THE WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

Because we are particularly conscious of the interaction between speech and writing in writing lab tutorials, the articles in this month's newsletter dealing with differences between oral and written competence should be of interest to us all. And because of our accompanying interest in talking among ourselves, there are numerous announcements of conferences also included in this issue. For high schools seeking information on starting a writing lab, an article on that topic should provide helpful information and insights.

Thus, I hope that the newsletter continues to be useful. I also hope the newsletter continues. To insure that there are funds for duplicating and mailing, I keep heckling you for yearly donations. As an informal, non-profit publication, we have no invoices, bills, or other forms of paperwork to remind everyone to send in those donations. But we do periodically have to delete names of those who haven't sent in donations for more than a year or so, and that unpleasant task is coming up soon. Please remember to send in your donation soon, if you haven't done so recently, as we don't want to lose touch with you.

So, along with your articles, reviews, announcements, questions, comments, suggestions, and names of new members, please send in your yearly $7.50 donation ($12.50 for Canadian friends) in checks made payable to Purdue University and sent to me:

Muriel Harris, editor
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EXPLOITING THE WRITING-SPEAKING RELATIONSHIP IN THE WRITING CENTER

Because talk is, perhaps ironically, the natural medium for our collaboration with students in the writing center as they shape written meaning, recent research in the relationship of writing to speaking seems particularly useful. Studies have confirmed what writing instructors in classrooms and in labs had intuited: Most students' oral language skills surpass their writing skills, but student writing can progressively improve when the instructor consciously exploits the complex relationship between speaking and writing. The writing lab in particular is a place where, on a daily basis, speaking thrives, both for instructional and non-instructional purposes. To new student arrivals, friendly talk first conveys an attitude about the nature of the place to which they have come. Next, more focused talk reveals to the instructor the reason or reasons, from many possibilities, for a particular student visit. And then talk unites instructor and student in an important mutual enterprise-- the development of writing.

Although abundant entries in bibliographies promise to clarify the connection between speaking and writing for purposes of improved instruction, the wheat and the chaff cling together with aggravating dexterity. The sturdy reader who indefatigably huffs and puffs finally discerns a tentative agreement amid arguments about the relative importance of the two and about the relative differences or similarities between them. A less than unanimous consensus confirms that, first, we must help the inexperienced writer cultivate natural expertise in spoken English, producing the equivalent of talk written down, a process that Barry Kroll calls "consolidation" (39). Second, we must coach students who are further along the developmental continuum to eliminate from their writing those often vivid oral conventions

which have been mutually determined (through talk) to be inappropriate for the written code (particularly of academic registers), a process which Kroll labels "differenti-ation." Third, because students who have progressed still further through the developmental sequence often find their writing, purged of the aforementioned spoken characteristics, lying flat and lifeless on the page, we must be armed with resuscita-tion techniques. Knowledgeable rediscovery and use of the lively conventions of, yes, the oral mode can bring about Kroll's "integration"--perhaps better designated as a "reunion"--of writing and speaking.

This paraphrased synthesis of selected speaking and writing research, bringing the thoughts of many scholars together, ini-tially appears unrealistic for application in the writing lab, particularly one like ours with unscheduled conferences. A closer look at the literature, however, reveals its sometimes obscure common sense and a validation of what we have been doing, perhaps unconsciously, all along. The only new problem might be even greater pressure on the instructor to assess quickly and accurately the student's need for consoli-dation, differentiation, or integration and to adjust the purpose of the talk accord-ingly.

A firm grip on the first of the three areas--consolidation--is useful for most teachers of basic writers, a significant portion of our clientele. The student who is unacquainted with written codes and/or academic registers should initially be encouraged to consolidate the act of writing into what he already knows: the oral style of his relatively limited language skills. The student may not be permitted to use his tested repertoire of speech techniques as a pattern for writing in the classroom, but the lab instructor can guide him, through thinking talk, from the more familiar to unfamiliar territories. Instructor and student can move from their own dialogue into at least the rudiments of how to produce inner dialogue, thus beginning the process of differentiation. James L. Collins and Michael M. Williamson wisely urge instruction that promotes a "gradual transition" from speaking to writing (34).

Often students are not aware of the two sets of conventions governing speaking and writing or of the range of informal to formal levels within them. The lab may be

the only secure place in which the student can learn about and experiment with the (probably more) complicated written forms, free of the tension involved in the evalu-ative judgments of the traditional academic class. Pre-writing talk helps a student organize and rehearse his ideas without jeopardy. In a post-writing activity, the instructor's simply pointing out the differences between speaking and writing in a matter-of-fact tone eliminates the focus on error. The general writing center climate promotes questions such as, "Will your reader know what this means?" and puts the emphasis squarely and positively on the goal of communication.

Successful differentiation will solve many common problems. Pauses which the inexperienced writer creates in speaking do not necessarily fall where we expect them in writing. A speaker need not distinguish between the relatively weaker comma and the stronger semicolon. Word endings which have not been articulated in a dialect will obviously not magically appear on paper, but helping the student find correct examples in his own writing preserves the individual's confidence in his capability. (The tale of one's own detention in a university speech clinic or--more directly--a few strains of northern Iowa nasality may bore the student, but they illustrate the universality of our weaknesses.) The spontaneity of speech masks redundancy, wordiness, and non-linear organization, all of which loom from the written page (often looming from beneath the classroom instructor's red ink). Speech knows no paragraph, capital letter, or correct spelling, although the omission of these same elements may constitute a dummy marker in written work. And, finally, many students need to be told that some instruc-tors are inordinately bothered by normal structures such as second person or contrac-tions, simple carryovers from oral habits.

One type of failure to distinguish--to differentiate--between speaking and writing modes develops from the student's lack of imagined audience or reader or from the usually unfounded assumption that the receiving consciousness is effortlessly tuned into his own thinking. As a matter of fact, inexperienced writers, even in English classes, are often not told just whom they should imagine as their audience. Should they make the tacit leap of faith that the reader is simply their classroom teacher? Is the reader perhaps a fictitious non-

expert in whatever the field? Another student? These legitimate questions will not occur automatically to the bewildered freshman, thrown off balance by unexpected, unprepared-for university demands. In this case, the lab instructor can perform the role of a reader whose understanding is blocked by a disorientation as to his (the reader's) stance or identity, as well as by incomplete information, gaps in reasoning, the failure to make abstractions come to life with concrete detail, and imprecise diction. The lab instructor, acting perhaps as an anonymous other, can insist on clear meaning and encourage talk until he finds it. The instructor may become a recorder for the student whose oral discourse flows smoothly until student pencil touches student paper. And James Moffett's explanation of yet another role seems pertinent: The conversations which

> best prepare students for writing are full of requests for clarification and elaboration . . . . The type of conversation that is close to writing is not the dialogue between two friends . . . but the dialogue of a talk-show host with his guest, in which the purpose is to produce text which a third party-- the TV audience--will find understandable and interesting. (27)

The student's awareness of context will also almost automatically help differentiate writing from speech. In the give and take of informal dialogue, speakers collaborate in the development of meaning, taking advantage of context, which, in its largest sense, encompasses the entire speech act-- all characteristics of the participants, their setting, and their purposes. To a somewhat lesser extent, formal speakers also profit from context, drawing upon their sense perceptions to evaluate rapport with an audience with whom they may have little in common. If nothing else, the live (breathing, not necessarily attentive) listener says plenty to the speaker with body language, as all teachers know. In sharp contrast, the writer must inject mere words with all the meaning he can muster, conveying a multitude of nuances through tone, syntax, emphasis, and so forth. Seldom can the writer, even one who knows his audience well, rely on shared information or subtle understandings.

The importance of context was illustrated for me when work on this paper halted

momentarily because of a loud shout. From the courtyard pool of a small southern motel, a youngster's voice rang out: "Mom, watch the bees coming down!" The message, subject to multiple interpretations in a written medium, was immediately received-- correctly--by all listeners. A considerate child had warned his mother, visible on a second story balcony, that the open stairway, which she would enter on her way down to the swimming pool, was infested with bees. Implicit conveyance of information may be sufficient in spoken communication; explicit conveyance of meaning is necessary for the more remote/removed sending and reception of meaning in writing.

A warning of another kind--beyond watching out for bees--is pertinent here. All too often at this point, having been consolidated and having been differentiated, the student's writing has undergone a sad transformation, with voice the character-istic most often lost. Bleak and barren strips of words appear dutifully segregated from one another by appropriate markings, but the self who wrote the words has disappeared. Often in the writer's desire to avoid error, the proverbial baby--that unmistakable spark of life we refer to as voice--has been thrown out with the bath water. Metaphorically the student resembles an aerialist who is ready to abandon the relatively safe perch of differentiation for the swinging bar of integration, which dangles a terrifying distance from his outstretched hands. Suspended between speaking and writing, the student/aerialist may prefer to fall to the sanctuary of the flat net below rather than to risk unfami-liar space just ahead. As the writer gains confidence within the lab, however, inte-gration of speech and writing again takes place, and the writer's personality returns in a form appropriate for written code and academic register.

Frequently technically oriented composi-tion texts, business guides, and writing handbooks slight the discussion of voice. Understandable requirements of industrial and scientific writing for undeviatingly objective clarity and conciseness might seem to eliminate voice as one of many subjective elements. However, in most cases, even the most stringently scientific, some degree of personal projection would be a welcome addition. In the eight lines under the goal of interesting writing, the authors of a technical manual write: "Be lively and

lucid, not dull and boring. People in technical fields are human, too" (Bly and Blake 6). They had opened the chapter by acknowledging the basic truth in a quotation from Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.:

Technical writers are trained to reveal almost nothing about themselves in their writing. This makes them freaks in the world of writers, since almost all of the other ink-stained wretches in that world reveal a lot about themselves to the readers. (1)

Somewhere between the freaks and the wretches lies ample room for vital student voices. Voice need not be subjective in the usual sense, only real, reflective of the mind that lies behind it.

With his own highly developed voice, Peter Elbow assures us that "The best writing has voice: the life and rhythms of speech. Unless we actively train our student to speak onto paper, they will write . . . dead, limp, nominalized prose . . ."(291). Asked to clarify a mystifying passage, a student often speaks

the thought in syntax which is perfectly clear and lively, even if sometimes inelegantly colloquial. If the student had known enough to "speak the thought onto paper" and then simply cleaned up the syntax, the writing would have been much better . . . . Perhaps it is fanciful to talk of speech having a magic that writing lacks--call it presence, voice, or pneuma--but the truth is that we tend to experience meaning somehow more in spoken words than written ones . . . . [O]f course writing can be as alive as speech. What characterizes much excellent writing is precisely this special quality of lively or heightened semantic presence. It's as though the writer's mental activity is somehow there in the words on the page--as though the silent words are somehow alive with her meaning. (292, 298-299)

Bringing the student to an awareness of voice is often an exercise in consciousness raising. All writers--even freshmen!--have voices, many of them interesting, many of them remaining undiscovered. Nonthreatening sessions in the writing lab can help students find these personal vehicles to superior papers.

In fact, writing lab personnel can catapult Loren Barritt's enumeration of the user-friendly characteristics of speaking ("social, easy, automatic, and natural") into the writing arena, which is typically "solitary, difficult, controlled, learned" (132). Within the collaborative environment of the writing lab, no longer is the writer a solitary figure with a hopelessly difficult task. The control required for writing comes more naturally in a place where writing is viewed as a craft which must be practiced by students and instructors. And although writing must be learned, the learning can be a natural activity, eventually paralleling that characteristic of speech.

Noninstructional and instructional talk in a writing lab setting obviously belies the old saw that talk is cheap. In our age of accountability, such talk must be structured to make sure the lab student is involved in genuine learning. The instructor, the appearance of ease and spontaneity to the contrary, must ensure that the talk wends its way, however surreptitiously, toward specific educational goals. Without this consciousness on the part of lab personnel, talk can degenerate into unproductive chatter and perhaps even counterproductive methodology. We must also remind ourselves that the flip side of speaking is listening--and do more of it (Jacobs and Karliner). Additionally we should encourage our students to pursue the flip side of writing--reading--which will acquaint them at least unconsciously with a variety of writing models. Appropriate here, too, is Elbow's admonition that the fragile evanescence of speech is counterbalanced by its powerful tendency to be indelible (285-290). As we talk to students, we must perpetually maintain an awareness that--in spite of its casual ambiance--the writing lab is a place-- perhaps more than any other on campus--where even informal spoken remarks bear the responsibility for good teaching and good human relations. Perhaps only in the writing lab is the student able to reveal his vulnerability, thrusting the instructor into a unique form of professional and ethical obligation. Effective talk can help us deliver.

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CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

New York Metropolitan Association
for Developmental Education Fall Conference

"Current Thinking in
Developmental Education"

Oct 23, 1987

Mount Saint Mary College
Newburgh, New York

Contact Ann E. Damiano, Mount Saint Mary
College, Powell Avenue, Newburgh, New York
12550. (914) 561-0800, Ext. 176.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JOB VACANCY

DIRECTOR OF THE WRITING LAB
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
APPLETON, WI

The director administers the writing lab; works individually with students who need help with academic writing; recruits, trains and supervises peer tutors; conducts workshops; gives presentations on topics such as writing the essay exam, overcoming writing blocks, organizing the research paper; evaluates the degree of writing improvement shown by students who have been tutored.

Qualifications: M.A. or Ph.D., with training and experience in teaching writing. Evaluation of credentials will focus particularly on quality and extent of experience.

Nine month position; salary determined by qualifications and experience. Send application and vita with names of three references to Charles Lauter, Dean of Students, Lawrence University, Appleton, WI 54912 by January 8, 1988; position begins September, 1988.

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TUTORING TECHNIQUES FOR STUDENTS IN THE ORAL TRADITION

Too many universities have not fully addressed the language problems of non-standard English speaking students who have graduated from American high schools with very little language competence. Many of these students come from backgrounds with a strong oral tradition and find themselves unable to compete in required freshman composition classes. Consequently, they often avoid taking required courses until they are juniors or seniors and have struggled through other courses with no further language study. Not only does this hamper their writing skills, but their reading and study skills as well. The result is that the quality of their learning in other courses suffers and they create self-imposed deadlines to fulfill the writing course requirements for their degrees. In a few instances, individual colleges have reacted by requiring completion of all sophomore level courses before junior level courses

can be attempted. However, this often increases the pressure on non-standard and ESL speakers, and they come to the Writing Center with almost impossible expectations. Writing centers represent the only avenue of support for many of these students when they enroll in required writing courses and are faced with instructors who expect them to perform at the same level of competence as standard English-speaking students.

At the Arts and Sciences Writing Center at the University of Cincinnati, we have developed several approaches to tutoring students who speak non-standard dialects or English as a Second Language. Some of our general approaches are to affirm their experiences, help them discover an appropriate vocabulary to express their experiences in the pre-writing process, and help them discover their unique and systematic errors in the editing process. Sometimes we find it necessary to help students present their writing proposals to instructors who may not be aware of their language limitations and possibilities.

This lack of awareness sometimes leads to impossible situations for students. At a recent meeting in our department concerning the "ESL problem," one faculty member, describing his frustrations with ESL students, said "I don't know what language they were writing in, but it wasn't English." Although it is unfortunate, it is probably better for students in such a situation to withdraw and attempt the course at a later date. Overt prejudices are very difficult to overcome. But there are faculty members who are willing to write out assignments for ESL students, direct them to meet with tutors at the Writing Center, extend deadlines if necessary, and allow extra revisions of papers. Although this is beyond the call of duty, our experience is that these measures help our students succeed and they respond by putting forth concentrated effort, taking full advantage of the opportunity.

ESL students come to the Writing Center with numerous problems. They may fear using the language because they know they do not yet use it "perfectly." They may be homesick if they are away from their families for the first time, or they may miss their home countries. Many are making the initial adjustments to living in a foreign culture and are overwhelmed with learning how to negotiate with landlords, buy groceries and use public transportation. Added pressure

comes when it turns out that a composition instructor expects them to know about American culture and history. They may be expected to know what Puritans are, what the Great Depression was, even the differences in style between white and black basketball players, despite the fact that they have never seen an American basketball game. It seems that the more "relevant" an instructor tries to be, the less relevant he or she appears to ESL students.

When students come to the Writing Center for the first time, they usually have either an assignment for a paper or a paper that has already been graded, but needs revision. The first step in discussing papers with students is to talk about the assignment. We make sure that the assignment is clear and that they understand the topic, audience and purpose. We then discuss the expected form of the essay. Many students are unaware of such conventions as introductions and conclusions and have no idea what is expected of them. They also lack skills in second-guessing their instructors. If an assignment's length or scope is unclear, they have no way of picking up clues from class discussion. Because of their language skills and/or pride, they are reluctant to ask their instructor or other students. So we are sometimes faced with only the vaguest notions of what is expected from the student. Sometimes we call the instructor for clarification, but we rely heavily on written feedback on papers to see if we are on the right track. Without that information, we can only rely on our own experience.

The next step is to discuss conventions of writing with the student. Although most instructors specify an intended audience for a paper, we remind the students that the real audience is the instructor and that students should be alert for clues about the instructor's expectations.

Next we discuss the topic of the paper and possible ways to approach it. Once this decision has been made, we attempt to list idioms and vocabulary that may be required for the assignment. We make sure to write the words and discuss their connotations. For example, one student was required to write a paper in response to some interviews with prostitutes in an excerpt from Studs Terkels' Working. Since the student was newly arrived from Thailand, she had no idea of the vocabulary to use in discussing the subject, so we spent about fifteen minutes compiling an academically acceptable vocabu-

lary to discuss problems of prostitution in Thailand. Another student has supported himself by loading trucks at a local warehouse since his arrival from Russia two years ago. His English is fluent, but it is filled with idioms not commonly deemed acceptable in freshman composition, so we spend a lot of time "cleaning up" his vocabulary.

The next step is to develop an outline for the assignment. Sometimes, in the interest of time, it is necessary to be very directive in this process and help the student formulate a thesis, determine supporting ideas for the thesis, write topic sentences for the paragraphs and remind the student what a conclusion should include. We then recommend that the student take the outline home and write a rough draft from the outline. When the student returns, he or she reads the rough draft aloud, and we determine whether the student has followed the outline. We then point out places where the student has supplied a correct form verbally, but has written an incorrect form. If there is a deviation from the outline, we discuss reasons for this and suggest alternatives.

After looking at the organization of the essay, we try to identify systematic errors. One student from the Sudan consistently misused relative clauses. Once he learned the function of a relative clause, he did not repeat the error. Other problems, particularly verb tenses, article and preposition usage and sentence structure, require repeated explanations. Surprisingly, idioms are not frequently a problem, perhaps because students are aware of them and are more likely to look them up if they are unsure of their meaning. One complaint that students sometimes receive from their instructors is that they rely too heavily on cliches. We at the Writing Center tend not to define this as a problem if the cliches fit the context and are grammatically correct.

This brings up the question as to whether we have different standards for ESL writers than we have for native writers. We try very hard to maintain the same standards, but it is sometimes difficult to do this when we see students progress from writing sentence fragments to marginally acceptable essays in ten short weeks. Since we at the Writing Center do not grade the students, we sometimes share their disappointments if they do not pass a course.

We attempt to make distinctions between the problems that they face because they are ESL writers and the problems that all writers face. We explain that some problems, such as writer's block, inadequate knowledge about a particular topic, or inexperience or lack of interest in a given subject area, are problems that many other beginning writers face. We find it helpful to make these distinctions because many students believe that they could get rid of these problems if only they knew English well enough.

We also make sure that they are aware of writing problems that derive from their particular dialect. Many of our students live with family members or friends from their own countries, work in businesses owned or operated by other speakers of their language, and consequently, their only exposure to all-English speech may occur in the classroom. There, they are reluctant to use English because they fear making mistakes and being misunderstood; they fear asking questions because they do not always understand the answers and are embarrassed to ask for written replies; and they fear asking questions about written material because they think instructors will not believe they have read their assignments.

Among the black students we tutor at the Writing Center, there are a number of students who, to varying degrees, write in Black English Vernacular. This dialect is, of course, grounded in a pidgin/creole used by blacks who needed a language that combined tribal languages with the language of their owners. Here lie some of the beginnings of the debate about the importance of one's own language, and, as was made evident in the sixties, a rejection of the language that represents both oppression and a power class other than the student's own. Although we recognize this situation and the politics of it, we also recognize that our students are expected as well as required to speak and write standard English in college and the work place. Thus we face a situation in which we must say that a student has to acquire a second dialect--that of the standard--while not devaluing other languages or dialects that the student uses.

This attempt not to devalue a student's language (or ego) is what often confronts us while tutoring. It is also, unfortunately, a task that some Freshman English teachers have either ignored or failed to adequately address. One of our Freshman English

teachers, for instance, in writing a referral to the Writing Center for one student, wrote: "Unless Jerry can correct these grammatical problems, once and for all, he will not pass 102." Jerry had read the ultimatum and, although many of his writing skills had improved over the past two quarters, he felt as if he were incapable of conquering his occasional subject-verb agreement lapses. In the worst of cases, we must also recognize that there are still those writing teachers who use students' grammar, diction or syntax to make a value judgment about the students. This type of excess baggage accompanies these students, many of whom have already experienced these types of judgments before, when they come to the Writing Center. Armed with this and a sense of failure, they arrive with essays bearing poor marks and editorial comments that seldom praise and seldom explain possible solutions to the students' errors.

First we attempt to establish a non-threatening discussion of the problems. Because students recognize the value judgments that often accompany the labeling of a particular feature of their writing as a dialect, I have found it unnessary (and less anxiety-provoking for me and for the student) to immediately announce that this feature is a dialect or possibly dialect-based. I once attempted, for example, to tell Jerry, the student with the ultimatum, that he wrote similarly to the dialect he spoke. This I said was a dialect rich in its differences from the standard, one that was linguistically sound, with its own system of phonology, morphology, and syntax. He coldly assured me, after I had finished my English-teacher speech, that he did not write nor speak a dialect, nor did anyone else in his family. Because of this encounter, I now discuss with all students the differences between oral and written usage. This is a broader, less threatening base from which to begin because it allows both of us to note how our language differs when we write. These spoken/written differences are also dialect non-specific.

From this point, we attempt to identify the errors that plague the student. Particularly with grammatical errors, I attempt to concentrate on only one feature per session, usually the most frequently repeated one. Often, just identifying the error as a systematic one encourages the student to proofread specifically for that and so eliminate it in a second draft.

Unfortunately, this technique sometimes fails the writer during in-class essays because of time constraints. In such cases, a teacher familiar with language acquisition can be helpful in letting the student either have more time to proofread or in allowing the student a chance to rewrite.

Proofreading aloud also seems to eliminate some errors. Sometimes a student who seems to write in a dialect does not necessarily speak the same way. By proofreading aloud, this student hears her language and changes those elements of her writing that are inconsistent with what she hears. One student consistently omitted the final -s from third person singular verbs. She wrote "he go," but read and spoke "he goes." She saw this as a simple spelling error and began to proofread for it.

There are, however, persistent problems that students might have that are not solved simply through identification and proofreading. Sometimes a student needs extensive practice in an area. Here, we use workbooks, handbooks, and tutor-created hand-outs. For instance, for the non-inversion feature of some writers' syntax that results in sentences such as, "I asked him did he want to go," we use patterning to help the student. Here the student changes sentences in the standard form "I asked him if he wanted to go" into the non-standard form. Then, with a different set of sentences, we asked the student to invert non-standard forms (often their own) to the standard. Giving the writer an opportunity to understand both conventions helps her make the distinction in her own writing.

With inflectional endings, plural -s and consonantal -ed, we generally use chapters and exercises from workbooks or handbooks, while encouraging the student to read the essay aloud. With these, we also work a good deal with the student on his or her rough drafts. We try, as we hope the student's teacher will, not to identify each omission, but instead point out to the writer that there are a certain number of omissions in a certain paragraph and then ask her to identify them.

Certain features, such as irregular verb forms, require that the student learn/memorize the form itself. This seems to be the most frustrating aspect of our tutoring--those times when we must say that there really is no rule--for instance, with

irregular verb formation, but that the student must familiarize herself with those forms that are problems for her. We suggest that she study the forms in her handbook, but more importantly, that she concentrate on her own usage. We also suggest that if she is unsure of the form and cannot check it, that she do what all good writers do--change the word to one she does feel comfortable with.

Also present in the essays of nonstandard dialect writers are the same misspellings that we find in the writing of standard English writers that result from the student's pronunciation of the word. We point out these spellings and explain them. For example, the student may substitute axed for asked. It really seems to help when we point out our own pronunciation/spelling confusions. The fact that all writers speak differently than they write puts the student at ease.

It is important, though, to recognize that what may at first appear to be a spelling error may be more deeply rooted than simple pronunciation. Jerry--of the ultimatum--kept misspelling what turned out to be verbals. It took me two sessions to identify the error as a systematic one that resulted from Jerry's use of verbals. He was using the present participle as a modifier without adding -ing to the present or -d/-ed to the past form of the verb. He knew it was a verb he was using, but he was unsure how to use it or what to do with it.

We were able to change the "abuse children" and the "broke glass" easily and read his essays with this feature in mind once we understood the cause.

Although we hesitate to become grammarians, this example, I think, points out that we must be familiar with basic grammar and comfortable explaining it when we tutor our students. To simply say, as we sometimes do, "I don't know why; it just isn't right," frustrates both the tutor and the student. At our Writing Center, we often rely on one another, and often argue about what seem to be incidental points of grammar, and in the end, we find ourselves checking our handbooks--just as we suggest that our students do.

Elizabeth Campbell and
Kristine Webb
The Univ. of Cincinnati

Fourth Annual Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

November 7-8, 1987
Purdue University
West Lafayette, Indiana

"The Writing/Tutoring Process"

Featured Speaker: Barry Kroll

This conference invites peer tutors, professional tutors, and faculty to join together in discussions, workshops, and presentations to share ideas and common concerns about tutoring writing.

Proposals have been invited on all aspects of tutoring writing, with particular emphasis on topics which explore the conference theme, how the writing and tutoring processes intersect and interact. Peer tutors are particularly encouraged to attend and to participate in what we hope will be a weekend of informative, lively discussions and workshops.

Conference schedule: Nov. 6, evening registration and informal reception; Nov. 7, 8 a.m.-11 p.m., meals, conference sessions, informal evening reception; Nov. 8, 8 a.m.-1 p.m., breakfast and conference sessions. Registration fee (includes four meals and snacks): $25 per student; $50 per faculty member. Options for inexpensive housing for students will be available, in addition to suggestions for hotel accommodations.

To register for the conference, write to: Susan Umberger, Conference Division, Rm. 116 Stewart Center, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907. (317-494-7217).

Conference Co-Chairs:

Muriel Harris
Dept. of English
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47907
(317-494-3723)
        (and)
Phyllis Lassner
36 Antrim Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
(617-492-4728)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

10th Annual Conference of the

Writing Centers Association: East Central

May 6-7, 1988

"Collaborative Pathways"

Proposals should address the theory and practice of collaboration, in particular, ways in which school or college writing centers collaborate with other schools, departments, or community organizations. Also pertinent to the conference theme would be approaches to fostering collaboration within the writing center, especially in areas of tutor preparation, tutor/tutee interaction, and the use of computers. Proposals may be for individual or panel presentations, workshops, and topical discussion sessions. Special meetings for educators in middle and secondary schools will be arranged, as will general sessions for tutors.

Please send two-page proposals by January 15, 1988, to Lea Masiello, 203 Pratt, IUP, Indiana, PA 15705. For further information, call Lea Masiello or Mike Williamson, IUP Writing Center, 412/357-3029.

CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT

Plan now to attend the 1987 Midwest Writing Centers Association Conference, "Writing Labs: Experience and Experiments," taking place October 23-24 at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. The conference will feature keynote speaker Mary K. Croft of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Croft, with her extensive writing lab experience and publications background, will speak on "A Place for Revision--A Place for Vision."

Conference sessions are many and varied, ranging from practical tutoring strategies to administrative theory. Indeed, the conference is designed to serve both the peer tutor and the director, the newcomer and the veteran. For conference details contact the program chair:

John H. Knight
English Department
Fort Hays State University
Hays, KS 67601
phone: (913) 628-5384

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

10th NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON

COLLEGE LEARNING ASSISTANCE CENTERS

May 11-14, 1988

sponsored by
THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL ACADEMIC SERVICES
Long Island University
Brooklyn, New York

Proposals should be practical in nature, about 200-250 words, and include topics such as computer-assisted instruction; program evaluation; critical thinking skills; reading, writing, and math basic skills; English as a second language; cognitive skills, and materials development. Proposal deadline: December 1, 1987. For further information, contact Elaine A. Caputo, Conference Chairperson, Special Academic Services, Long Island University, Brooklyn, NY 11201 (718-403-1020).

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Third Miami University Conference on the Teaching of Writing--THE WRITING TEACHER AS RESEARCHER: LEARNING FROM OUR STUDENTS-- invites proposals for papers, demonstrations, and workshops on any topic related to classbased research in writing. It will especially welcome studies in which (1) teacher-researchers become learners within their own classrooms in order to be educated by their students and (2) students themselves play an important and conscious role in the research.

The Conference will be held October 21-23, 1988, on the Miami University campus in Oxford, Ohio. Keynote speakers are Lucy McCormick Calkins and Donald M. Murray. Deadline for one-page abstracts is April 15, 1988. Abstracts should indicate whether you prefer 15-25 or 40-50 minutes for a paper or demonstration, or 1, 2, or 3 hours for a workshop. Send abstract to Donald A. Daiker, Chair, Program Committee, Conference on the Teaching of Writing, Department of English, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056. (513) 529-7110.

The Conference is supported by the Exxon Education Foundation.

The Tutor's Corner

THE WRITING TUTOR BICYCLE

To be a good writing tutor, one must be able to ride a bike--the tutoring bicycle. What has the art of tutoring got to do with riding a bicycle? Riding a bicycle is a learned skill in which one must understand the basic components and usage of the machine he is operating. For the writing tutor, this machine is the English language. To learn to ride a bicycle one must also be willing to take chances; using new teaching methods to help the client understand the concept is always a risk. And, just as there is no way to know what different types of surfaces one might be riding his bike on, there is no way to prepare for all of the questions and problems that a tutor will need to be able to respond to and solve. So, one must practice, practice, practice! Finally, once the skill of riding a bicycle is learned, it rarely becomes a forgotten skill--just as tutoring rarely becomes a forgotten skill and can be brought back up to par through more practice.

I think this bicycle analogy is a perfect way for me to express my feelings about working as a tutor again after 6-months' time. I worked as a writing tutor at the Ball State University Learning Center for one year and became quite comfortable and confident with my ability to tutor my peers in composition. However, when I later returned to my position, I suddenly found myself very nervous and uncomfortable with the thought of tutoring again. I was uncomfortable mainly because I did not quite know how to go about brushing up on my tutoring skills again without just jumping in. Obviously, I could brush up on my grammar skills, but how does one practice objectively responding to a client's paper, or being perceptive to a client's individual needs?

So, I jumped right back into tutoring and fell flat on my face. Perhaps I am being over-critical of myself but when my first client, John, left the Learning Center, I felt as if I had failed. John had written an in-class essay in narrative form and had received a "D" on his paper. John was interested in a "quick fix" way to turn his revised paper into a "B" or, what the heck, an "A" paper by that afternoon. This is a common situation in tutoring and one I was not unfamiliar with. However, it was a situation that I had not dealt with in six months, and I was a little unsure of myself on how to handle the situation.

Through extensive training, I knew that as a tutor I should make it clear to the client that a few grammatical revisions are not going to boost up the letter grade of the paper. John's paper contained the more complex problems of lack of parallelism and an inappropriate tone. In this situation, the tutoring trick is in presenting this idea without intimidating or overwhelming the client with the task at hand. This is the very trick I had problems with. After John and I had discussed the basic grammatical mistakes of the paper that were so boldly highlighted in red ink, and John had learned how to correct his mistakes in a manner sufficient to his needs, it was time to work on revision.

I decided to go the "worksheet route" to help solve John's composition problems. I showed him the worksheets that explained and gave examples of the problems and ways to fix these problems. Worksheets can be useful, if the client understands the transfer between the worksheet and his own writing. I was unable at the time to make the transfer clear to John. Hence, I believe John left the Learning Center still thinking that the only thing wrong with his writing was his grammatical errors. And, I venture to guess that John did not receive an A, or a B for that matter, on his revision.

Fortunately, I immediately worked with a new client who had fewer problems in her writing. I was able to sufficiently help solve her composition errors, which was a definite confidence booster for me. Many tutoring sessions later, I have now regained confidence in my ability to be a writing tutor. This confidence has in turn improved

my ability to communicate with my clients. Furthermore, I am continually "brushing up" more and more on my skills through practice.

Similar to learning to ride a bicycle again, I simply had to jump right in and start tutoring. I fell off the tutoring bicycle a few times, but I just picked myself up and kept trying until I got back the same rhythm. I know I will still have some wobbles, but I am glad that I am able to ride the tutoring bicycle successfully again at the Ball State Learning Center.

April Neth
Writing Tutor
Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

THE WRITING LAB: FROM FANTASY TO FACT

In recent months there appear to be many questions about how to establish a high school writing lab. Since we implemented such a facility at North Tama County (Iowa) High School during the 1979-80 school year, it has become an effective part of our curriculum. Perhaps the answers we found in our small, rural district of 700 students K-12 can be used or adapted by others.

The administration and public were impressed that the request for such a facility came from staff members. In our case, the lab was initiated by the language arts staff as a companion to our writing competency test at the ninth-grade level. Once this diagnostic test identified students with particular writing needs, we felt it was imperative to direct our energies toward meeting those needs. The creation of a writing lab seemed to provide the answer. Regardless of the method of diagnosis, a writing lab can be beneficial.

Our writing curriculum is based on the philosophy that if students are shown how to write, they can all do so. The basic writ-

ing course teaches the process: prewriting, planning, first copy, revision, and final copy. As students execute this process, attention can be given to any serious mechanical problem(s). We feel that while correctness in writing is important, this will usually take care of itself as students develop confidence in writing. Our writing lab supports this concept and does not usually rely on the drill approach. The lab is a place for students to practice and for instructors to provide feedback. Every attempt is made to generate an easy, informal feeling. Through consistent experimentation, students learn that they can write and that they can write well. They are, thus, provided with a tool which can enable them to gain success in other areas of the school curriculum, and we hope, life.

Such a philosophy is flexible enough to meet the needs of various types of students. The lab serves different groups: (1) Students who have been diagnosed through the competency test in writing as below a ninth-grade writing level are assigned to the lab. This is the largest group in the lab and usually accounts for 12-18 students or 20 to 25 per cent of our ninth-grade class. 2) Transfer students are assigned to the lab to ascertain their writing skill, receive basic writing instruction, and thus prepare for the writing test. 3) Foreign exchange students are assigned to the lab where both written and spoken language development are enhanced. 4) Some students are referred by other staff members who feel the students need additional writing help. 5) Occasionally, students will seek out help on their own, particularly college-bound students or "serious" writers who wish to "polish" their skills. The needs of all of these various groups have been addressed by our writing center.

Scheduling is often considered a potential problem in a project of this sort; yet it has not been at North Tama due to the cooperation we have received from faculty and administration. The lab is open two to three periods per day. Each student needing help is scheduled into the lab at least twice but no more than three times per week. (This is usually opposite their physical education and takes the place of a study-hall.) While we usually have 12-18 students in the lab each semester, we have no more than four to work with at any one time. That way it is possible to work individually with each student. The principal does all

of the scheduling and intentionally schedules writing lab students first so that they can be accommodated. The teachers assigned to the lab are also willing to switch a lab and planning period from day-to-day if it will benefit the students. (We do insist that the teacher keeps one period free per day for planning.)

The approach used in the lab varies from student to student. In general the lab continues to provide practice in the total writing process. Specifically, most students seem to have one or two main problems. Most likely these are sentence structure, fragments and run-ons, and organization. Students are provided in-depth work in their particular area(s) of weakness while continuing to use the entire process. Students are encouraged to write about what they know best--their personal, social, and academic interests and experiences.

The materials used in this approach are varied. No one set is used with all students. We have attempted to develop learning packets to meet the most common problems. These can be categorized according to the following areas: development of a main idea, organization, sentence structure, word choice, and mechanics. These packets form the bulk of our materials. In addition, we sent for all free materials and begged for the donation of others such as sample materials from textbook companies.

As a result, the funding of the lab was minimal. The major cost to the district is the salaries spent to man the lab the two to three hours per day it is open. With the encouragement of our Board of Education, we applied for and received a "Teacher Incentive Grant" in the amount of $2000 from the State Department of Public Education. (The Board committed itself to providing the funds should the grant not be awarded.) Fourteen hundred dollars was used to pay two teachers to work over the summer researching the lab, sending for materials, evaluating them, and organizing them. The remaining $600 was used to purchase some additional materials and equipment.

The daily operation of the lab is easily administered. Each student has his or her own personal file folder. In it is kept all work done in the lab plus a 5 x 8 index card with daily assignments and notes of the instructor. Thus, at a glance, it is possible to determine the student's area of

work, assignments already done, and suggested assignment for the next session. Students may work in pairs or as a small group as well as individually. The instructor plays an active role as participant and facilitator of the activities.

Formal and informal evaluation methods have been used over the years to assess the lab's effectiveness. Writing lab students passing the competency test usually range from 50 to 100 per cent, or an average of 76 per cent. In addition, a student survey in 1982 confirmed these positive results. The 1982 seniors had been the first to participate in the current writing program, and all underclassmen had done so. It was found that the writing program, both the test and the lab, was rated as excellent by 18.75 per cent, very good by 30.73 per cent, good by 32.29 per cent, fair by 15.10 per cent, and poor by only 3.13 per cent. We found the responses were similar regardless of whether a student had used the writing lab or not. Student comments included, "It made me feel English, like my other classes, could be met head on." and "I learned my mistakes and don't make them any more." Comments such as these were far more common than the occasional, "It's worthless." In addition, we have seen the improvement of students as they advance through the curriculum. Two former writing lab students went on to be editors of the school newspaper and yearbook respectively. Others have completed programs at both technical and four-year colleges.

Looking back, we feel the writing lab has been a beneficial tool in improving students' attitudes and skills in the area of writing. While other labs may be more elaborate in materials, organization and procedures, the North Tama lab has been effective in meeting the needs of our students.

From Fantasy to Fact: A Chronological List of the Steps Followed in the Establishment of the N.T. Writing Lab

1. Established the need for such a facility with the implementation of the Competency Test in Writing.

2. Approached the N.T. School Board to present the concept of a writing lab, to ask

for space and equipment, and to ask for support for an application for a Title IV Grant.

3. Surveyed catalogs and advertising brochures for materials that might be useful.

4. Sent letters to publishers asking for examination or preview copies of possible materials. A request also was included for any complimentary materials that might be useful.

5. Initiated field trips to other labs and curriculum centers to note organization and materials. (U.N.I. Curriculum Lab, U.N.I. Skills Lab, AEA 7 Curriculum Lab where an ERIC Search was instituted, Mason City H.S. Writing Lab, and the Federal Teacher Center)

6. Met with the superintendent and the media director to request space and equipment. A remodeling of a portion of the audio-visual room was scheduled for the coming summer. Equipment was identified that could be made available.

7. Met with the principal to discuss scheduling of teachers and students in the writing lab. (Seventeen students were scheduled into the first writing lab from one to three times per week.)

8. Attended a workshop on the learning packet concept at the Federal Teacher Center.

9. Spent the summer months previewing materials, collecting and modifying existing materials and developing new ones.

10. Preceded the fall term with two days of moving into the new lab and arranging materials.

11. Oriented staff at the fall in-service meeting.

12. Dispersed information on the writing lab to the student body.

13. Operated lab as teachers continued to develop materials and write packets to meet the needs of the individual students.

Veta Hildebrand
North Tama County
High School
Traer, Iowa

Address correction requested