The WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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This month's newsletter is particularly chock full of numerous requests for help, offers of assistance, and comments on why the newsletter is useful. Clearly, this is an excellent example of the newsletter's purpose and its distinction from its companion publication, The Writing Center Journal. While the WCJ is intended for longer articles reporting research and theoretical discussions relevant to writing labs, the WLN is an informal monthly exchange of information, requests for help, announcements, and articles concerned with the daily operations of writing labs. Because writing labs are complex places requiring attention to a variety of administrative and instructional concerns, we need a constant channel through which to keep sharing the kind of information included in newsletter articles. And because writing labs offer a unique (and some of us would say--uniquely effective) format for writing instruction, we also need a journal devoted to more scholarly considerations of individualized instruction in writing. Thus, we have both the Writing Lab Newsletter and the Writing Center Journal, and both are publications of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) affiliate organization, the National Writing Centers Association.

The appreciative letters from members of our newsletter group included in this month's issue are also there to remind the authors of newsletter articles how useful their writing is to others. Too often manuscripts are sent to WLN with cover letters that are top-heavy with apologies: "This may not be useful . . ." or "I don't know if the enclosed essay is appropriate . . . ." These authors need a healthy dose of appreciation to let them know that others really do benefit from their writing.

So, keep sending your articles, reviews, announcements, comments, requests for help, offers to share your work, names of new members, and those always-needed $5/yr. donations (in checks made payable to Purdue University and sent to me) to:

Muriel Harris
Writing Lab Newsletter
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PEER TUTORING AS A SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITY

The title for this essay was generated by a line in Mary Rose O'Reilly's "The Peaceable Classroom," an article in the February 1984 issue of College English, which I happened to have read in our English Lab just before observing a peer tutor and a student work together for more than an hour. In the tutoring session, the student's initial frustration and despair were obvious; he was unable to get started, unable even to arrange his thoughts about the topic, and the paper was due the next day! The peer tutor, on the other hand, began with all the right moves and answers; at first, she listened to the tutee's lament, then began a patient question-and-answer session regarding the student's focus, audience, and goal.

But as the tutee answered with increasing confidence and his anxiety level visibly receded, the peer tutor's anxiety level visibly rose. She had been able to initiate the dialogue and elicit answers, but then her confidence in the process slipped. I could almost hear her thoughts, which she later confirmed: "Whose paper is this? Are those his ideas, or am I just getting him to answer what I would write? Is he using me as an easy way out of thinking for himself?" I remembered one of O'Really's closing ideas, that the writing class today is often a student's most radical learning experience, offering learning as a process of moving from inward examination to outward expression, as compared to what O'Reilly characterized as imposed intellectual bullying. My synthesis of O'Reilly's idea

and the peer tutor's dilemma was that if the contemporary writing class is radical, then peer tutoring in the writing lab could be a downright subversive experience for both tutor and student. It could overturn their perceptions of how both composing and teaching are achieved: with alternations of doubt and confidence, submission and authority. What had happened in the peer tutoring session, an unexpected trade of responses to the process, might be what we English professionals would expect; however, for the involved students, it is a small revolutionary experience.

So what is there about peer tutoring in a writing lab that overturns students' perceptions? One encompassing realization by student and tutor is that the writing is a process and not a product, that all the argument and backtracking in the tutoring session are sometimes more important than the finished paper. The open-ended, non-domineering advice that a peer tutor can give encourages more rewriting than the usual grading-and-conference sequence in a writing course, where even the most positive encouragement is accepted through the filter of the professor's authority. Peer tutoring encourages the student to think of her discarded attempts and multiple revisions as really good efforts rather than as evidence of her incompetence to achieve coherence even after multiple drafts.

Peer tutoring also fosters an interactive relationship between learner and teacher, a potential for trading places that does not happen much between student and professor. The student who comes in for help is much more likely to challenge a peer tutor's suggestions than a professor's, and such a challenge is likely to motivate the peer tutor to learn more about the process at hand, just to make sure that he really is helping in a constructive way. Since most peer tutors are upper-level English students fresh from comparative lit or teaching methods courses, challenges from their peers usually send them from initial confidence through a sequence of panic, fearfulness that the student will return, study for subject mastery, and regained self-confidence, a parallel of what their tutees must do. Good writers discover gaps in their competence, while insecure students find that their writing can make sense to someone they perceive to be on their own level. And peer tutors offer a clear test of communication to student writers: Would a peer learn what s/he needs to know from what I have written?

Holistic learning also describes the peer tutoring process. The tutee engages all of the sensual processes involved in composing (speaking, listening, thinking, feeling, writing) compared to the one, listening, most often engaged in the classroom or conference. When observing a peer session, one can see this have a profound effect on the tutee's understanding of her own topic, from the number of jotted notes to the length of final paper. The tutee reaches for coherence through dialogue with the tutor rather than through a monologue with herself. The tutor also becomes a holistic learner, gathering insight from the tutee's progress, generating his own ideas about interesting new topics, trying his own hand at writing something worthwhile about someone else's assignment. By its focus on process rather than on product and by its unauthoritarian response to writing, peer tutoring encourages a thoughtful process of composition in any course requiring writing.

The diffusion of authority in the non-teacher-dominated tutoring lab also generates confidence in the students' own processes and thoughts rather than insecurity that a teacher isn't right there to approve or disapprove of what the students are doing. I think that this is the subversive kernel in the peer tutored lab: the potential for students, the non-authorities, to develop confidence and a sense of pride in their own ideas on a topic, their own methods of organization, their own trails to a good conclusion, without having to involve that filter of authority, the teacher's critique. Peer tutoring takes something that students have been doing for centuries, collaborative learning, and allows them to use it to develop respect for their own thought processes, their own insights, and their own response to their writing. It is because of this potential that we involved with writing labs should encourage and support this method of self-validation within the writing process.

Jenny R. Redfern
Eastern Montana College

A writer is a person for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people.
Thomas Mann

WRITING LABS ARE MORE THAN REMEDIATION CENTERS

Often evaluating student writing takes this sequence: the teacher assigns a paper; the student chooses a topic, writes the paper, and hands the paper in. Then the teacher suggests specific changes to be made in the paper, marks specific errors, writes cover comments and assigns a grade.

Among typical teacher comments on a student's paper might be comments such as these:

> You have a good understanding of your topic. You develop your ideas well, but your sentence structure is flawed. In this paper I find two comma splices, two fragments, and at least ten misspellings. Perhaps you should go to the Writing Lab to get help with your problems.

Sometimes students go to writing labs on their own initiative. More often however, as suggested in the above example, students go to a writing lab because of teacher referral.

But all too often student and teacher reasons for visits to the writing lab are too narrowly conceived, too limited in purpose. All too often teachers and students conceive of writing centers as fix-it repair shops, post-mortem editing and proofreading parlors, whose work it is to free rough drafts of fragments, rid tentative texts of run-ons, clear completed compositions of comma faults, and deliver unedited discourse from misspellings. In short, for many students, and for many faculty members as well, writing labs are defined simply as remediation centers whose work is limited to providing basic writers with basic grammar, mechanics, and spelling help.

Understanding reasons for this narrow and limited view of writing labs as centers of remediation is essential if we are ever going to communicate to others the real, full functions of writing labs. One of the major reasons the functions of writing labs are thought of so narrowly involves whether students and teachers conceive of writing and the writing process in naively simplistic or mature, informed ways. Consider the five definitions of writing that follow, for example.

First, think back to elementary school days. Think back to when the term "good writing" itself referred narrowly to penmanship. In elementary school "good writing" was often synonomous with "good handwriting." "Good writing" designated a manuscript marked by well-formed letters of the alphabet, all exhibiting consistent shapes and flowing lines. "Poor writing," on the other hand, designated a manuscript marked by ill-shaped, almost unintelligible symbols scrawled and scratched and smudged along some lines. Thus, most of us began with a view that writing is handwriting, simply that.

A second narrow, but larger definition of writing, pertains to our late years of elementary school and the early years of junior high or middle school. In this context the term "good writing" often referred to writing as copying--effective transcribing and recording, carefully writing down one's own words or the words of others. Copying successfully, or sometimes paraphrasing, the words of another from a book or encyclopedia constituted the major elements of the writing process as defined by this limited view.

"Writing correctly," writing effectively with no major sentence errors and no misspellings, is a third, more general sense of the phrase "good writing." In middle and junior high school, this definition often became the major meaning associated with writing discourse of all types. This definition emphasizes correctness in forming and punctuating sentences, demands skill in placing right letters in right places. But this definition often omits references to writing qualities such as ideas, insights, creativity, organization and development. As narrow, as limited, as primitive as it is, this definition is too often the definition of writing that teachers use when they refer their students to writing labs and writing centers to remediate student writing "problems."

But writing is more than sentence and spelling correctness, and the writing center services are more than eyeballing a paper rapidly to give it a quick fix. Both the concerns of writers and the services of writing centers are broader, more complex, and more numerous than this third sense of writing suggests.

Good writing labs and good writing cen-

ters provide student services that suggest a fourth and fifth definition of "writing." A fourth definition of writing is what James Moffett calls "writing as crafting." "Good writing" in this sense suggests opportunities for and obligations of writers to make decisions about topic, purpose, speaker, and audience. "Good writing" suggests writing well-formed sentences and well-developed paragraphs. It suggests organization and unity, logic and coherence, tone and style, thesis and synthesis. Often writing on this level is influenced greatly by interacting with other people who write. Interacting through response group and peer tutoring, interacting through visits to the writing lab or through participating in writing conferences with tutors or instructors are all elements of writing as crafting. Writing as crafting suggests that students possess knowledge about the processes and elements of writing, that they experience these processes and elements, and that they experience them through interacting with themselves or with others.

A fifth definition of writing is "writing as authoring." Authoring suggests being aware of and possessing skill in all areas of the prewriting, writing, and rewriting stages of composing. Authoring implies a concern for preparing for writing: questioning, discovering, inquiring, creating, and planning. Authoring suggests awareness of purpose, audience, voice, tone, and possibility. Authoring suggests a fluency of ideas: conceptualizing, organizing, stating and developing ideas. Authoring suggests possessing a sense of correctness, effectiveness, exactness and appropriateness of expression. Authoring suggests engaging successfully in a multitude of skills and activities simultaneously.

These five definitions of writing form a hierarchy, ranging from simple to complex: writing as penmanship; writing as copying; writing as correctness; writing as crafting; and writing as authoring. How a person defines writing in relationship to this hierarchy has much to say about what he or she expects the activities of the writing lab to be.

A second major factor related to writing labs being considered fix-it places is the narrowness with which we tend to view the lab itself. In our world of specialization we go to gas stations to buy gasoline, grocery stores to get staples, and to a shoe store to get shoes. When people take their cars into a shop to get new tires or to get a windshield wiper fixed, they do not have the radiator cleaned, the air filter changed, the points replaced, or the bodywork on the door completed. No. Instead, just the tires get replaced and balanced if you are at a tire shop. If the windshield wiper motor has burned up, just the motor is repaired or replaced. Such is our world of specialization. We make one call at one place of business for one purpose. Not so at the writing lab.

Go to the writing lab and ask for the quick fix--ask for the spelling check and major errors massage--and see what help you get from your tutor: "Your thesis sentence is not well-formulated. Many of your sentences are choppy and need to be combined and reworded. As a matter of fact you have three areas of focus that could lead to possible thesis statements and some of your sentences are too long and need to be shortened. Yes, you are good at writing dangling participles; and no, you should not write dangling participles if you can avoid them. What this visit really means is that you will have to rewrite this paper at least once or twice more and you will not be able to turn it in when you go to class in thirty minutes." There you are. There is your quick fix. A quick fix? A simple solution? Another tire mounted and balanced for the old one? Redo the whole car when I just wanted a check of the air pressure in my tires? Such are the problems associated with our age of specialization. Such are the unlikenesses of car problems and composition processes.

The quick fix solution to writing improvement is now showing up in the writing lab in a technological form not unlike the automechanic's garage: computers and computer aids to writing. "Just feed my paper through the computer and let the machine pick up my spelling, sentence and stylistic errors," the request rings out. Again, the definition of writing that a person possesses is relevant. Again, the elements of the writing process that need to be fine-tuned are extremely important. Again, the conceptualization of the writing lab as the paramedic parlor--the one-stop shop for help in one or two or three elements of the writing process is the view that we must contend with. Do you want a writing conference about your writing and its effectiveness, or do you want your spelling checked? Do you

want to learn the art and skill of writing or do you want a grade on a paper? Do you want the paper to be a unified, well-developed insightful whole, or do you want a page of words all spelled correctly? Do you want to experience all of the lab's services over a period of time or are you really looking only for the quick fix?

Answers to these questions are not simple and easy, and there are no simple solutions to dealing with narrow and limited conceptualizations of the terms "writing" and "writing labs." Yet to know and define what the enemy is is a part of the battle. And the rest of the battle is up to us--we must inform others about writing lab services; we must perform the services we say we offer; we must serve on all fronts possible. And finally, we must not get trapped in our own narrow and limited perspectives--we must not ever think that we are capable of running and maintaining a quick fix, one-stop writing clinic. Rather, we can offer to faculty and students alike a writing lab or writing center with specific services to assist individual students in all processes and elements of the writing process. We hope that our students will take advantage of these services, and for those students who do, we look forward to their improvement and success.

Perhaps in months to come a colleague will write on a student paper, "Your ideas are insightful and well-organized. You have made excellent progress in expressing your ideas clearly and effectively. I can tell that you have been learning from your visits to the writing lab."

Elray L. Pedersen
Brigham Young University

GROWING INTEREST IN SECONDARY SCHOOL WRITING CENTERS PRESENTS NEW PROBLEMS TO NWCA

As I planned the workshop sponsored by the National Writing Centers Association for the NCTE conference last November, I had an audience firmly in mind. Unfortunately, the audience I imagined and the audience I got did not match very closely, giving me a hard lesson in basic rhetoric. Having planned the workshop for people at least acquainted with writing centers, I was left feeling inadequate before the demands of a roomful of high school teachers who wanted nuts-and-bolts information about starting writing centers.

Those of us who are happily moving well-established writing centers toward new activities, carefully adding to our materials files, refining our record-keeping and tutor-training, have a new task to face. In the secondary schools, the writing center idea is now where it was ten years ago for higher education. A huge constituency is looking to us for guidance and help.

What can we do? The NWCA particularly faces a complex problem in planning programs which serve both the established writing centers and the secondary school interest in starting them. And, to complicate the problem, we are required to go beyond our own experiences and recognize the particular problems of starting a writing center in a secondary school. For example, for most of us in college and university centers, a pool of tutor candidates is usually easily available, particularly among graduate students looking for assistantships. There is no such equivalent pool in a secondary school. Peer tutors are substantially less prepared than those in colleges. High school teachers face scheduling constraints which we do not. One teacher at the workshop explained that she was unable to schedule a time to conduct tutor-training. In disbelief, we questioned her further; well, she wasn't kidding--her problem is real and important.

The discovery of this constituency presents a challenge to those of us who have experience and knowledge to offer. How do we get that experience and knowledge to the people who need it? What specific problems do they face? How can we adapt our methods and systems to fit their needs? It seems to me our first job is to listen to them. I would like to solicit suggestions for providing appropriate opportunities to do just that. Can we work jointly with regionals to develop how-to workshops? How about contacting secondary school organizations? If you see an opportunity to do some connecting, please take it. If you have an idea, please send it to me.

Jeanne Simpson, NWCA President
Department of English
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Charleston, IL 61920

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

Old Dominion University will sponsor the Sixth Annual Developmental Writing Conference on April 4, 1986 at the Holiday Inn-Waterside Area/Downtown, Norfolk, Virginia. Write Academic and Career Preparation Programs, 1411 West 49th Street, Norfolk, Virginia 23508 or call (804) 440-3692 for registration information and brochure.

COMPOSITION CONFERENCE

"Writing Across the Curriculum"
April 12, 1986

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

For further information, contact:

Linda Barnes
Dept. of English Lang. & Lit.
SIU at Edwardsville
Edwardsville, Illinois 62026
(618) 692-2179/692-2060

Northwest Regional NCTE Conference
April 27-29, 1986
Portland, Oregon

The conference will feature more than 180 sessions for elementary, secondary, and college teachers of language arts. Featured speakers will include Ralph Nader, Ernest Boyer, and Dale Johnson. For information, contact Roger Sauer, Rex Putnam High School, 4950 S.E. Roethe Rd., Milwaukee, Oregon 97267. Phone (503) 653-3805.

COMPUTERS IN WRITING—INTENSIVE CLASSROOMS
June 15-29, 1986
Michigan Technological University

A 2-week workshop is being offered for English teachers who want to incorporate computers into their writing-intensive classroom. No previous computer knowledge is needed. For information contact Susan Bucheger, Coordinator, Division of Education and Public Services, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931. Phone (906) 487-2262.

BOOK REVIEW

Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing. Ronald A. Sudol (Ed.). Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1982.

Ronald Sudol has put together a very useful collection of essays about revision that will be of special interest to writing lab personnel. Much of what we do in the writing lab, of course, involves revision of one kind or another. And the essays in this excellent collection relate revision to everything from editing and thinking to teaching and learning.

Two of the articles in the collection deserve special mention because they address significant problems frequently encountered by tutors in writing labs. John Ruszkiewicz, in "Revision and Risk," discusses students' reluctance to conceive of revision as anything but a sentence level activity. He argues that "the so-called 'mechanicals' present students with relatively few choices. A misspelled word, for example, guarantees a return on the time invested in correcting it. So do most reconsiderations of grammar and punctuation, which can be checked by thumbing through a handbook. When the available choices are numerous and the likelihood of success is less certain [however], an innate conservatism takes hold . . . When advised by a teacher to reconsider the structure of an essay, to modify a thesis, to add a paragraph, to alter the predominant tone, students face situations in which recommended changes may not improve the text at all. And students do not feel sufficiently confident to make these judgments on their own."

Edmund Miller, in "'But It's Just My Opinion': Understanding Conflict with Students about the Expression of Opinion," discusses thorny problems that can arise when discussing the ideas in students' papers. We must make it clear to students, Miller argues, that we are criticizing the student's failure to express ideas fully and cogently--not the student's value system.

The volume also includes a very useful bibliography, compiled and annotated by Charles Duke, for those interested in further study of revising.

Patrick Sullivan
Springfield College

A READER OFFERS . . . .

A WRITING ASSIGNMENT WORKSHEET

Our "Writing Assignment Worksheet" was originally designed to help basic writing students practice the various stages within the writing process and to help them internalize the process. The use of the "Worksheet" can, however, be very valuable for work within the writing center. Whether the "Worksheet" is distributed by the instructor or by the writing lab personnel, the use of the "Worksheet" can help students better diagnose student problems and recommend effective alternatives, and can help students become more independent as they gain skill and confidence in their writing and use of the "Writing Assignment Worksheet."

I will be happy to send copies and to answer any questions about use of the "Worksheet"; I hope you find it as valuable as I have in working with writing center clients.

James Upton
Burlington Community
High School
421 Terrace Drive
Burlington, Iowa 52601

A READER COMMENTS . . . .

I enjoy the WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER and similar publications a lot, and one of the main reasons is the fact that such newsletters tend to approach the teaching of writing from a less technical, less complex method than journals such as College Composition and Communication. While I am grateful for the work done in CCC and similar journals, I think that the teaching of writing occasionally needs to emphasize rational, common-sense approaches more than it does. It needs to emphasize also, I strongly feel, the teacher's attitude.

Eugene Kraft
Washington, D.C.

A READER COMMENTS . . . .

I enjoy reading the Writing Lab Newsletter; it's informative but down-to-earth.

Marilyn F. Bonnell
Salem State College
Salem, MA

A READER RESPONDS . . . .

(A response to Judy Markline's "Peer Tutors in the Community College," in the Writing Lab Newsletter, December 1985)

I share Judy Markline's enthusiasm for peer tutors in the (California) community college. I've worked with tutors in my one-to-one composition classrooms since 1973. This semester I have two paid tutors in each class of 31 students.

Back when classes were smaller, I usually worked with one tutor per class. Some tutors chose units instead of pay. That's history, as Judy points out.

I wrote the book (THE WHOLE THING, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974) that makes it unnecessary to train tutors and that allows the close coordination of writing lab and writing classroom that Judy refers to (instructors teach in both lab and classroom; a tutor may work in both; some students attend both and, I believe, continue the same work in both).

However, THE WHOLE THING does not require close coordination between writing lab and writing classroom. One-to-one composition teaching in my California community college developed in writing classrooms many years before our writing lab opened; writing lab work has remained separate from classroom work. At Judy's college, both apparently developed simultaneously; Allan Hancock's writing lab and writing classrooms are exceptionally well integrated, better than in any other place I have visited, read of, or heard reports of.

Judy is also right about the availability and variety of tutors in the community college. Except for an occasional referral from a colleague or a tutor, I find my own tutors. Some have taken a class that uses THE WHOLE THING; some have not.

My experience training tutors has been the same as Judy's: I used to meet regularly with tutors but no longer do so. (I probably didn't ever need to do so, but I didn't know that, being new to the concept of tutors and needing reassurance myself that everything was all right.) Instead, each tutor receives a copy of the INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE to THE WHOLE THING. The

GUIDE explains "What to do at the checkpoint" and "The most common student problems and how to help." With a structured, process-oriented textbook, there are almost always a finite number of ways that students can go wrong in working through a procedure, and tutors catch on to them quickly by reading about them in the GUIDE, observing them, and then experiencing them. Because most students are working through the same procedure at the same time, tutors rapidly become experienced.

In the classroom, tutors have interruption privileges to ask questions. They listen at my station when I cover some activity new to them. And because the students' work is sequential, anything overlooked or done incorrectly surfaces at a later stage for remedying. Remarkably little of that occurs, considering the number of students we work with and the amount of work that the students do.

Tutors are seldom at a loss because the structure of THE WHOLE THING guides their work. They aren't bored because the students are always planning, writing, analyzing, or revising their own writing. Even though the procedures are the same, the students and their writing are highly individual. Besides, the tutors see the results of their work immediately: students' writing improves noticeably right in front of them, every day, and that's exciting.

THE WHOLE THING and the tutors' work free me to take over at checkpoints where more teaching experience and educational background are especially productive: where I can encourage one student to attempt a more sophisticated revision but praise another for the level achieved; where I can recommend that a thesis statement be sharpened because the student is capable of learning more but check through another because that student has reached a learning plateau for the moment and can be brought back to the thesis at a later stage when I can expect learning to continue; where this advice or that will cause the most direct student success; or where various explanations may be needed for clarification.

I also check the first couple of revisions at particularly important checkpoints to be sure all students receive my level of professional attention and to keep up with each student's work. The tutors check further revisions, those that provide time on task to reinforce learning. The two that I check serve as examples for the tutors to refer to.

This system allows me to note on a student's page if the student is to return to me rather than shift to a tutor. I use this note for a student who is unusually difficult in personal ways, or who wastes a tutor's time by trying (in vain) to get the tutor to do the student's work, or who can be moved ahead very quickly, across checkpoints, a decision that I am responsible for.

Tutors contribute to retention, a large issue these days in higher education as well as the high schools. They do this by providing frequent attention to each student, by increasing the students' rate of progress (pace), by improving the student's self-image, and by being an example. Tutors who are instrumental in retaining only one or two students have more than paid for their semester's work, a point to emphasize repeatedly in applying for tutorial funds.

A week before the end of the semester, here are some retention and attendance figures from the four classes in which I use THE WHOLE THING. Each class started with 31 students: they now have 25, 25, 25, and 24 students actively enrolled, a retention rate of 80%. Of those students, 13% attended 100%; 39% attended more than 95%; 59% attended more than 90%; 91.5% attended 80% or more. Not counted among the 100% attendance are two New Leaf students whose attendance for the past 8 weeks and 10 weeks was 100%.

My tutors are as pleased as I am.

Janet Stearn Abbott
Hartnell College
Salinas, CA

CHANGING THE IMAGE OF THE STUDY CENTER

At Pacific University (in Forest Grove, Oregon) the Study Center did not have a positive image; it appeared insular to the faculty and stigmatized to the students. Many of the faculty had never visited the Center or been informed of its activities. Students felt as if the Center was primarily for those people on academic probation or for those brushing up on basic English skills.

The image of the Center was in need of change. Rather than being regarded as a way-station for underachievers, it needed to become an integral part of academic life at Pacific University. As the newly hired director, my task, in part, was to function as a public relations person.

My first task was to establish communication between the Center and the faculty. During the Fall semester I visited faculty members (usually during their office hours) and asked them to talk about their perception of the Study Center. "You mean there is one?" replied one professor. However, most of the faculty wanted to hear more about what was happening, and they wanted to see the Center play a stronger tutorial role. As a result of these visits, the faculty began receiving a monthly update on the Center's activities, and they regularly received tutor recommendation forms. Futhermore, if a faculty member indicated a need for a workshop or study session on writing the in-class essay, for example, I made sure that the Center conducted an evening session on that topic open to all interested students.

My second public relations task was to encourage more students to use the Center. Thanks to faculty recommendations, responsible peer tutors were available to provide assistance in a number of subjects, such as statistics, neuroanatomy, accounting, chemistry, and ethics, as well as English and mathematics. By the end of the semester, word spread among the students that they could get help in many courses. To reinforce the tutorial role of the Center, I asked several of the faculty to allow me to talk to their students about the Center's purpose, and idea that was well received. And in order to focus more attention on the Center, I submitted an article on its activities for each issue of the student paper.

My third public relations task was to involve the rest of the staff. I met with the admissions team who wanted information about the Study Center in order to prepare a brochure to be included with other recruitment material. The meeting with the Dean of Students resulted in a larger agenda for the Center during Orientation Week for college freshmen. Dialogue with the Director of Alumni Relations led to the printing of a fairly long article on the role of the Study Center in the quarterly issue of the alumni newsletter.

These public relations moves were and continue to be necessary for the vitality of the Center. The things that go on in any study/learning center must be publicized, must be made known to both faculty and students. No longer can any director take it for granted that a study center's merits will be appreciated without a little "sales" job.

Greg Jacob
Pacific University

Michael Chiteman, Director of Academic Services at The Pennsylvania State University, The Behrend College, offers his nomination for the Outstanding Grammar Error of 1985, which appeared in a freshman paper discussing the trauma of moving:

"I had to leave my good friend's behind and find new ones."

Any other nominations, or shall we proclaim this dazzling entry the Grand Winner?

WHAT SHOULD A COMPUTER-ASSISTED COMPOSITION LAB BE?

At the beginning of this spring semester, we set up our second computerized writing lab together. The first was at Bennett College, and the second is at Methodist College in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where Lynn Sadler is the almost-two-semester-old Dean, and Wendy Greene is the almost-one-semester-old Writing Lab Director. We believe, fervently, in the concept of computer-assisted composition.

At Bennett College, one semester of writing on the IBM PC, using EASYWRITER, produced an astonishing change in student writing. The primary objective--increased volume: longer sentences, longer paragraphs, longer essays--was almost immediately met. As many professional writers have pointed out, sometimes to the machine's detriment, writing on the computer tends to increase word output. But our students had been writing so little, despite the persuasive power of arbitrary six-sentence paragraph minimums, that the increased volume of words gave us a new handle on student writing. At last we could encourage students to be creators and critic-editors rather than waste time begging for minimal expression. Our students began "to learn to write by writing."

The faculty responded with a wonderful willingness to grade draft after draft: the students were allowed to revise as many times as they wished--until the semester ran out. Faculty, always overworked, nevertheless loved the lab: students were writing more successfully and papers were far easier to read. In addition, we adopted simply circling errors as a grading technique. Each student learned more by discovering the nature of her errors for herself. As a result, the computer writing lab produced a happier English department.

We reaped another reward of which we had not dared to dream. We expected students to enjoy writing on the computer, but we did not expect to find such intense motivation for writing in our students. Word-processing hackers ("I would major in word-processing if I could") developed, as did new computer writers who willingly embraced the concept that handwritten rough drafts were passe, that composing on the computer makes better--as well as faster--papers. Bennett students who believe in this method of composition have been willing to go on record, publicly, to recommend this method to their classmates. If they feel dependent on an outline, they compose an outline--on the computer--and print it as they begin. Then they attack the paper they have sketched, piece by piece.

Thanks to a thorough orientation during the first two classes, every student using this method can correct errors, make deletions and insertions, and move blocks of text well enough to teach others. Although peer tutoring is a planned part of the writing lab program at Bennett (student assistants make it possible to open the lab in the evening), peer tutoring also simply happens, as if a natural part of the process. When the director is helping a student, or writing at a computer herself, one of the "hackers" (many of them now spend what was their student-union loafing time in the writing lab) is dying to leave her own work to offer assistance. We have certainly continued to foster this double-pronged development--peer-assisted, direct-to-the-computer composition. At Methodist College, it produces writers who are both competent and quick.

Thus we earnestly believe that one concern to be faced by teachers is what to do with students who are now highly motivated, but not necessarily well equipped, to write. The answer at Methodist will include widening the breadth of the writing lab function. First, we will continue to encourage every student to compose all his or her papers, whatever the course, on the computer. We will also ask all faculty to expect computer-composed papers. Surely every teacher will cooperate: such papers are easier to read and grade. In addition, we might suggest to the writing staff that, beyond the five-paragraph essay, or even only next to it, lie the personal letter, the journal entry, and, shades of bygone days, the stylistic imitation. (Well do I remember manufacturing an imitation of Lawrence Sterne's A Sentimental Journey in a sophomore writing class.) Should we feel really adventurous, we may decide to poach in our neighbor's parklands and ask composition students to try their hands at short stories, and even news reporting. Once the student is motivated, we can try all those devices used on us--who were, somehow, already motivated. Merely by increasing writing motivation, we make the student more

"like us;" in other words, we produce a student whom we can teach more easily because we can identify with him or her.

The Greene-Sadler answer will also include deepening the writing lab function. At Bennett College, the lab staff suffered only one major disappointment: the faculty hardly used the place. Now it is true, as I remarked before, that all faculty are classically overworked, but many of those at Bennett learned enough about computer writing, in a long series of workshops, to recognize that when they use the computer for writing, they save time. But in large part, they do not do it.

Why? We postulate that first, faculty and staff are not accustomed to walking to the lab to write their tests, syllabi, and handouts on the computer. Second, they know that the lab remains filled with students: they may walk to it and find no computer available. Third, like all of us, they are producing materials at the last minute, and therefore cannot rely upon a new technology to deliver the goods for them in their near-desperate state: the old department typewriter will rescue them, they know, because it has for twenty years.

Two solutions suggest themselves: the writing lab must be convenient--first and foremost, to the English faculty--at least as convenient as the old department typewriter. Second, we must reserve some time when the lab is open only for faculty use. In other words, we must schedule our computer labs more intensively than ever. The faculty--in writing labs everywhere--must steal a wonderful Wednesday morning on the computer and hang onto it. Students, after all, can force the administration to open the computer lab on the weekends if they choose. ("Force" was not the right verb at Methodist, but in general, at a private college, what the client wants these days, the client gets.)

But to return to the conversion of the faculty, if we writing lab directors schedule faculty mornings, and if we put our computer-writing labs right at the center of the English department instead of in distant basements, and if we add a faculty lounge next door with coffee and teapots, we might slowly wean our faculty away from that old department typewriter and onto the computer. That would usher in a brave new world. It is true that lounges have been secondhand-furnished before now, merely to suggest that English faculty members talk to one another, but we hope that computer composition may be powerful enough even to draw university writing and literature teachers together. Both write, do they not?

Utopia does arrive, we hasten to add. Lambs lie down with lions at Methodist College--not only English but the Business and Education departments use the CAC Lab.

The Computer-Assisted Composition Laboratory at Methodist College is a writing lab where the door never closes (I cannot remember the last time I unlocked the door in the morning, and I arrive at 8 a.m.). And, incidentally, it is a writing lab whose photograph was used as a recruiting tool by the Admissions Office in a mass mailing this spring. How far from its humble origins has the writing lab traveled!

We see among the future needs in our writing laboratory at Methodist, extensive CAI materials, a library of current research and alternate texts concerning composition, a gathering of periodicals which treat computer-assisted composition, the heuristics-based software that we are designing as well as that just beginning to be published, carefully structure evaluation measures, and a new generation of linguistic exercises that--on paper--we have called a "practical verbal skills lab."

We will slowly collect or create CAI materials. Unlike some others, and with some caveats, we still believe in the future of CAI as a welcome substitute for textbook grammatical exercises. We may elect--in large part--to design our own. The CAI exercises that we have used or seen to date do not fill our needs: they do not appear to improve students' written usage. But we cannot be sure even of that because no evaluation system is used. As we move toward using CAI in the CAC Lab, we will keep two things in mind:

1. There's no point in CAI that does not work: change it, fix it, make it work--and its corollary, prove that it works--or junk it.

2. A machine in use for computer-assisted-composition is probably teaching more effectively than a machine in use for CAI: if an appropriate-use conflict occurs, CAC

should win out.

We plan one new-old function for the CAC Lab. We want to take advantage of the continuing burst of publication in the rhetorical field. Since we want to supply easy access to the latest texts and theories for the composition faculty, we are building a small departmental library in the lab. The lab also supplies a suitable home for the wealth of periodicals in print or springing up that deal with microcomputing in education. We are, in fact, so committed to computer-assisted composition that we will start our own journal in that field during the coming year--and we will welcome your submissions!

We want to sketch for you briefly where we are taking the CAC Lab from here. We have three central tasks. First, we must finish our five-paragraph-essay program, "Diagrammatic Writing Using Word Processing," so that we can test it in English 101 in the fall. Second, we must begin learning BASIC, so that we can program a series of pencil and paper exercises that we created. Collectively, these "Practical Verbal Skills" exercises form a linguist's approach to teaching grammar: they need to go on the computer so that we can prescribe them for our students on an individual basis. Third, we must finish the evaluation process that we have begun in the CAC lab.

Evaluating the efficacy of teaching writing on the computer has become a major shared concern. We are keeping as many records as time and imagination allow. We keep a user log; we have given matched pre- and post-questionnaires to students; we are running a text analyzer--GRAMMATIK--on the first and last writing done by one eighth of our students, selected at random. In addition, we have had every faculty member teaching in the lab keep a daily record of the events that occur in the lab. We hope to expand this foray into the basic research needed in all computer-assisted composition labs: research into the real effects of writing on the computer.

Beyond those developments, the CAC lab at Methodist will give workshops to the community this summer, teaching everything from LOGO for little kids to LOTUS for big-business types. We will continue to teach (and to consider further student-and-faculty uses of) THINK TANK, one of the new idea-processing packages. And we will continue to design software: our research paper program, "Computerized Guide through the Construction of the Research Paper," is next.

The Computer-Assisted Composition Laboratory at Methodist may be a little unusual: in January, it opened with a "perfory cutting." It is the favorite spot on campus for both of us who do papers and workshops around the country hyping the lab's own terminology: not only CAC for computer-assisted-composition, but also, "brain dumping." Brain dumping is our expression for fast, initial, computerized "free-writing." In that connection, our President received a letter from a college president in Virginia recently. The Virginian allowed as how he had heard a lot about Methodist, but he was especially curious about this "mind-dumping thing." What did our President do--the Virginian wanted to know--with the faculty . . . once their minds had been "dumped"?

The old writing lab, we contend, has come a long way. And we expect it will keep moving right along.

Wendy Tibbetts Greene
and
Lynn Veach Sadler
Methodist College

NWCA ACTIVITIES

The executive board of the National Writing Centers Association will hold a business meeting at 4C's in New Orleans. Members and interested persons are invited to attend from 5:30 to 6:30, Thursday, March 13, in the Waikiki room of the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

Executive Board Nominations

Nominations for at-large positions on the executive board are being solicited. They may be presented at the meeting or sent to

Joyce Kinkead, Executive Secretary
National Writing Centers Association
Department of English UMC32
Utah State University
Logan, Utah 84322

Membership of the executive board now includes representatives from each of the regional writing center organizations. The NWCA encourages regionals to elect their representatives in time to attend NCTE in

November. Names and addresses of elected representatives should be sent to Joyce Kinkead to ensure their receipt of executive board information and announcements.

In 1986, therefore, ten new board members will be elected, eight from regionals and two from at-large. For consistency, Irene Clark, regional representative of the Pacific association, moves to an at-large position so that all regionals will be on the same time line. In addition, the immediate past president will remain on the board for an additional year regardless of the date of term expiration.

NWCA Assistance to Regionals

The board has voted to give up to $100 to regional associations for keynote speakers at their conference. Regionals should propose their plans to the board, which will decide on proposals at its meetings.

NWCA Assistance to Graduate Students

The board voted to give $200 grants to deserving graduate students whose theses or dissertations focus on writing centers. The executive secretary will draft an application form. The application must include a letter from the chair of the student's committee, and the proposal must have been accepted by the student's committee. Decisions on these grants will be made at board meetings at 4C's and at NCTE.

Jeanne Simpson
NWCA President

A READER REQUESTS . . .

The University of Maryland Asia Division has recently opened a Writing Center at Yokota Air Base, Tokyo, Japan, to serve military and civilian personnel. We would greatly appreciate any help from stateside writing centers, especially in building our collection of handouts on all aspects of writing, from grammar and punctuation exercises to exercises on developing a thesis, and revising or editing. We will be happy to pay for photocopying costs. Please send materials to Peter MCMillan, Director, The Writing Center, The University of Maryland, Box 100, APO San Francisco 96328.

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

Writing Centers Association: East Central
Eighth Annual Conference
"Words Reaching Out to Worlds"
May 16-17, 1986
at
Northern Kentucky University

FEATURING:

Friday evening workshop by Peter Elbow (author of Writing Without Teachers, Writing With Power, Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Teaching and Learning)

Presentations on the teaching, learning, and practice of writing

Discussion of writing centers in high schools

Discussion of writing centers and institutional politics

Discussion of the roles and methods of the writing center tutor

Lodging available in Northern Kentucky University dormitory ($10 per night single occupancy; $14 per night double occupancy) or in the Drawbridge Inn ($37 plus tax single occupancy; $47 plus tax double occupancy). Registration fee: $30 for faculty; $20 for high school faculty and part-time college faculty; and $12 for full-time students.

(Registration materials will be mailed to those on our mailing list by late March. If you have not received registration materials by April 15, please contact me.) For additional information and/or registration materials, please contact:

Paul Ellis
Writing Center--230 BP
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, KY 41076
Tel. (606) 572-5475

JOB OPENING

Queen's University at Kingston, Ontario, 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 writers 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 ASAP 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

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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