

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

Promoting the exchange of voices and ideas in
one-to-one teaching of writing

Volume 14, Number 1

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....from the editor...

Hello again. I hope you've had a thoroughly relaxing summer and are ready to plunge in again. Maybe, just maybe, this will be the year that your administrators will shower you with long-overdue recognition, generous budgets, and almost enough staff. But even if reality prevails (and you have to keep on "liberating" enough chairs from down the hall), the students coming in will be there to remind you that they need you.

And the newsletter will continue to need your voice. There are stacks of truly useful articles waiting to appear, but in addition, we need to hear from each other, to keep in touch and to be aware of what others are doing. One addition to this year's newsletter could be a "progress report" section, brief (and not so brief) notes on what your lab is doing, what problems you're struggling with, what thoughts you have about all the usual topics. For newcomers to the world of writing labs and for those who don't have easy access to nearby fellow directors, such shop talk can be as valuable as the more focused articles that appear. So let's hear from you.

-Muriel Harris, editor

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Using communication
skills in the writing
conference

Good writing conferencers, like good cooks, often work by instinct. The process functions well except for those who would like to duplicate the results but do not know the ingredients. Unlike great chefs who are reluctant to share their recipes, many good communicators encourage and often insist that allied helping professions borrow and even steal their trade secrets.

Experts in communication skills, including a number of leading psychotherapists and counselors, have long insisted that tutors, teachers, clergymen, physicians, and parents can profitably apply the techniques that skilled counselors use when working with clients. Although the goals and outcomes are different, other helping professions can profitably use many of the communication skills employed by counselors and therapists.

Tutors who conference well with writers often assume a role different from that of the

traditional dispenser of information. They also transform the session into something more than just a casual conversation with the student. This same specialized and purposeful interaction is what distinguishes and defines the talk of helping agents with their clients. Counselors and other professionals communicate in a way different from those who engage in regular, everyday conversation. It is the nature of that dialogue and its unique ability to help other people that we shall examine and define in the context of the writing conference.

Learning to listen to another person remains a basic skill in almost any helping relationship. Carl Rogers repeatedly states how sobering it is that people seldom truly listen to what others say. He insists that without attentive listening there can be no understanding, and hence no real communication. Because listening behavior is so important, most definitions of helping relationships include suggestions which help a person listen to another with real understanding.

Attending Skills

Allen Ivey and associates have identified a number of components that underlie good communication practices in helping relationships (Ivey, 1982, 1984). Tutors can use the following listening or attending skills in virtually any conferencing format, whether it be a few quick comments in passing, a longer session, or even in the interaction which takes place in a small group or class discussion:

I. Basic Attending Behavior

- a. Eye contact- Look at the student from time to time but do not stare. Making "gentle" eye contact is an important initial sign that you are "attending" or paying attention to what he or she is saying.
- b. Attentive body language-Be natural, and assume a comfortable body posture. In our culture a slightly forward trunk lean, together with a relaxed, easy posture most often communicates attention and interest in the other person.
- c. Natural use of voice- Speak in a normal, friendly tone of voice. If you wonder about what kind of impact your voice makes on others, have

another person listen to an actual session or a tape recording and provide feedback.

2. The Minimal Encourage and Paraphrase :

Once the conference begins, there are a number of basic responses or Minimal Encourages which can help a student to continue talking (Gordon, 1974):

a. Silence- Saying nothing at all is a powerful, nonverbal message advocated by William Glasser and other helping agents to convey genuine acceptance and encouragement. Saying nothing but being attentive and interested suggests that you are listening and that you want the person to say more.

b. Acknowledgement Responses-Often referred to as "empathic grunting," acknowledgement responses use verbal cues like "Uh-huh," "Oh," "I see." and often include head nods and a variety of nonverbal body postures or gestures which let the student know that you are listening.

c. Door Openers-These consist of a few words or short sentences from a student's conversation which pick up

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is eight to twelve double-spaced typed pages, three to four pages for reviews, and one to two pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose self-addressed envelopes with return postage clipped (not pasted) to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g., Aug. 15 for the Oct. issue).

Please send all articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly donations to the editor.

on what the student said and encourage him or her to continue. Examples include, "Tell me more," "How did you feel about that?" "Give me an example," "That's something I'd like to hear more about," or the repetition of one or two key words from the individual's past statements.

Minimal Encourages demonstrate that one is listening sympathetically and prompt another to continue the conversation. Para-phrasing is even more important as a way of showing that you, the tutor, are in fact paying attention and accurately comprehending what the student has to say. Paraphrasing is considered by many helping agents to be the key tool in responding effectively to a client. It involves the tutor feeding back to the student the essence of what the tutor thinks the student just said. The tutor does not repeat the student's exact utterance word for word but rather reflects back on what the tutor believes the essence of the message to be. The following is an example of paraphrasing:

Tutor: "So, what kinds of progress are you making on your paper?"

Student: "I just don't like the way it's coming out. I can't seem to think of any ideas."

Tutor: "The paper really has you stumped right now."

The tutor's response does two things: (1) it shows the student that the tutor is listening, and (2) the student is encouraged to continue by either picking up on and continuing the idea of the tutor's paraphrase if it is accurate or clarifying what he or she really wants to say if it is not. For example, if the tutor's previous paraphrase is not quite accurate, the student could say: "Well, I'm actually kind of bored with the paper right now and would like to work on it later."

Many tutors who initially begin trying to paraphrase worry about what they are going to say and whether their response is "correct." It is worth noting that for any given message there are dozens of different ways a good listener can respond. It is best not to fret about the perfect response, but rather to respond naturally to

whatever the student has said. A tutor need only stay with what the student seems to be saying and "give back" to the student what the tutor thinks he or she is trying to express (Ivey, 1982).

Since complete objectivity and comprehensiveness in one's response is a difficult if not impossible goal, tutors can learn to make their inevitable selective focusing work for them: they can concentrate on those parts of the conversation which they believe will most help their student's writing and mirror back those elements. The result, while still employing active listening, enables the tutor to respond to those elements of the student's message which come closest to what the tutor perceives as a solution to the writing task at hand. For example, if the student seems to be having difficulties with organization, a tutor might try to relate the student's utterances to an examination of a logical flow of ideas.

Such selectivity remains a delicate balancing act between what a student would like to discuss and what the tutor thinks the student needs. The danger, of course, is that the tutor might "take over" and not truly hear what the student wants to talk about. When in doubt it is usually best to go with as many of the student's concerns as possible. Most students will make the greatest progress if the tutor attends to where they are at the present time. It may be frustrating not to "correct" an obvious problem, but students are notoriously hard of hearing if tutors address their own rather than the students' problems about their writing. Witness the number of times English teachers correct the same misspellings on the same students' papers. The profession has conclusively established that telling students is not enough.

3. Reflection of Feelings: Many students' responses and writing products come from feelings that reflect or relate to something that happened or might happen in their lives. Not only can a tutor help a student sort out facts from emotions, but helping to identify emotions is, once again, a way of showing a student that you are listening. In short, reflection of feelings involves a paraphrasing of a

person's emotional state. In reflecting feelings in a conference, the following steps are often the most helpful:

- a. Use the student's name from time to time and/or use the pronoun "you."
- b. The feelings must be labeled as specifically and vividly as possible. Give special attention to mixed or ambivalent feelings.
- c. Use sentence stems such as "You seem to feel...", "Sounds as if you feel...", "John (or any name), I sense you're..." and add the labeled emotion.
- d. The context may be paraphrased for additional clarification: "You seem to feel...when...."
- e. Reflection of feelings is most often useful if immediate here-and-now feelings in the conference are labeled and worked through (Ivey, 1982).

The following excerpt is an example of a tutor concentrating on a student's emotional content:

Student: "I'm going to spend the whole summer with my grandparents in Georgia!"

Tutor: "You seem to feel pretty excited about staying with them for the summer."

Student: "Yeh, I sort of am, but I'm wondering whether there will be anyone my age down there."

Tutor: "You're happy about going, but you might also be feeling a little anxious about not having anyone to talk to."

Student: "I don't want to be by myself all summer."

Tutor: "Sounds as if you will feel lonely if no one is around."

4. Open Invitation to Tally~ Inviting a student to discuss his or her paper is often best achieved by a response in the form of a question. There are two kinds of questions—open and closed. Closed questions are often factual in nature, frequently begin with "is" or "are" and can usually be answered by a simple yes or no. Closed questions usually deal with particulars or specific points of information ("Are you taking Biology?") while open questions usually provide more latitude for the student to develop his or her answer.

Open questions beginning with "what" often lead a student to talk about the details of a situation ("What did you hear last night?"). "How" questions most often help a student talk about process, sequence and emotions ("How did you cut yourself?" or "How do you feel about your new pet?") while "Could" or "Would" questions tend to provide the maximum amount of room for student response ("Could you tell me more about your plans for next year?") (Ivey, 1982).

It should be noted that closed-ended questions tend to put people on the defensive ("Why is she asking me that?"). Similarly, questions which begin with "Why" often make students feel interrogated. For example, "Why didn't you include the color of your car?" may be impossible to answer and may also make the student feel that he has done something wrong in some vague, ill-defined way.

5. Summarization: Often, at the end of a conference, a tutor needs to help a student pull together what took place and to restate or recapitulate the substance of the conference. Not only does this put closure on what happened, but it grounds the student, and helps him think of the next step he could or should take. Seeing the wider picture not only reinforces for the student what he has accomplished, but also enables him to draw conclusions, sort out his reactions, and see where he's been and where he might be going.

Summarizations are similar to paraphrases and reflection of feelings except that the time frame is longer and the points expressed cover a broader range. A tutor can use

summarization to:

- a. Begin a conference ("I would like to discuss...", or "In our last conference we talked about...").
- b. Clarify what is happening as the conference proceeds ("Could we stop for a moment and see what has been said so far...?").
- c. Provide a transition from topic to topic during the conference ("So far you've been talking about...; now...").
- d. Summarize what has transpired over the entire conference ("*Today we talked about,...") (Ivey, 1982).

Influencing Skills

Although the five points above define the basic listening or attending skills which should be at the heart of any writing conference, the ability of the tutor to help or influence a writer in some way is also important. The following skills can be employed as additional tools to help a writer, either by encouraging or empathizing with her, actively intervening in the form of suggestions, or by helping her re-think for herself what she is trying to say:

1. The Positive Asset Search: The Rogerian emphasis on positive regard can often be translated into what Ivey calls "The Positive Asset Search" (Ivey, 1984). To be distinguished from praise which implies a judgmental stance, the asset search is the identification of something positive about an aspect of the paper, the student's effort, or even about herself as a writer. The emphasis on strength and not weakness is what helps people grow (Ivey, 1984, p. 13). Thus, the progress a developing writer makes frequently depends upon tutor encouragement. Too often teachers as conscientious graders of compositions assume a critical stance because they believe that the identification of errors will help a student "correct" what is wrong. However, one's good intentions can often be perceived by the student as a threat rather than a help; hence, emphasis on the positive is important,

2. Confrontation: Occasionally confronting students with discrepancies within their writing can help them develop a new and clearer version of their draft. For example, if a student in the conference speaks of her love of sailing but falls to include it in her paper you might say, "On the one hand you mention you love to sail, but on the other hand you don't include it anywhere in the paper." Any clarification of possible discrepancies can help her think through more clearly what she is really trying to say.

3. Directives: Actual directives to a student can be useful but, if overdone, can revert to the old "search and destroy" approach which finds a tutor going through a student's paper and pointing out all the mistakes. Used judiciously, directives can be helpful to a student. She can benefit from a well-placed piece of information which relates to a writing problem, especially a directive is objective and non-evaluative. Defining the use of a comma or demonstrating how one can "show" rather than "tell" in descriptive writing can provide helpful and supportive input. A good rule of thumb is to determine how close the directive is to the student's own frame of reference or concern. If it becomes a resource provided by the tutor at an appropriate point in the conference, the suggestion can be a useful teaching tool.

4. Self Disclosure: Using self-disclosure can help a student see that the tutor has experienced or shares the same kinds of writing problems the writer has. For example, telling a student that you, too, have trouble organizing your facts prior to writing them down can reassure her that she does not stand alone. Again, it is important to remember that the focus of the conference should be on the student's work and the tutor's efforts to reflect back to the writer what she is trying to say. The tutor's own experience should never become the main or dominant focus. Rather, it should act as a supportive illustration or complementary insight to the student's own concerns. Self-disclosure, used in

moderation and in the right context, can be a good way of helping a student see that most writers share the same problems, concerns, anxieties, and triumphs.

Conference Format

Finally, the following is a useful format in any conferencing situation where one can use the above attending and influencing skills:

- 1. Gain a sense of rapport and help put the student at ease initially:** This can be done by small talk, a friendly invitation to help the student ("What would you like to discuss today?") or an opener inviting the student to talk about his paper ("How's it going?") and getting down to business in a cordial and open manner. Often, a good way to get a conference off on a positive note is to discuss initially what the student likes about his own paper at this point. You can agree with him or suggest some other positive things about the paper or the student's effort.
- 2. Identify what seems to be the biggest concern for the student.** Attending skills are helpful here. Such open ended questions as "What don't you like about the paper?" or "What would you like to work on today?" are good questions. Usually concentrating on one or two issues per conference is best.
- 3. Help the student solve his writing problems or concerns:** Any number of attending and influencing skills can be used. Simply asking a student how he would like to handle the problem can lead to the student's owning the solution rather than the tutor. Also, students learn to become independent problem solvers, preparing them for the time when the tutor is not there to guide them through their writing.
- 4. Discuss with the student what he will do next with the paper:** At this point the tutor helps the student see what his next step will be. Again, a range of attending and influencing skills can be employed. A sense of

moving ahead helps the student act on those areas he has identified for improving the paper.

Conclusion

A good response to writing springs ultimately from one person reacting to the ideas, feelings, and intentions of another. In an effective writing conference tutors often act out the role of parents attending to the halting and tentative efforts of their young child- they do a little guiding, suggesting and advising, and lots of listening, nurturing and reinforcing. As Don Murray states, the only prerequisite to being a good writing tutor is to "keep inviting, encouraging, supporting, establishing increasingly difficult goals- and sharing laughter at failure" (Murray, 1985, p. 157). In knowing and using these skills, tutors will be able to communicate with writers and support them with purpose, insight, compassion, and understanding.

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Seven myth-understandings about the writing center

"What can we do about our image?" asked a tutor in our Writing Center staff meeting last year. "People don't seem to understand what we do here." This tutor had just been explaining for the umpteenth time, to a student who showed up asking to have his paper proof-read, that we are not a proofreading service.

That was only one of the misunderstandings the tutors are forever having to correct. We agreed that something must be done. We also felt that if our mission were better understood, the Writing Center could provide better service to Boise State University. We decided to use an issue of the newsletter we send to all Boise State University faculty, WORD WORKS, to dispel some of the myths that tend to hang around the writing center. (Not the Joseph Campbell kind of myth, mind you, but the kind that just ain't so.)

Myth #1: The writing center is a remedial service for poor writers

This image of writing centers goes back to the early days, the mid-'70's to the early 130's, when most centers were first setting up. When prestigious universities like Harvard and Stanford started writing centers back then, they made news. Students' writing skills were so bad (said the media) that even these prestigious institutions had to offer remedial work. It was true that the original purpose was largely remedial. Centers begun in the '70's were basically skill-and-drill operations for students who had trouble with grammar and punctuation.

The evolution of writing centers since then has been dramatic. Gone are most of the programmed instructional packages. Gone are most of the tape players and private study carrels. They have been replaced by something simpler but a lot more powerful: tables, where tutors and students sit together and talk about writing. Most writing centers are now "full-service," offering help in all possible aspects of writing, from choice of topic to final editing, but it is now done one-to-one, not student-to-machine.

The main cause of the change has been the recognition that writing, especially that done in the world of work, is all collaborative to some degree. All writers need someone to draw them out and to act as a trial audience for their ideas and drafts. Good writers, too, need the writing center.

Myth #2: The writing center is mainly concerned with competency exams

The BSU Writing Center did indeed start out as a support system for the exams. That was how we got our facility and our original funding. A large part of our work still consists of getting students ready to pass the exams. But we do much more.

Myth #3: The writing center is only for students in English classes

We still sometimes hear the question from students and faculty: "Do you work with anyone or just with students in English classes?" The answer, of course, is that we work with anyone, in any discipline. In fact, we hope to get increasingly involved in writing across-the-curriculum.

Myth #4: The writing center does work for students that they should be doing on their own

This may be the most deep-seated myth. The old admonition, "Do your own work," goes back to first grade. It's drummed into students' heads ever after.

It is true that students don't learn from work that others do for them. But that should not be confused with collaborative learning, a realistic model based on how people actually learn. When tutoring is done properly, collaborative learning takes place. Tutors do not do the students' work for them. Instead, through dialogue and demonstration, they help students discover their own techniques for improving their writing.

"Change the writer, not the piece of writing," is an axiom followed by all writing centers. The object of a tutoring session is not

to perfect the paper at hand, but to question the student, draw her out, help her find the re-sources and skills she already has and apply them to her writing.

Myth #5: Faculty should require students to visit the writing center

Sound odd that this is called a myth? It is, and it's related to Myth #1.

All writing centers have seen students who appear at the door and announce sullenly, "My teacher said I have to come here." Typically, these students are difficult to work with. They feel they've been labeled as deficient and detoured to the center as if to purgatory. If they can just learn to spell or put commas in the right places, they can get out of there and join the world again.

For that reason, we don't encourage faculty to refer students to the center. Students who come on their own usually make far more progress than those who are referred - and they usually stick with their work longer and more willingly.

On one campus we know of, faculty are not even permitted to refer students to the writing center. All students must come on their own initiative. We don't want to go that far. We don't want to shut out the possibility that a referred student will be a good learner, because many are. Generally, though, it is better for instructors to recommend the writing center to their students, but not require them to go.

Myth #6: The writing center only helps with essays and term papers

One may ask, what else is there? Quite a bit, actually. To name a few, there are job applications, resumes, and proposals of various kinds. There are short stories and poems. Beyond that, there are the many kinds of informal writing faculty are asking students to do: journals, notebooks, responses to readings and class sessions, in-class exploratory writings. Many students are not used to these kinds of writing-they are used to handing everything in for a grade- and they need help learning how to use informal writing to its best advantage. The writing center offers that help.

Myth #7: The writing center is only for students

This might be the most persistent myth of all. The writing center is a free service for anyone connected with BSU, and that includes staff and, yes, faculty. We will take on any writing project. Our ability might be limited when confronted with an article for a specialized professional journal, but we can respond to it on some level. We can certainly provide a sympathetic, helpful audience for letters, articles for general audiences, resumes, and all the other writing that professors normally do.

We would like to see faculty use the center for help with their own writing. A few English instructors do so. It is also common for tutors to make appointments with each other. Even the best writers- especially the best writers- know when to seek help.

Beyond the myths: the writing center today

The BSU Writing Center, now entering its tenth year, has matured along with other centers across the country and become part of a full-fledged profession. Starting this fall, all new writing center tutors will take a three-credit course in tutoring. They will be better prepared than ever to help students and faculty with writing. They are also as willing as ever to visit classes anywhere on our campus, in any discipline, to explain the services of the writing center and to conduct writing workshops,

Rick Leahy and Roy Fox
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Bob Hamm, the retiring Director of Affiliate Publications at the National Council of Teachers of English and the author of F.Y.I., a delightful two-page potpourri of news, notices, and personal comments, included in a recent issue a few wonderful bloopers that his students have written: "Screams and whales filled the air" and "One of my favorite books is Donkey O.T." On the demise of the correctly used apostrophe, he notes the following:

On the way home from [a] conference, I saw a sign at O'Hare Airport in Chicago that announced that a particular airline "...Salute's It's Employees at OHare." Three errors in only five words. I know it's probably not a record, but it's pretty impressive regardless.

Tutor's Column

The wettschmerz of prescriptive grammar

The director of the Writing Center at Moravian College, David Taylor, is a former Navy man, and he runs a tight ship. Before his intrepid tutors are turned loose on tutees, they must attend an initial training course of variable duration (this semester's version took nine full weeks?). In addition to analyzing writing samples and participating in mock tutorials, novice tutors must blitz a series of grammar worksheets and ten editing quizzes. Tutor initiates are able to analyze a tutee's paper for grammar errors, and using the schema given in the front of Diana Hacker's *Rules For Writers*, Second Edition (1988), a good tutor can tag a tense shift in a tittle of time ("14b?" cries the tutor; "See Hacker, page 103: 'Maintain consistent verb tenses!'").

I completed the nine-week tutor training course this semester. I haven't studied prescriptive grammar since I was sixteen, and at the ripe age of twenty-nine, I found the gram-mar blitz challenging and, at its best, invigorating and fun. Learning to define grammatical terms simply and concisely for tutees is a useful exercise: and having at one's fingertips a schema for identifying grammatical mistakes is a powerful tutoring tool. Tutees are rightly impressed if you can say, "Ahhh! Here's a 23a: ambiguous pronoun reference; let's look at your Hacker."

As I burned the midnight oil practicing pronoun antecedent agreement, memorizing oddball mnemonics (e.g., "FANBOYS"- that is, "For And Nor But Or Yet So), and apostatizing the apostrophe, I began to question both the meaning of my life and the meaning of prescriptive grammar. (Late nights do strange things to the mind.) "Now look here," I said to myself. "You've written dozens and dozens of papers, and you've made Phi Beta Kappa. So what if you can't immediately explain why a comma is necessary with nonrestrictive elements?"

I knew I could write well, and I knew most of my tutees could not I knew that I was able to write well without a Hacker, and I knew

that I was trying to train my tutees to write well by using a Hacker. "Wherefore a Hacker?" I asked myself. "For Taylor and tutees? Forsooth, there must be other ways!"

I beat a path to Moravian's library and dug out Robert A. Peters' *A Linguistic History of English* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), where on page 194 I found the corroborative passage I sought:

At present, many Greco-Roman English prescriptive grammars, which are actually handbooks of English rather than grammars, continue to be published and continue to be used in schools. Such works are little more than repetitious echoes of those of the preceding century. Historically, their nomenclature and classifications date back to Mimic and Donatus. Their prescriptive rules date from the eighteenth century. From that time to the present, such authoritarian rules have found favor with lower socio-economic groups seeking a quick guide to linguistic propriety.

I come from a middling middle-class background, but reading and education were prized, and I spent vast amounts of time reading and remain to this day a book addict. The only real edge I had on my tutees was the vast amount of reading and writing I had done.

In colleges across America, formal written English is a requirement for most papers. Because so many students come to college without having done much writing or reading, they require a quick fix of prescriptive grammar to bring their writing up to snuff. Having a good tutor nearby, a Hacker in hand, was a welcome tool for many Moravian students,

As I punch my prescriptive-grammar time clock working with my first tutees, some-thing need at me and made me feel angry, even sad. Was it the intensive grammar drilling

which was part of my tutor training course? No, because ultimately this was fun: one's progress could be charted according to the time one invested in learning terms like "nonrestrictive clause," and prescriptive grammar soon became a complicated game which was rather enjoyable. Was it my uninformed tutees? No, because they themselves were generally alert and even enthusiastic, and it usually was a pleasure to work with them.

What then? Was I merely a snob? Because the King's English came easily to me, did I resent those for whom it was difficult? No. The facts of my life belie this possibility. (Until I was twenty, I thought the word "prep" meant what one did before an exam.)

Finally I found the answer. All the reading and writing I had done which gave me a good command of the language was incredibly significant for me. Who would I be today had I not read Anderson's *Fairy Tales* or Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* or Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Toni Morrison's *Sula*? Reading these works was transforming. My perceptions of reality were forever altered by these books—the same books which helped me, through example, to become a good writer. And my tutees, for the most part, were not book addicts. Conrad's prose hadn't reached out and grabbed them and shaken their souls into submission. And that's what was making me angry and sad. I wanted all of these pleasant and intelligent people to become book addicts! And why weren't they already?

As my adventures as a peer tutor continue, I will continue to hone my skills with Hacker and persist in my role as a comma mechanic. But in my back pocket, I'll carry a dog-eared *Brothers Karamazov* or maybe a *Moby Dick*, and perhaps that gleam in my eye will bespeak not only late nights with tense shifts and comma splices but also a certain evangelical fervor for the transfigurative powers of the written word—powers which pummel and prod the human spirit with their savage and incessant graces.

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New From NCTE

The English Coalition Conference: Democracy through Language. Eds. Richard Lloyd Jones and Andrea Lunsford. 87 pages, paperbound. \$6.95 (NCTE members, \$5.50). No. 13818-015. (Order from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.)

This new report on education looks at the way English and the language arts are taught at all levels of education. It is the first effort since the 1960's to assess the language needs of students and to chart future directions for the teaching of English. The result of an intensive 21-day meeting of a cross section of the English teaching profession, the report contends that only if teaching is transformed from fact-feeding and fact-testing to an interactive process will students be induced to participate more fully in their own learning.

Wetting and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research Ed. Chris Anson. 371 pages, paper-bound. Price: \$14.95; NCTE members, \$11.95. No. 58749-015. (Order from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.)

This collection of essays on responding to student writing is described in NCTE publicity releases as intended for teachers of English, middle school through college; administrators of writing programs; and teacher educators. But just because the people at NCTE aren't as aware as they might be of the world of tutoring, don't overlook this book as a source of some useful reading for tutors.

The essays in Part I, on current theory of response, and Part II, on practice, are more attuned to classroom teaching. but two particularly relevant articles are David Bleich's essay urging us to see the response process as social interaction and Donald Daiker's important reminder of the benefits of praise. Part III is the section most likely to be used in tutor training, with essays on peer conferences as attitude-builders and encouragement for revision, theories of interpretation to deal with error, a beginning peer tutor's response process, and an analysis of how tutors set agendas for tutorial sessions,

Posing questions for collaborative evaluation of audio taped tutorials

Peer evaluation of audio or video tapes in tutor training sessions is nothing new. Emily Meyer and Louise Smith suggest in *The Practical Tutor* that tutors conduct practice sessions on audio tape to practice modulating the tone of their questions and comments (32). In separate articles, Fran Zaniello and Shelly Samuels have discussed the advantages of videotapes in tutor training. Zaniello used scripted sessions to illustrate negative sessions and how to avoid them. Samuels taped actual sessions and, in an approach similar to my own, devised a questionnaire which enabled tutors to evaluate sessions inductively.

Both video and audio taping have advantages and disadvantages. Video, of course, allows tutors to see how one another's body language and facial expressions enhance or detract from the tutorial. But, as Samuels notes, video taping can be intimidating, and the setting up and dismantling of the equipment can be cumbersome and intrusive (6). Audio taping equipment, in contrast, creates less distraction and is usually readily available. (Most centers have old cassette player/recorders lying around from the days when taped grammar programs were going to solve our problems.) Another advantage of audio taping is that during the training sessions the tutorial is reduced to its essence- talk. Of course, the trainer and tutors cannot evaluate body language on audio tape, but neither are there the distracting comments on how this tutor or that looks on TV." I am not advocating one method over the other, but whatever type of taping a center employs, peer evaluation of taped tutorials works most effectively if evaluative criteria are broken down into specific questions which serve as collaborative pathways for discovery.

Drawing on the recent work of Muriel Harris in *Teaching One-to-One* and Meyer and Smith in *The Practical Tutor*, we can devise the following criteria to measure the effectiveness of tutorial sessions:

1) Tutorial Objective: Both the tutor and tutee begin the session with an agreed-upon objective. If objectives change during a session, the tutor and tutee make the change mutually in response to matters arising out of the tutorial session.

2) Tutor-tutee Talk The content, quality, and proportion of talk between tutor and tutee indicate a collaborative attempt to address writing matters, rather than a mini-lecture conducted by the tutor.

3) Tutor-tutee Rapport The tutor conducts him/herself as a peer concerned with the tutee's needs and sensitive to the tutee's personality to the extent that he/she can ex-temporize strategies for including the tutee as a collaborative partner in the session.

4) Tutorial-classroom Connections: The tutor views, and encourages the tutee to view, the tutorial as supporting and supplementing what the tutee is learning in class. In interpreting assignments and comments on papers, the tutor and tutee see themselves in a collaborative, rather than adversarial, relationship with the course instructor.

A trainer could, of course, merely supply tutors with these criteria as a means of evaluating their tutorials as well as those of other tutors on tape. But such an approach would impede collaboration and its attendant discovery. Rather, the learning situation would become one of authority (the trainer) telling apprentices (the tutors) what matters.

Though tutors need to become versed in these evaluative criteria. It is best to have them discover criteria from a list of questions, not grouped under directive headings. Thus, tutors discover the criteria for themselves as they examine one another's taped sessions together. Moreover, in addressing the trainer's questions, tutors pose other questions that can define new criteria in addition to those tacitly inscribed in the trainer's questions.

The questionnaire included here (see page 13) is the result of two semesters of tutor training using tape recordings of actual tutorials. Each question includes specifics that arose out of training sessions in which students responded to more general questions.

For example, item ten- on tutorial-classroom connections- asks if the tutor is sensitive when referring to the tutee's instructor. In its present form, it also includes specific

references to tone of voice and the quality of the instructor's assignments. In its initial form, item ten was merely an open-ended question. The specifics grew out of the training session when, on one tape, a tutor said rather sarcastically that he could not see why the instructor had worded the assignment as she did. While the assignment was rather vague, in hearing the comment other tutors were quick to note that the tutor's tone of voice was undermining the student-teacher relationship. Thus the tutor on tape, as well as his peers, was able to discover not only that tone of voice is important but that tutors must do all they can to maintain the student's confidence in the instructor, even when the instructor may seem wrong-headed. Certainly directors and trainers are aware of the need for sensitivity to the tutee's instructor and could easily relay this to their tutors, but through the initially open-ended question the tutors were able to discover answers for them-selves, inductively and collaboratively.

Similarly, many of the specifics of items three, four, and five- on tutor-tutee talk- grew out of evaluations of taped tutorials. The points about the tutor summarizing and rearticulating what the tutee says, for example, were generated when tutors complimented other tutors' abilities to focus the tutee's thoughts by restating them. Likewise, in item five, the specifics on pushing a tutee to discover answers for him or herself- hints, silence, cajoling, re-writing- all reflect different styles that tutors recognized and defined while listening to the recordings of one another's sessions. In sum, using criteria-based questions provides direction for the evaluation, but the lack of criteria labels of the core questions allows the tutors to discover collaboratively the important specifics that make a tutorial successful.

Designing a training program using tape recordings is not difficult, but it does require sensitivity and planning. First, to ensure collaborative discovery, the trainer needs to schedule training sessions when tutors can meet as a group. At Indiana State, with only six tutors, finding one hour when all could meet was tricky but not impossible. However, large centers may have twenty or more tutors. When this is the case, several sessions should be scheduled so that at least four tutors can meet together. If the director cannot conduct all sessions, senior tutors can be trained to run them.

Second, the director should schedule the Page 12

evaluations of the recordings by descending order of the experience of the tutors. For instance, I usually have tutors evaluate a tape of me working with a student first. Next, they evaluate my full-time assistant. Recordings of teaching assistants follow, and finally under-graduate peer tutors. This order alleviates the inexperienced tutors' fear of "being put on the spot." More importantly, it enables them to apply what they learn from the recordings early in the semester and to hone their skills by the time it is their turn. Thus, their own recordings build confidence rather than tear it down.

Third, the director should review the tape before it is evaluated in the training session. Since the recordings usually run forty-five minutes to an hour, the director must edit the tape so that its most important parts can be heard and discussed within the allotted time. In addition, reviewing the tape before the session allows the director to edit out anything that might embarrass the tutor and to address any serious problems with him or her in private. Along with developing the tutors' abilities, the analyses of the sessions and tutors' formulation of the questions enable the trainer to gain insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the staff, insights which help in both planning future training sessions and in pairing tutors and tutees.

Although we plan to work video taping into the tutor training program at Indiana State, the audio taping will remain an integral element, for this approach has enabled trainers and tutors to develop collaboratively their knowledge of themselves, their tutees, and the dynamics of the tutorial conference.

Peter Carino
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Some Questions for Evaluating Tutorial Sessions on Tape

When we listen to the tapes of one another's tutorial sessions, we, of course, should trust our immediate impressions and instincts as fellow tutors. But in addition, we can focus and refine our impressions if we consider the following questions.

1. What type of tutorial is going on? Pre-writing/invention strategies? Grammatical coverage (with student writing, with exercises and student writing)? Help with a completed rough draft? Revision? With a graded paper? Something else?
2. Is the objective of the tutorial clear? In other words, is the tutorial focused on the completion of a specific task regarding the writing process? Or are tutor and tutee working to improve a specific part of the paper? If needed, does the tutor allow for a change of objective? Does the tutee have the freedom and confidence to change objectives if the need arises? Does the tutor encourage this freedom?
3. What is the proportion of tutor talk? What does the tutor talk about? Raises questions? Summarizes and re-articulates what the tutee has said? Tells the tutee what to do (this can be positive if the tutor is giving directions; negative if the tutor is writing the tutee's paper for him/her)?
4. What is the proportion of tutee talk? What does the tutee talk about? Questions? Answers? Discussion of writing problems? Expression of negative or positive feelings about writing?
5. Does the tutor push the tutee to discover answers for him/herself? How? Hints? Use of silence? Friendly cajoling? Writing? Rewriting?
6. Does the tutor include praise and encouragement? Enough? Too much? Is the praise and encouragement sincere?
7. Does the tutor avoid negative statements that might reinforce the tutee's lack of confidence as a writer?
8. Does the rapport between tutor and tutee indicate that the Writing Center is a non-threatening environment?
9. Does the tutor allow brief digressions from the task at hand? How skillful is the tutor in keeping the digressions brief and putting the tutorial back on track without seeming to cut the tutee off abruptly?
10. Is the tutor highly sensitive and extremely tactful in any references to the tutee's instructor? This includes tone of voice as well as the content of any references to the instructor, his/her assignments, and his/her markings and grades?
11. How does the tutor respond to the instructor's assignments and comments, as well as to the tutee's responses to them? How would you define the attitude of the tutor and tutee toward the instructor?
12. In general, how knowledgeable does the tutor sound to the tutee? So knowledgeable as to intimidate? Knowledgeable enough to help? Not knowledgeable? Does the tutor admit sometimes that he/she does not have the answers but offers to find them out?
13. How knowledgeable does the tutee seem, either about writing or the requirements of the assignment at hand? What does the tutor do to draw out and reinforce the tutee's knowledge?
14. Does the tutor avoid writing the tutee's paper? How does the tutor handle requests and indirect pressure to do the tutee's work?

Third Basic Writing Conference

**September 30, 1989
St. Louis**

The featured speaker will be Glynda Hull. Concurrent sessions will be held on writing and reading labs, reading/writing/speaking skills, research, computers, ESL, and instruction for special students. For more information, contact Dr. Sally Fitzgerald, Center for Academic Development, University of Missouri—St. Louis, 8001 Natural Bridge, St. Louis, MO 63121.

Northeast Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College

**October 12-14, 1989
Albany Hilton
Albany, NY**

For registration information, contact Judy Karmiohl, Schenectady County Community College, Schenectady, NY 12305.

5th Annual Conference of the Pacific Coast Writing Center Assn.

**Saturday, October 14, 1989
Pacific Lutheran University
Tacoma, Washington**

The keynote speaker is Irene Clark (University of Southern California). The registration fee of \$45.00 includes breakfast and lunch. Contact Gloria Martin, Writing Center, Pacific Lutheran University, Tacoma, Washington 98447 (206/535-8409).

Call for Proposals

**New York College Learning Skills
Assn.**

13th Annual Symposium on Developmental Education

**April 22-24, 1990
Nevele Country Club
Ellenville, NY**

Appropriate topics include all aspects of developmental education and learning support services at the college level. Proposal submission deadline: October 27, 1989. For proposal submission guidelines and forms, contact Dr. Kathleen Schatzberg-Smith, Asst. Dean of Instruction, Rockland Community College, 145 College Road, Suffern, NY 10901 (Telephone: 914-356-4650, ext. 261 or 210).

Teaching Academic Survival Skills to under-prepared college students—the largest educational minority

**May 3-4, 1990
Cincinnati, Ohio**

The University of Cincinnati is sponsoring a forum for exchanging information on what can be done to teach students how to learn to learn. Deadline for call for papers: November 1, 1989. For further information, contact James Harter, Mail Location #206, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221.

From the center out

The old song goes: "I don't know why I love you like I do, I just do." For writing center folks, the song goes: "I don't know why I work like I do, I just do." Why writing center folks are among the most dedicated, hardworking, and energetic of educators is a topic for another time and place. Like working with my computer, I don't know why it works, but I'm certainly glad it does. I don't know why writing center folks do all that they do, but I'm glad that they do.

Muriel Harris has posed some excellent queries about the expansion of writing center philosophy and services. I'm sure I don't have any answers, but my experiences in our "Communication Resource Center" at Burlington Community High School and in meeting and working with writing center folks from around the country have convinced me that writing centers have a most unique opportunity to provide a myriad of valuable services to the school population, the community, and to the profession.

Our center has always been a "Communication Resource Center," and we have always attempted to work with students and staff in traditional writing-across-the-curriculum and writing-for-learning activities. We do spend most of our time in conferences with individual students, but we also spend an increasing amount of time in all content area classrooms working with teachers and students on writing and learning activities. We publish a building newsletter written by and for staff sharing of writing/learning activities, and we do much to help students see writing as a valuable communication and learning tool in all areas of school and of life.

We are also continually expanding our efforts outside the center to provide important services to students, staff, and the community. We sponsor after-school workshops on essay exams, research process and product, contest writing, etc. We hold evening sessions on writing and study skills for students and parents, and we hold evening sessions for parents and students on completing college entrance or scholarship writing. We work with students and adults on writing effective job resumes,

letters of inquiry, etc. We provide tutoring sessions for local community college students. We work with staff on their own college or professional works. We are now offering "Introduction to Word Processing" through the writing center, and we plan to establish a "writing hotline" for students and businesses in the community. I'm not sure what new services we will add next week or next month, but I am sure we will add.

I suppose there comes a point when writing center folks get burned out, and as Muriel Harris suggests, the more we do, the more is expected. Time, energy, and outcomes are always essential considerations. However, expanding the services from the center offers many benefits and has proven to be worth our efforts.

The most obvious and important beneficiaries are our students. In addition to assistance in helping them help themselves become more competent and confident writers and thinkers, the expanded efforts offer other benefits. Not only have they performed better in writing classes, but many indicate that they are better students in content areas classes. I have no statistics to prove this, but I suspect that formal and informal writing in almost any class will improve content understanding and critical thinking ability. Beyond the classroom, many of our students have won writing contests, and others have won scholarships at least in part due to their writing ability. The financial reward for the students and their parents is an important economic consideration.

Staff also benefit from the expanded efforts. Our work in study skills and traditional writings has improved student performance.

We try to use "real examples from" real classes in our evening sessions, and we often work on such skills in the content classroom. Staff also benefit in terms of exploring, developing, and sharing writing-for-learning activities to further improve student learning. We also achieve much positive response in our work with staff on their own writings.

The positive public relations created

through such efforts are also of great significance. Parents are more supportive of the school if they see that their children can and do receive "extra" help in study and communication skills. The financial savings for parents from student-won scholarships also create excellent perceptions of the center and the school. Assistance to the local community also generates much positive good will, and in times of tax referendums, special tax levies, etc., such good will can be most crucial.

Such efforts also benefit the center in terms of the district and board of education perception of its value. Few events happen in a vacuum, and accounts of positive experiences within and outside of the center usually find their way to administration and board members. The center can literally offer so many services that it becomes indispensable.

These services are not, however, without drawbacks. We do get tired, we do often sacrifice part of our own personal life. we do create

enemies who believe we should only do what we are contractually required to do and who believe that we set a bad precedent because they may be asked to perform such extra activities. and we do become so busy that we do occasionally have to say "no" to some requests. But, these problems are minor compared to the genuine positive services and good will that expanded writing centers can provide. Perhaps writing centers can bum the candle at both ends and still last the night....

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