The ✎ WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

....from the editor....

With the languid days of June comes the winding down of the semester— and of the newsletter. This last issue of the academic year (and of volume 15) focuses on a crucial group who inhabit our labs— our tutors. In the following articles you'll find a description of a training program emphasizing the role of the tutor as writer, a review of a book of tutors' essays, articles by both a college and a high school tutor, and a description of a program integrating the work of the tutor and faculty. As you plan your training sessions for next year, these articles and essays may suggest some additions for your program. They may also suggest some outlets for your tutors' own writing.

Good wishes to all for a quiet, relaxing summer. May you find some well deserved time to recuperate, and may you survive that annual summer rite of writing labs— rearranging the furniture.

•Muriel Harris, editor

Teaching the Conferencing Strategies that Improve Students' Writing

At Occidental College we offer the services of a modest peer writing advisor program to any student who wants to confer on writing in progress. Between 7-11 p.m. any night except Friday and Saturday students can come without an appointment to the Learning Resource Center and receive feedback on drafts, advice on how to proceed on a writing assignment, or in some cases editing help. The writing advisor position has a good rep on campus: it is considered one of the finest student worker options, as is evidenced by the fact that students return semester after semester to the job, and some even volunteer to work after graduation. This positive response to the program comes in part from the philosophy of training advisors. Advisors frequently comment that the position has stimulated them to continue to develop their own writing abilities, has placed them in a comfortable support

group of other writing advisors with similar interests (though we draw from all majors), and makes them feel rewarded. I used to think that the last reason was the primary one for becoming an advisor, but with our program's shift in emphasis over the past few years— away from a functional view of training and toward a process view— my perception has been transformed. We all know that writing is a way of learning content and that advising is mutually beneficial to tutor and tutee; and probably most, if not all, of us emphasize the writing process over the written product in our everyday encounters with composition students. But what has struck me repeatedly over these years is our center's remarkable results from blending all three of these understandings as the underpinning of our training program.

We see writing advising, not just writing, as a process that teaches students about content and about writing. It is immaterial that the majority of writing which advisors look at is ineffective or less sophisticated than their own. We as writing center personnel can access, rather than restrict, the communicative capacity of our writing advisors and not just their advisees'. We can make advisors better writers *and* help them to develop the conferencing strategies that unleash their tutees' linguistic imagination. So when I title this paper "conferencing strategies that improve students' writing," I mean *all* students involved.

You will note that I use the word "tutors" infrequently. We have deliberately not called Occidental's advisors "tutors" because we want them to be perceived accurately: as peers engaged in writing as much as are their clients, but who have been trained by the Writing Program to make valuable suggestions. We do not experience a stigma associated with the program; writers of all ability levels seek us out as an audience. That means seniors working on specialized comprehensives and first-year students stuck on a particularly terrorizing essay.

We market our advisors as trained by the Writing Program. But what does that really mean?

Because writing advising is a process and requires growth as does learning to write in college, I strongly disapprove of product-centered lists of do's and don'ts or a focus on the outcomes we expect from conferences instead of

on the process of conferencing. I don't hold workshops in tutoring before the term begins but instead rely on weekly meetings and a minimum of two conferences with me during the term for each advisor. I do not use techniques such as role playing and instead favor exploration of actual conferencing.

I prefer not to instruct our student writing advisors in such absolutes as "never discuss content" or "never comment on an assignment," but instead prefer to help them learn about their role as readers through their experiences as advisors and through observing the experiences of others.

I welcome former advisors to share conferencing strategies. Even more important, our program involves all advisors and me in videotaping and sharing parts of our conferences; in writing and presenting self-evaluations of our strategies; and in writing papers about specific conferences, which we submit for collegial feedback and revise.

Some would say that our sessions can lack consistency or predictability or that we are prone to avoidable errors of judgment. And I would agree that these tendencies lie in waiting— but I do not consider predictability and consistency or the avoidance of error as necessarily virtuous, any more than I would consider

the five-paragraph essay inherently a good definition of what an essay should be just because it is highly teachable. Such approaches ignore the messy business of learning processes to jump to reductive conclusions. I hold that generalizations about effective conferencing— like any description of communication— should be drawn in specific contexts that promote the use of good judgment rather than of application of strict rules.

A typical assignment requires the advisors to write to an audience of peer advisors and to describe what happened in a session, analyzing it for its contributions to their understanding of their own writing process and its contributions to their tutoring. They then share the paper with other advisors; after revising based on suggestions from their colleagues, they look at the next draft with me in conference. This is very much like the process of intervention we engage in at the writing center and the one which I teach to faculty in our writing-across-the-curriculum program.

Videos are made always with permission from the client, by appointment; then the advisor views the tape and selects two segments that seem effective and one that raises an issue for him or her. The advisor meets with me to discuss the video segments and the assessment.

Here is part of a discussion Josie, one of the advisors last year, and I had about a taped segment:

Josie: Here Greg [who on the tape is reading his draft aloud to Josie but stopping frequently to brainstorm on diction] is straining for words. He's not really thinking about what he's saying to another person. Also, I'm getting a little impatient. That's why I said to just write down anything for now and go back to it. I do that to free my own mind when I write.

Adrienne: You don't appear impatient to me, and I don't think you do to Greg. Your suggestion was just what he needed. He seemed to be psyching himself out— losing track of his point.

Josie: Yeah. Well, he isn't really saying much, then gets all tangled up. I stick to my guns and make him get back to the argument, which he is really having trouble with. I think it worked pretty well

to ask him a lot of questions. Did it go on too long?

Adrienne: I think you're picking up on Greg's tendency to try to read your mind. To guess. How else could you have gotten him to think?

Josie: Suggest words?

Adrienne: Sure, go on and try that, too.

Josie: O.K. Do you think it was wrong to laugh [at one point when Greg fixated on trying to guess what word Josie had in mind, and Greg desperately suggested a word that was obviously inappropriate]?

Adrienne: Well, it seemed good hearted, and you came right back to helping him. What other strengths do you see in the session?

In these conversations with advisors I try to clarify issues, answer questions, and point out positive aspects of the tape that they might have overlooked. Around midterm each advisor writes an essay entitled "Some Elements of My Conferencing Style"— it is an exploratory essay. At the end of the term advisors write an essay on "Learning the Advising Process." In preparation for this paper, we read about and discuss communicative discourse theory. Advisors are expected to employ case-history evidence and to comment on both their writing process and their advising processes. Through the experience of writing these papers, advisors recognize what they have done well or what they have done less effectively and how they might improve. The first passage I will offer comes from Jo Ann's end-of-term essay and shows her growing sense of effectiveness:

Until this week when I watched the tape of my most recent session with Martha in the context of my earlier advising tapes, I didn't realize how much I have grown as an advisor over the term. When I made the tape on May 1, I'd already seen the paper Martha was writing for English 100 at least twice, and I thought it would be a wrap-up conference: a sort of "make the advisee feel good" session. But looking more closely at Martha's role in the session made me realize that I asked good questions and encouraged her to keep working on the draft, but I also made it clear to her from the start that she had to take control of the paper.

Instead of just evaluating the paper for her, as I was tempted to do when she asked, "What do you think?" I put it in front of her to read and asked her to be an outside observer. That worked to help her see whether her paper communicated well.

We had found in the last conference that it would be necessary to add a portion to her paper but she hadn't done it. Instead of digging in my heels, I let her discover her own motivation. Playing an outside observer, she had to describe what she saw in each paragraph. And this descriptive outline made her discover that more than one place in the draft was still unclear without the supporting information I requested that she put in last time. I didn't have to beg or insist. At the end of the discussion, I think it was good that I summarized the positive effects that inserting those new paragraphs would have.

And here is brief excerpt from Dawn's midterm paper, which contains a highly critical, but constructive element:

When Rob and I met last month, I was concentrating on getting him to explain his thesis; knowing him, he would never sit down and write until he talked it all through. Now that I look at the tape, I don't like it at all. I just kept saying "Uh, hmm" rather than responding to him. Sounds dumb. I look so passive that it's hard to know who is the tutor. At the end I try to get him to a thesis, but he strays and I never bring him back. I realized from the tape that I should've put an outline of what he said on paper and gone over it with him. Then he'd leave with something in his hands. Or I could've put blank paper in front of him and asked him to take organizational notes as he talked. I realize outlining is something I myself need to practice more.

One final video that I require is of the advisors working together on drafts of their papers for training meetings. That they are a community of writers becomes clear. They note the direct but comradely approach to each other and the degree of collaboration they engage in as they work through ideas. Inevitably the issue of plagiarism arises, and we discuss their own sense of ethics in the videotaped session. Although they are not writing

these papers for a "real" course, the advisors want to know just how much collaboration is acceptable when they write other essays for classes or when they work with students. I wouldn't attempt to simplify the answer to this question by responding out of context, but the video provides an illustration wherein we can look for ethical considerations and construct heuristics. Who owns emergent ideas? When is it okay to give a writer words? These questions deeply concern our advisors because of omnipresent anxiety at Occidental about what constitutes the "Spirit of Honor." What we do, in effect, at Occidental is create a grammar of conferencing: we describe the existing patterns that constitute our conferences.

This approach seems to educate rather than to train. We are, to continue to use a paradigm of linguist H. G. Widdowson, developing the capacity for communication in our tutors and our writers, rather than seeking to accomplish completion of a regimen to ensure competence in tutoring. So we have education vs. training and capacity vs. competence.

Widdowson's construct helps to explain the dramatic results in our program. Advisors seem to understand the roles of reader and writer in context, to use conferencing as part of the process of evolving drafts because they have studied it as they have studied writing. They are capable of developing heuristics— for tutoring and for writing— rather than having to use absolute notions handed down to them by the authorities. By midterm, advisors' capacity for understanding, tolerating, and producing various discourse has grown far beyond that of our advisors in former years when we relied on tutoring techniques and employed more formulaic self-evaluation practices.

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When Tutor Meets Student:
Experiences in Collaborative Learning:
Buy it, Read it, Share it, Discuss it (A Review)

When Tutor Meets Student: Experiences in Collaborative Learning. by Martha Maxwell
(Kensington, MD: MM Assoc., 1990. 110 pp.)

"The nineteen vignettes in [*When Tutor Meets Student*] won cash prizes for their authors in a contest run each semester between 1987 and 1989," writes compiler Martha Maxwell in the book's preface. "All the authors," Maxwell explains further, "were writing tutors enrolled in a tutoring-for-credit course at the University of California at Berkeley." The course was sponsored by Donald McQuade (co-author with Nancy Sommers of *Student Writers at Work*); the tutors' field supervisor was noted authority on collaborative learning and peer tutoring, Thom Hawkins; and the tutors' immediate supervisors included Liz Keithley, Yvette Gullatt, and Rosa Rodriguez. If only because you can expect the kind of terrific writing essay-contest winners usually provide and because you can expect the essays to treat issues in the kind of informed and sensitive manner you've come to rely on from any venture in which McQuade and Hawkins are involved, you should buy, read, share and discuss this book. But it is because the writers in the book flesh out concerns that all of us involved in peer tutoring programs and writing centers are wrestling with, because their essays will make you reflect how tutoring is on the cutting edge of educational reform, that you should send for your copy today.

Let me show why I'm so enthusiastic about *When Tutor Meets Student* by providing you a glimpse of the book's contents. As you read, consider the issues these tutors have treated and how nice it will be to have in one place something tangible to regard as you discuss these concerns with your colleagues.

On the role of the tutor:

- ....every freshman has teachers, TAs, and authority figures. They also have friends, who will offer them gossip, praise whether deserved or not, and complete commiseration. As tutors, we have to maintain a stable balance between two poles. (Holly Holdrege, "Getting Real" 33)

- The most important questions we [tutors] can ask...are those questions which the students can learn to ask of themselves. We can give advice, we can challenge statements, we can cheer success; but if we don't give our students the tools to survive the years of writing which face them [without someone beside them to advise, challenge, and cheer], can we say that we've really done anything at all? (Matthew J. Livsey, "Ours *Is* to Wonder Why" 58)

- Having a bond of mutual trust between tutor and tutee can do much to increase the success of the tutoring experience. Tutoring is different from teaching in that it involves a collaborative effort between both students who agree that writing is a process improved by feedback. (Karen Castellucci, "Getting to Know You..." 82)

- Instinctively I felt it was important to tone down my own expressiveness, so that she would feel more comfortable expressing herself, and so the rapport between us would feel more balanced. This sense of balance is essential in a tutorial relationship. To achieve it, a tutor must learn to *listen*....(Mark Yardas, "Achieving Rapport with Quiet Students" 93)

On the benefits of being a tutor:

- I have always been a good writer, but somehow serving as a collaborator to others helped me to do the same for myself...my humility was counterbalanced with a sense of accomplishment, pride and self-confidence. I was no longer the writer who knew everything, nor the pre-English major who had reason to believe that she may not be good enough for CAL. (Lynn M. Shuette, "Tutoring? Why Should I?" 4)

On how tutoring nudges the tutee into work:

•It seemed that my role had shifted from tooth puller to collaborator: he would get out some kind of reasonable paper with or without me. I was helping him hone his ideas, but he was doing the thinking. (Mike Brodsky, "How I Got to Be a Writing Tutor" 20)

On how wanting to *help* often leads to unexpected obstacles:

•...I felt a tension growing...which came from Allison's frustration with her writing and my eagerness to eliminate her frustration quickly. I wanted to help her develop self-confidence and motivation, but my encouragement often led to sessions when I found myself answering questions for her instead of allowing her to generate the analysis. (Antonina Pascale, "Tutoring Via the Objective Eye of the Video Camera" 24)

On when tutoring doesn't work:

•I said..."If you want to make this thing work, you are going to have to take responsibility for improving your own writing. When you're ready, and have a serious draft you want me to help you with, and are willing to let me help you improve it, call me and schedule an appointment." Lisa never called. (Jason Buchalter, "Session from Hell: The Dark Side of Collaborative Learning" 37)

On tutoring the learning disabled:

•I began to focus on his writing problems as writing problems without worrying about how his cerebral palsy might prevent the improvement of his writing. (Robert F. Derham, Jr., "Coping with a Learning Disability" 41)

On cultural diversity in the writing center:

•As a result of my sincere interest in his problem over personal identity, I cultivated a trust that facilitated our tutoring sessions in many ways. The sessions, for both of us, took on an astounding dimension of energetic enthusiasm. In a final analysis, not only did Alex find a writing tutor at the Golden Bear [Writing Center], but more importantly, a friend and cultural peer. Now as I consider the Golden Bear's objective to assist EOP and AA students in their adjustment to the university, I realize that as a minority tutor, I will inevitably play a special and crucial role in that program. (Eduardo Munoz, "A Minority Writing Tutor at the Golden Bear" 66)

On gender issues in tutoring:

•... I asked him whether he felt uncomfortable talking to me, because I was a woman. This question made him uncomfortable; obviously, he *did*. We had a discussion of why he felt uncomfortable and how we could change our sessions. We didn't resolve anything, but we did get the issue on the table, and we still come back to it from time to time in our sessions. (Linda Irvine, "Close Encounters with Feminist Ideology" 53)

On the benefits of encountering differences in the writing center:

•I am convinced that I learned more from Marie than she has learned from me. I had a lengthy one-to-one relationship with a woman whose past and present [and probably future] differed from mine greatly, whose family experience was alien to me, and whose educational experience was far different from mine. Without that "artificial" friendship created by tutoring, I would probably never have gotten to know Marie; the social opportunities for such relationships are rare on campus. (Susanna Spiro, "A Little Enlightenment in the Golden Bear" 77)

On whether or not the tutor should fix:

•...I wanted to take my pen and just start "fixing" all the cosmetic errors but realized that they might heal themselves if we concentrated on construction and reworked his ideas. (Judith Wolochow, "I Have Been Meaning to Write for Some Time" 47)

On how tutoring won't allow taking anything for granted:

•Somewhere in my own learning, I had assumed that if a person was able to write a lucid, eloquent, and meaningful sentence, then they must have already

learned "the basics." Tutoring Ana made me realize how wrong I was. (Wendy Salem, "Case Study: Ana Guerrero" 61)

On being uncertain about the *help* a tutor can give:

> •[Jesse] had come to the Student Learning Center looking for a miracle in the ninth week of class. He expected someone to give him answers to all of his writing problems, preferably in ten words or less, and make his papers perfect. Instead, he got me...What was I supposed to do?...Who did I think I was? I had walked into the Student Learning Center and volunteered my time to help other students write. What made me think I was qualified to do this? (Tammy Medress, "Patience and Persistence Please" 67-68)

On how being persistent may lead to a fruitful tutoring contract:

> •[Lupe] changed from a reluctant participant to an active contributor to the workshop. I don't have to cajole her into giving ideas or opinions on her classmates' papers, and they don't have to feel as if they are imposing on her from comments on them. Lupe told me that this new-found confidence extends to her other classes. Because she sought help, followed advice and didn't give up on the possibility of overcoming her problems, Lupe also learned that persistence pays off. (Barbara McClain, "Persistence Pays Off" 74)

On the tutor as 'ready auditor':

> •The tutorial—where [Rosa] actually saw someone reading her papers and had the opportunity to discuss them in an atmosphere in which she didn't have to impress somebody for fear of her grade—gave her a tangible and healthy sense of a sympathetic audience. She now knew she had to make her papers understandable to someone other than herself. (Susan Vincent, "A Case History: Rosa" 81)

On the tutor-as-counselor role:

> •I...was made aware that Roberto's problems were not with writing, but that something outside could be undermining

his ability to concentrate and succeed. I took instantly to the suggestion that Roberto might do well to see a counselor. And suggesting this to Roberto helped him to open up to me. He said his mother had been giving him a lot of trouble and wanted him to come home. He was divided between obligations. Also, he was from a home where his native language was Chinese, but the spoken language of his town was Spanish. He was dealing with three languages! And on top of all that, he was afraid he didn't belong at such a large school, but was also afraid to admit failure. Essentially, Roberto was torn in so many different directions that he could not hold himself together. (Jennifer Fondbertasse, "Before Ideas" 89)

As the above entries clearly indicate, the tutors represented in *When Tutor Meets Student* have hit upon topics that all those involved in the educational enterprise are debating. They have provided powerful experiences with differences (gender, cultural, behavioral, intellectual); and, in doing so with sensitivity and insight, they have reflected upon their roles as tutors collaborating with other writers. The vignettes prompt crucial questions about our form of intervention in the writing processes of students. Quite appropriately, then, Maxwell provides a series of questions for discussion after each essay. When you read through the entire booklet—which includes a glossary, a syllabus for a course in tutoring writing, sample Writing Center advertisements/handouts, in addition to the 97 pages of text—I think you'll affirm what Kenneth Bruffee announced at the Penn State Conference for Peer Tutors in Writing: Those involved in collaborative learning, like tutors, by virtue of what they're discovering about themselves and about those they work with, are increasingly becoming agents for initiating positive changes in the academy.

Although the book is remarkably error-free given that Maxwell apparently undertook the task of copyediting herself, you will run across a few typos, some omitted punctuation, an occasional "arguement" or "untill." There is also acquiescence by some of the authors in using as a generic the masculine personal pronoun. Since I anticipate more than a single printing of the book, I expect these mistakes will be eliminated. A little more disturbing is

the mini-teacher-like tone expressed in some of the essays: "...he had a larger problem. He didn't understand the point of studying literature"; "it was my job to help him raise his writing skills to a passing level"; "I conditioned him through these exercises." I found the most troubling aspect of the book to be that it is uncertain about its audience. It has focus, obviously, since all the essays deal with tutoring. Further, Maxwell has linked certain essays together by topics: difference, setting agenda, tutoring benefits, and so forth. However, even though the book is aimed ostensibly at all writing tutors, as Maxwell writes in her preface, I got the sense that the book's *raison d'etre* was implementation within formalized tutor training programs, such as the one at CAL. Nevertheless, I also thought that *When Tutor Meets Student* could generate important discussions among tutors who are involved in venues that do not have such a highly polished tutoring program. And, as you may notice from my comments above, I steadfastly believe that the vignettes in the book can be discussed profitably by all teachers involved in promoting writing throughout the disciplines in the academy. These audiences *should* be attracted to the book, but I believe Maxwell may have to write a little more in her preface to make it clear why this is so.

Despite these shortcomings, I still see *When Tutor Meets Writer* as a must for anyone involved with tutoring, collaborative learning, education! That the writers in the text talk to issues scholars in our field haven't yet resolved is ample reason for ordering copies. And that's just what I've done. Now I'm looking forward to receiving mine so that I may share them and then discuss them with my colleagues here.

Pricing information I've received is as follows: 1-4 copies: $10.00 each + $3.10 postage & handling; 5-9 copies: $9.50 each +$5.20 postage & handling; 10-19 copies: $8.00 each + $9.10 postage & handling. You may get information on *When Tutor Meets Student* by writing: MM Associates, PO Box 2857, White Flint, Kensington, MD 20891. (301-530-5078).

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Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

Oct. 4-5: Midwest Writing Centers Association, in Garden City, KS
Contact: Steve Kucharik, Dept. of English, Garden City C.C., 801 Campus Drive, Garden City, KS 67846

Oct. 12: Pacific Coast Writing Centers Association, in Belmont, CA
Contact: Marc Wolterbeek, English Dept., College of Notre Dame, 1500 Ralston Ave., Belmont, CA 94002

Oct. 17-19: Rocky Mountain Writing Center Association, in Tempe, AZ.
Contact: M. Clare Sweeney, 2625 College Ave. South, Tempe, AZ 85282-2344

Oct. 31-Nov. 2: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Fort Worth, TX
Contact: Christina Murphy, Box 32875, Texas Christian U., Fort Worth, TX 76129.

A Reader Comments....

The January and February issues of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* were especially good—not only were the articles in them informative but the timing was also appropriate (I'm thinking in particular of the "Minimalist Tutoring" article by Jeff Brooks). The *Newsletter* just keeps improving!

Mary Bartosenski
Colby College
Oakland, Maine

Tutors' Column

Just Like Joe

Tutoring Joe was nothing like what I expected. I'd never tutored a learning disabled student before, and I pictured the arrival of a clumsy, stooped shouldered student with unkempt hair, papers sticking out of his notebook, totally disorganized.

But Joe didn't look like this at all. Wearing a pinstriped oxford shirt, blue cardigan, clean jeans, and loafers, he confidently approached the table and introduced himself with a smile. Taking hold of his outstretched hand, I noticed that his hair had been cut recently, and although he had a few stitches above his right eyebrow (the remnants of a racquetball accident, as he later told me), this tutee looked as if he could be in the running for student body president.

He was.

Not only was Joe confident in appearance and manner, he was also very intelligent, as our first and subsequent sessions showed. He had a wide and advanced vocabulary; he could follow a complex argument and easily explain ideas verbally. Yet he was coming to me for help in finishing two incomplete papers so that he could get his grades from last semester. What was the problem?

Joe had a learning disability.

In other words, even though Joe was intelligent and self-assured, a dysfunction in his central nervous system kept him from performing well in one certain area—writing. After working with Joe for several hours, I could spot the characteristics of his problem when looking at learning disability checklists (see p.10).

Some of these characteristics included distractibility and difficulty in written expression, but Joe's main problem was sequencing. Although he understood each fine point of the subject of his paper, he couldn't connect his thoughts in a logical pattern.

During our times together, Joe wanted to say everything perfectly before he would write down his ideas. By the time he said something he liked, he had forgotten the words he used before he could get them on the paper. To help Joe break through this blank-page barrier, I had him talk into a tape recorder. He could then rewind the tape as many times as he liked in order to get his ideas down.

But this process was tedious and time-consuming. I constantly had to ask him questions that would help him stay on course, or his ideas would wander. It took us three days of two-hour sessions to write one two-page paper. Needless to say, he and I were both testing our endurance levels. It didn't help that another characteristic of his learning disability was an inability "to finish assignments in the standard time period, or rush to complete them not using all the time allocated" (*Learning Disabilities* 2).

This, in fact, was exactly what happened. Joe didn't come in for our last two sessions. I don't know if he finished his ten-page research paper or not. But I do know this: many Joe's linger outside our writing center walls. We must be prepared to meet their needs.

This may mean helping them find ways to compensate for their learning disabilities, as I did with Joe. It may mean pointing out spelling errors to a dyslexic student who will never know that the word isn't spelled "right." It will mean giving these people specific and individual attention.

But isn't that the strength of peer tutoring, to be able to work with students individually, focusing on their specific writing problems? If we do, we can help these people,

many of them intelligent and talented, just like Joe, find the success they're so capable of achieving.

Mary Jane Schramm
Taylor University
Upland, IN

Work Cited

Learning Disabled Adults in Postsecondary Education. Washington, D.C.: The National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Handicaps, 1987.

Checklist of Possible Learning Disabled Characteristics.

According to *Learning Disabled Adults in Postsecondary Education*, a learning disabled student sometimes

• Demonstrates marked difficulty in reading, writing, spelling and/or using numerical concepts in contrast with average to superior skills in other areas.

• Has poorly formed handwriting—may print instead of using script; writes with inconsistent slant; has difficulty with certain letters; spaces words unevenly.

• Has trouble listening to a lecture and taking notes at the same time.

• Is easily distracted by background noise or visual stimulation; [has] difficulty in paying attention; may appear to be hurried and anxious in one-to-one meetings.

• Has trouble understanding or following directions; is easily overwhelmed by a multiplicity of directions or over-stimulation; may not understand information the first time it is given and may need to have it repeated.

• Confuses similar letters such [as] b and d, or p and q; confuses the order of letters in words, repeating *was* for *saw*, *teh* for *the*; may misspell the same word several different ways in the same composition.

• Omits or adds words, particularly when reading aloud.

• Confuses similar numbers such as 3 and 8, 6 and 9, or changes the sequence of numbers such as 14 and 41; has difficulty copying numbers accurately and working with numbers in columns.

• Exhibits severe difficulty in sticking to simple schedules; repeatedly forgets things, loses possessions, and generally seems "personally disorganized."

• Appears clumsy or poorly coordinated.

• Seems disorganized in space—confuses up and down, right and left; gets lost in buildings; is disoriented when familiar environment is rearranged.

• Seems disoriented in time—is often late to class, unusually early for appointments, unable to finish assignments in the standard time period, or rushes to complete them not using all the time allocated.

• Displays excessive anxiety, anger or depression because of the difficulty in coping with school or social situations.

• Misinterprets the subtleties in language, tone of voice, or social situations.

(Note: Each learning disability is different. A particular student may exhibit only a few or several of the above characteristics.)

Things To Do in The Writing Center

In The Writing Center you can:

- reveal new work
- receive constructive criticism
- write
- look over shoulders
- revise rough drafts
- get/give input
- share ideas
- read
- find someone to proofread your paper
- collaborate on poems, vignettes, essays, novels, dialogues, editorials, plays, etc.
- put stuff on the back burner
- enter contests
- revise second drafts
- send out stuff for publication
- think
- play word games
- interact with professional writers
- participate in/give writing workshops
- listen
- give birth to characters
- create new worlds
- learn
- sit curled up with a thesaurus
- organize a literary magazine
- delight in a finished piece of work
- revise third drafts
- type up things scribbled hastily on napkins, the backs of notebooks, paper bags, receipts, etc.
- plan a night of poetry readings
- critique the work of peers
- throw away your "babies"
- take stuff off the back burner
- play with the computers
- revise fourth drafts
- daydream
- paper the walls with rejection slips
- celebrate award-winning pieces
- freewrite
- make stream-of-consciousness lists

Sara Weythman
Peer Tutor
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Minutes of the National Writing Centers Association Executive Board Meeting
March 23, 1991
CCCC: Boston

Members Present: Pamela Farrell, Pat Dyer, Lady Falls Brown, Nancy Grimm, Julie Neff, Sally Crisp, Teri Haas, Susan Hubbuch, Mark Shadle (substituting for Gloria Martin), Ellen Mohr, Christina Murphy, Rosemary O'Donoghue, Byron Stay, Clare Sweeney, Ray Wallace, David Healy, Ed Lotto, Diana George (ex-officio), Muriel Harris (ex-officio).

Guests Present: Eric Hobson, Alan Jackson, Judy Kilborn, Gilda Kelsey, Maggie Hassert, Linda Bergmann, Mike Anzaldua, Susan Guitar, Dorothy L. Holley.

President Pam Farrell called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. Members decided to have minutes of executive board meetings published in the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *The Writing Center Journal.* A treasurer's report was not available because of the recent change in officers. Deadline for nominations for executive board positions is April 1. A ballot will be mailed to the board.

Old Business

The board implemented a new policy for the Outstanding Service Award. The award will be given every three years. Nominations will be submitted to a committee composed of the winners of previous awards. This year the award was presented to Jeanette Harris at the special interest group session.

Pam Farrell is coordinating plans for publication of a writing center directory. About 200 submissions have been received. Deadline is the end of April. Lady Falls Brown volunteered to help with the preparation.

Muriel Harris reminded members that the *Writing lab Newsletter* is interested in articles on daily issues, publicity, funding, nuts and bolts details. She stressed that there is still a need for addressing basic needs. *WLN* does not send out expiration notices. Subscribers should check the expiration date on their mailing label.

The new editors of *Writing Center Journal* are Diana George, Ed Lotto, and Nancy Grimm. Diana George distributed the new brochure for *WCJ*. She reminded board members that one of their responsibilities as a board member was to serve as blind reviewers for submissions. She distributed a list of suggestions for responding to authors.

Dues for the National Writing Centers Association are $25.00 which includes subscriptions to both the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal.* Send checks to Nancy Grimm, NWCA executive secretary, Humanities Department, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, Michigan 49931.

The Board received two applications for the graduate student scholarship. Members will review the applications and indicate their decision to Nancy Grimm.

The NCTE special interest session in Seattle will be entitled "What Keeps a Writing Center Going?" It is designed for writing centers at all levels, and speakers will include Pat Dyer, Lady Falls Brown, Julie Neff, Pam Farrell and Steve Fields.

There will also be a writing center session at the Conference on English Leadership on "Writing Centers and Their Place in the School."

Lady Falls Brown is responsible for planning next year's CCCC session. Members should send suggestions to her.

New Business

The writing center directory will be printed at Purdue. Ellen Mohr moved to charge $15.00 for the directory to cover costs and mailing. The motion passed. The directory will be ready in September and advertised in all NCTE journals.

Ad hoc committees are being formed to address issues of concern to writing centers. Committees will create working bibliographies and serve as a clearinghouse. Members volunteered to take responsibility as follows: Julie Neff— special populations; M. Clare Sweeney— computers; Ellen Mohr— peer tutors; Pat Dyer— research; Sally Crisp— Evaluation/ Assessment; Teri Haas— political issues; Ray Wallace— writing across the curriculum; Rosemary O'Donoghue— starting a writing center. Pam Farrell will contact someone to take responsibility for English-as-a-second-language issues.

Pam Farrell will write to Writing Program Administrators to discuss the possibility of setting up a liaison.

Julie Neff indicated that board members will be invited to her home for dinner at NCTE.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Grimm
NWCA Executive Secretary

The Tutor/Faculty Partnership: It's Required

New writing tutors wonder what role they will play, what it means to be a tutor. They have some notions about tutoring: sitting down with a student and talking about writing— particularly the student's. And of course they are right as far as that fuzzy image goes. They have been selected partly because they have the sensitivity, maturity, and competence to assist their peers by helping them scrutinize a paper and by offering strategies for reorganization and revision. But at Lawrence perceptions of the writing tutor's role quickly change from the relatively isolated context of the student's writing problems to the broader one of faculty commitment to improving students' writing skills. The basis for the change is the requirement that tutors work closely with faculty. The effect is a growing sense of partnership, of collaboration, which has both improved and expanded the tutoring program.

While a close working relationship between tutors and faculty is not unique to Lawrence, two conditions perhaps have made this a uniquely conducive atmosphere. Lawrence is a small university, with approximately 1200 students and 114 faculty, which prides itself on the personal academic relationships developed between students and instructors. Student tutors have enjoyed the individual attention of faculty in their own coursework, and it is the faculty who recommend potential candidates for tutoring. The second condition is the honor code, instituted over twenty-five years ago to insure openness and trust in academic affairs. This code, which states that students may not "unfairly advance" their own academic performance or "intentionally limit or impede" another's, gave rise to guidelines and procedures for tutoring which make the tutor/faculty partnership a condition of tutoring.

In our Writing Lab, any student who seeks tutorial assistance with a paper must first get permission from the instructor. The instructor signs a student (or faculty) referral form and designates the dates of the tutoring period. Students may not simply "walk in" to the Writing Lab and receive help on an assigned paper. While this procedure may seem unduly restrictive or even discouraging from the perspective of many writing centers, from the perspective of our Writing Lab the requirement augments the role of the tutor. Faculty construe tutoring, which is often long-term and which addresses several aspects of the student's writing, as an extension of their own responsibility to student. Since the faculty member may deny the student's request for tutoring or may even reject a particular tutor (neither has happened in my experience), his or her signature represents the sanctioning (possibly the initiation) of the tutorial. Faculty understand they are including a third party, the tutor, in the teacher/student relationship and by that inclusion acknowledge both trust and confidence in the arrangement; tutors understand that they have a responsibility to devise tutoring strategies in accordance with the instructors' expectations and assessments.

Once the referral has been made, I assign a tutor to work with the student— and the instructor. The tutor meets with the instructor, usually before, but on occasion after, a session, to discuss the particular needs of the student, to clarify the assignment, and to jointly establish appropriate objectives for the tutorials. Frequently, this or subsequent meetings will include the student, especially if matters of content— ideas and text analysis— must be discussed. In addition to meetings, tutors submit written reports to the instructor summarizing tutorial progress, and instructors respond in kind with suggestions and encouragement. (For a discussion of these procedures and the development of a tutor's ethical consciousness, see Jennifer Herek and Mark Niquette, "Ethics in the Writing Lab," *Writing Lab Newsletter* 14.5 [1990]: 12-15.)

The tutors' role, then, is defined to some extent by the instructors with whom they are working in light of specified objectives and the continual exchange among the student, the tutor, and the instructor. The instructor's own commitment to the student's improvement as a writer (as well as the student's academic success in the course) is shared with, and by, the writing tutor. The arrangement is required— and stipulated by the honor code. But there is more to the partnership than may be

apparent in these procedures.

Lawrence does not have a traditional first year composition course. Instead, all freshmen must take Freshman Studies, a two-term course (Lawrence has an academic year of three ten-week terms) which focuses on "great works," including literature, philosophy, science, music, and art. Professors from all disciplines teach sections of about fifteen students. Each term, students write three 5-6 page essays and two shorter papers, and rewrite one (although many instructors will allow, or demand, more revisions). The composition component of the course is therefore substantial, and students must demonstrate (or develop) clear, coherent writing styles while they grapple with analyses of the works.

In 1987, the committee which reviews the course each year recommended that faculty give more attention to the improvement of writing abilities. Before, most tutoring for freshmen was restricted to mechanics and the rudiments of sentence structure, but the initiatives of the committee resulted in a consensus that the faculty work more closely with the Writing Lab. The perception of the Writing Lab, and of the peer tutoring staff, changed. In that first year, the number of referrals (both self and faculty) doubled over the average of the four previous years, and they doubled again the second year— a 400% increase in two years.

As a consequence of the committee's recommendations, a writing tutor is assigned to each section of the course. The "section tutor" follows the same procedures of conferences and reporting as do those tutors not involved in the Freshman Studies program, but the tutor's relationship to the instructor, and therefore the role the tutor plays, has some significant differences. The section tutor must establish his or her identity as an adjunct to the instructor. The tutor meets with the instructor at the beginning of the term—before any referrals— to discuss writing assignments, the instructor's expectations of the students (perhaps the grading criteria) and marking system, and especially the benefits of peer tutoring. The tutor is particularly interested in the instructor's approach to the course, the philosophy which underlies the goals he or she has set for the students. When the instructor can articulate whether he or she will emphasize, for instance, the broad themes of the works, their historical context, close reading and comparative analysis, or personal interpretation, and what he or she considers a good student essay (an "A" paper), the tutor will be able to make judgments about the students' work from the same perspective. More difficult to explain but ultimately of greater importance are the instructor's speculations about how the student produces the good paper, i.e., the process of reaching the goal. Knowing this (an understanding which may evolve over weeks of discussion), the tutor can over the term gradually move the student's writing closer to the "ideal" defined by the instructor. Some instructors teach specific designs for structuring argumentative and analytical essays (as do most composition teachers). For others, the process is not as much the pedagogy, although the demands may be as great. All expect logical organization and clear prose. The tutor and instructor together, therefore, examine the instructor's approach and the unique extension to the teaching of writing which the tutor can provide. Tutors also meet the class and extend their personal wish to assist the students with their writing over the term. Through these initial contacts, the tutor becomes better prepared for the tutorial sessions to come, and the tutor sees his or her role from the perspective of assisting students as writers, not just of helping them through specific papers.

This perspective becomes all the more clear given the continuity of most Freshman Studies tutoring. With the first paper, the instructors identify students with major writing problems and refer them to the section tutor. Other students whose papers do not meet their own or the instructor's expectations refer themselves. The tutor, therefore, usually meets with a student weekly for virtually the entire term. The tutor and instructor determine the specific aspects of the student's writing that need attention, perhaps establishing priorities, and discuss more holistic approaches to developing the student's writing skills. When a second paper is assigned, the tutor addresses those concerns in the context of the paper. The tutor will use the resources of the Writing Lab or prepare relevant examples and exercises, or perhaps guide the student through revisions of previously graded papers. The tutor, then, has a responsibility to try to motivate the student to study and practice writing during those weeks when papers are not due (the student's recognition of the tutor/faculty partnership helps). When papers are due, the tutor will typically restructure the sessions— and meet more

often— in order to focus on the process of writing: to explore what that means for the individual student and engage the student in critical revisions. Other characteristics of tutoring aside, this personal attention to the student's consciousness as a writer, and the discipline which the tutor imposes, may ultimately be of greatest value. For students with basic writing problems (e.g., some ESL students) the consistent development of their writing skills would not be possible without the writing tutor, for the Freshman Studies instructor is not teaching a composition course per se, and, except for those in a few disciplines, does not have the time or ready access to resources for writing instruction.

The Writing Lab partnership with the Freshman Studies program, therefore, represents a change in the perception of peer tutoring. Faculty, for the most part, share with their tutors the responsibility for developing their students as writers. And that does not mean faculty abdicate the responsibility. Rather, they appreciate the distinct advantages of the peer tutorial relationship. As a result, tutors are better prepared and more motivated. They receive guidance and encouragement from the instructor and reciprocate by giving their analyses of the student's difficulties and progress— and, of course, by giving their time to the student. But there is another aspect of this relationship which again alters the perception of the role of peer tutors. While not all faculty have seen the tutor as potentially more than someone who works closely with particular students, some have— and have expanded the meaning of tutoring.

Since the section tutor is working in the context of a course, his or her role may be interpreted more extensively as the instructor addresses the needs of groups of students, even the entire class. For instance, instructors will ask tutors to provide explanatory materials on specific elements of writing, e.g., handouts on the use of semicolons and commas, examples of introductory paragraphs, explanations of logical fallacies. Some include their tutors in class discussions of writing in the course. An instructor who uses a particularly rigid model for structuring essays (and expects his students to use it) has his tutor assist him during special sessions with students who have problems understanding the design; the tutor works with members of the class as they practice using the new structure.

A practical alternative to individual tutoring (and certainly to class presentation) for assisting a few students with a common writing problem is small group tutoring. A tutor or instructor may identify three to five students who need examples and practice in, say, writing thesis statements, avoiding comma-splices, and the like. The tutor acquires appropriate materials from the Writing Lab, gets the students together, and conducts a group session. This form of tutorial assistance makes good sense and, increasingly, faculty are seeing the advantages of having their section tutors hold group sessions. Besides offering instruction in the mechanics of writing, tutors also work on writing skills in ways composition teachers have used for years. For instance, to prepare a small group tutorial on introductions, a tutor collected the most recent papers of the participants and made copies to serve as examples and to facilitate group discussion. The students, of course, did not stop with a glance at each other's introductions; they discussed whole papers: the ideas, the organization, diction, style, possible revisions. The opportunity to work together with a peer tutor became a comfortable and enlightening experience of peer critiquing.

A final (though certainly not exhaustive) example of the expanded role of the tutor— one which perhaps serves as an epitome of the tutor/faculty partnership: A professor who has taught the Freshman Studies course for years, who enjoys personal discussions with his students and who is remarkably dedicated to the improvement of his students' writing, decided to involve his section tutor in every aspect of writing instruction. Kristin, the tutor, participated in the instructor's conferences with the students (with every student for all the papers) and tutored students individually. Since she also read all the papers, the instructor discussed his evaluations and grades with her and requested her opinions about the soundness and clarity of students' writing. He understood, and took advantage of, Kristin's peer rapport with the students. She could put those students at ease who might recoil from what they saw as his sometimes harsh and demanding criticism; she could restore a proper (positive) perspective to those re-evaluating their own intellectual worth; she could "say in another way" what he said; and she could offer her own approach to solving the problems of organization, coherence, style. During student conferences, the instructor

would welcome Kristin's interruptions to ask for more clarification, or to pose a question she knew the student should have asked. Quite consciously, the instructor and the tutor blended their respective talents (while maintaining their distinct roles) in order to invigorate and intensify the writing experience of the students.

Since Freshman Studies faculty are THE faculty— are teaching in their respective disciplines and are concerned with the writing of students in those courses, their perception of the value of peer tutoring, and the role of the tutor, has affected the tutor/faculty partnership campuswide. Their positive, and often extensive, experience working with the tutors has enhanced, and continually enhances, their joint involvement in the tutoring program. In addition to their greater inclination to make or encourage referrals, faculty are more willing to contribute to the objectives and design of tutorials, to discuss a student's progress, and to include the tutor in their student conferences. Indeed, some faculty have requested section tutors for their non-Freshman Studies classes.

The tutors' experience, their work with both the students and the faculty, is an essential component of new tutor training. In addition to preparing new tutors to respond to the individual student and the writing at hand, training focuses on the tutor/faculty relationship. New tutors cannot merely accept the procedural conditions requiring their communication with the faculty and then function in all other respects as "silent" partners. Rather, they must assert themselves: they must represent to the faculty the advantages which derive from peer tutoring and from the continual exchange among the student, tutor, and instructor. The experienced tutors offer a description of those advantages and, in effect, define the role of the writing tutor at Lawrence.

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