining and revising, and we read articles on composition theory, but at the core of our program is writing.

We write about everything. I want tutors to see writing as a problem-solving tool, as an inventive process, as a way to think about and see the world. Articles or lectures that say this to them are not as effective as an inductive approach of writing and discussion. I want tutors to do writing. I want the tutor training program to be a model of writing as learning. We who work in writing labs know, if anyone can know, that writing isn't taught--it's practiced. Good tutors like good teachers rarely learn anything that makes them better at their jobs; they take strategies, ideas and processes, and they practice, practice, practice....

James W. Sollisch
University of Akron



Muriel Harris, editor
Department of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907

SEASON'S GREETINGS