

The **WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER**

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

Volume 16, Number 1

September, 1991

...from the editor....

Hello and welcome back to the newsletter for another year! I hope you've had a reasonably quiet, relaxing summer and are ready for the next month or so—the busiest, most chaotic, hectic, and invigorating time of the whole academic year. At least we know we are needed!

As I put together the articles for this month's newsletter, I realized how diverse, yet how similar we are as a group. On one hand, some of us have survived long enough to be the "veterans" referred to in Susan Hubbuch's lead article while others are newcomers plunging in to the world of collaboration and tutoring—the readers of Todd Goodson's article on starting a center. Yet we also have an all-consuming interest in what is going on in each other's labs, hence the good news (p. 16) that we have an updated directory now available.

Welcome back to all, and I hope the newsletter will continue for another year to be (as billed above) an "exchange of voices" among us. Let's hear from you....
•Muriel Harris, editor

....inside....

Some Thoughts on Collaboration from a Veteran Tutor

•Susan Hubbuch 1

Opening a High School Writing Center: Three Easy Lessons

•F. Todd Goodson 4

Message from the President of the National Writing Centers

•Pamela Farrell 7

Tutors' Column

•Karen Castellucci 9

Learning a Lesson in the Writing Lab

•Charles J. Leslie 12

Conference Calendar 13

Model of Collaboration: The Peer Tutor

•Ellen Mohr 14

Some Thoughts on Collaboration from a Veteran Tutor

Just as the field of composition needs theoretical underpinnings not only to define and legitimize the object of our study but also to give coherence to what writing teachers actually do in the classroom, so those of us who work one-on-one with students in writing centers also need theoretical underpinnings to legitimize our work and guide our activities. Currently, collaborative learning seems to be the "ideology" most often invoked to explain and give legitimacy to our endeavors. But I see some very real dangers in writing tutors wholeheartedly embracing collaborative learning, at least the ideology often presented in our journals and publications. My reservations should be apparent as I talk about my own experiences in collaborating with student writers.

Those of us who work individually with students on writing tasks which we ourselves have not assigned are in a unique position to "test," as it

were, certain reigning theories of writing and rhetoric. As tutors, we operate in a "neutral territory" where conflicts between some of our more popular theories become rather obvious. We are, for example, continually juggling the demands of writing-as-product with our immediate preoccupations with writing-as-process. We can see the tensions between the notion that the writer is the product of his language and his culture (central to the theory of the social construction of knowledge upon which collaborative learning ideology is built) and notions of Romantic individualism—the idea that the student writer must be free to find his or her own voice, that writing is the quest for a different, if not unique, vision. Most directly, we are confronted with the issue of what roles we and students are supposed to play in a conference. If I read current thinking on collaborative learning correctly, the power and the expertise of the teacher is the greatest obstacle to the empowerment of the student as writer. The solution I hear offered is that the teacher must abrogate her authority, that she should refuse to play the role of expert. Realizing the risk I run of being labeled a reactionary, I suggest that neither the tutor nor the student is adequately served by some idealistic notion that a writing conference is the meeting of two writers on an equal footing. In my experience, students seek me out because of my expertise in writing, and if I were asked to summarize what I have been doing over the past 11 years, I would say that my role has been to enable students to learn what it means to be a writer. Far from denying my expertise as a writer and as a teacher of writing, I overtly and directly call upon knowledge and information students don't have to reach this goal. Central to my conception of what writing entails, however, is the idea that an author must be master of a particular rhetorical situation, that an author must make decisions that can be rightfully made only by that author. Thus I give students information about grammar and rhetorical tricks of the trade—but at that critical point when a decision is to be made, the student, and the student alone, must make the choice.

Those of us who work in writing centers automatically escape many of the obstacles that advocates of collaborative learning see in a writing class. I, for example, do not develop the assignments students are working on, and I will not put a grade on the final product. Most importantly, I have no preconceptions of what the student ought to say in a paper; in fact, the

student should be more knowledgeable about the subject matter than I. Thus, vis-a-vis the course for which the student is preparing this paper, the student writer usually sees me as an ally in her goal of developing an effective text. Ours is, in this sense, a collaborative relationship. But this collaborative relationship is not comparable to normal collaborative efforts in real-world situations. The student and I are not working together the way Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede did on their paper on audience nor the way that students are expected to function in groups in our business courses. We do not come together, that is, as two people with a mutual interest and expertise in the topic at hand; most importantly, our goal is not the same as that of co-authors. In a writing conference the student and I are not striving to create a text that reflects a consensually formed point of view on this topic. More likely than not, the student's attention is primarily focused on making THIS paper a good one, and while I do want to help her reach this goal, that paper is not my final objective. That product, and even the specific process we go through to generate that text, is subordinate in my mind to a larger goal—which is the longitudinal one of the student's general development as a writer. It is this goal that defines my role as writing teacher, and which also explains and justifies the specific actions I take.

The **Writing Lab Newsletter**, published in ten monthly issues from September to June by the Department of English, Purdue University, is a publication of the National Writing Centers Association, an NCTE Assembly, and is a member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement. ISSN 1040-3779

Editor: Muriel Harris, Dept. of English, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907 (317-494-3723)

Donations: The newsletter is an informal publication with no billing procedures. Yearly donations of \$10.00 (U.S.\$15.00 in Canada) are requested to cover costs of duplicating and mailing. Please make all checks payable to Purdue University and send to the editor. Prepayment is requested from business offices.

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.

In the short run, the final paper that the student produces as a consequence of our work together will most aptly be described as a collaborative effort. It is unlikely that the student would have written exactly this text if she had not talked to me. Very likely her thinking has been affected by the conversation we had about the topic; and I may have brought up a point of view she had not considered, or directed her to further reading. More directly, I may have given her a thesis statement by articulating, in a coherent statement, ideas I found scattered in her draft or in our conversation; or I may have illustrated a point about clarity or cohesion by rewriting one or more of her sentences.

At my institution I do not need to worry about professors taking issue with such collaborative texts. Since the students I work with are doing papers for non-writing courses, their teachers are grateful to me for anything I can do to help students sort out their thinking into papers that are clear and coherent. But the fact that there are situations in which a professor raises questions about the precise ownership of a specific text illustrates, on the one hand, oversimplifications of nonfoundationalism and on the other, how far certain members of the academic community are from operating on its premises. My sense is that cries of "foul" arise close to home—in the humanities, where collaborative efforts are not a normal part of the *modus operandi* of scholarship. If these complaints, indeed, come mainly from our fellow teachers of writing, it would imply that we may be willing to accept cognitive or psychological definitions of writing-as-process, but we don't really embrace its social ramifications. Writing-as-product, I suspect, still lurks as a powerful notion in composition. Our colleagues may not want to quibble about who should take credit for a phrase or a sentence, but I wonder if distrust of writing centers in English departments doesn't indicate the continuing strength of Romantic notions of text as unadulterated reflections of a unique, authentic Self—or, in its more sophisticated formulation, the notion of writing as the artful creation of such a Self. An argument could be built (and I think Peter Elbow attempted such an argument in his 1987 *College English* article on ignoring audience) that external interference with students' texts risks adulterating a student's personal vision of the world, and thus, finally, threatens that empowerment so central to notions of collaborative learning.

Responsibility and ownership of texts are important issues in a writing center, but we are barking up the wrong tree in locating this issue in the text itself. As tutors I would consider us to be as irresponsible as those traditional teachers whom advocates of collaborative learning condemn if we ourselves become so obsessed with final products that a specific text is our primary concern. If I articulated a thesis statement for a student or rewrote one of her sentences solely to guarantee that a good paper results, I would be no better than the traditional writing teacher who appropriates a student's text and makes it her own. If I suggested organizational patterns or rewrote a student's paragraph simply to flaunt my superior writing talents, I should be condemned as someone who wants to keep that student in a subordinate role. The more we become preoccupied with the final product, in other words, the more we risk acting irresponsibly. We avoid these traps only if we remember that our role is demystifying for students the craft of written communication. The text at hand is simply an occasion for attending to the processes and principles that bring effective texts into being, and an occasion for attending to the writer sitting next to us. Metacognition should be our focus, and metadiscourse our language. Our obligation is to draw students away from their own preoccupation with a specific paper sufficiently for them to see that our efforts are centered on giving them the tricks of the trade.

I rewrite a student's sentence to illustrate a principle, and my effectiveness is gauged by how well the student grasps my explanation of what I am doing. I have to interrupt our conversations about the topic now and then to bring a student's attention to the activity we are engaged in, and/or to talk about strategies the student could try as she works to complete her text. In giving students information about writing, in a few cases I am stating rules; most often, however, I am pointing out or raising alternatives. But I can do no more than help the student clarify these alternatives—the writer must make the decision about which alternative is best. If I articulate a possible thesis statement in a conference, for example, it is always in the context of a query: Do you mean that....? Are you saying that....?

In other words, it is in the act of making a choice, or reaching a decision, that a student takes responsibility as a writer; it is in making choices about what will be said and how it will

(cont. on page 8)

Opening a High School Writing Center: Three Easy Lessons

It was the second week of June, and I was painting a ceiling. The phone rang. How would I feel, my department chair wanted to know, about being responsible for initiating a writing center in our high school three hours a day next fall? Well, gee, I don't know. Why not? I had a little experience working in a writing center as part of a graduate assistantship, but that was over ten years ago, and there is a terrible difference between "putting in a few hours each week" and "directing." I went back to my ceiling-painting wondering what to call myself. Pseudo-administrator? God forbid. Writing Center Generalissimo? Perhaps.

Eager to begin preparation, I picked up Farrell's *The High School Writing Center*, glanced through the table of contents, and broke into a cold sweat. The essays raised all kinds of issues I had never considered. "Goals and Philosophies of High School Writing Centers." I didn't have any. I wondered if my superiors had some. I wondered if I would agree with them if and when they might be passed down to me. All I had gotten so far was that I was to sit in my room during the specified hours and help students. The biggest task given me was to "promote the center," that is, get a lot of students to come through and "establish a need." Document, document, document. This was, I suppose, to become my first and most important lesson. It does not matter how pretty the goals and philosophy look set in type somewhere if no students come to the center, and as distasteful as it might be to some, we need to "sell" our service. However, if our composition instruction has moved to a process orientation, we have already been spending a good deal of time lately "selling" our product. For pre-writing to be effective, students must see the importance and potential benefit. Otherwise, those activities serve no more purpose than grammar worksheets in isolation. The same is true at all the stops along the process of writing. For any of the program to take hold, the students must be sold that what they are doing (revision, editing, etc.) will help to produce a better finished product. They must also value the finished product; therefore, the assignments must be meaningful and have a genuine sense of audience the students can appreciate. Likewise,

for a writing center to be successful, students must be sold on the value of the services made available. A writing center can be cold and lifeless—kind of a dangling modifier of the English department—or it can be a vital, dynamic place supporting a vital, dynamic composition program in the classrooms. The trick is to establish a good program and then convince students to buy into the system.

Lesson Number One: Students must want to be in the writing center.

Yes, I know it sounds simple, but it runs contrary to the way, as teachers, we are conditioned to think. It is easy to grow accustomed to the certainty of classes full of students who must deal with us. We set the rules and the requirements, and for those who can't take it, we always have the power of the F. However, if we have moved to a genuine, process-centered, composition program, we are already accustomed to "selling" activities. At the risk of sounding heretical or treasonous, perhaps an English department that has not internalized the process-centered approach should not attempt the implementation of a writing center. I would hate to imagine students wanting to visit such a place.

To continue my preparation, I went to a conference and attended a presentation on establishing high school writing centers. The presenters stressed the process of opening a writing center—doing background research, visiting other centers, developing a proposal, submitting it to administration, etc. I thought back to my ceiling-painting last June and felt nauseous. As happy as I am to be developing a writing center, I am sick of all new programs being developed and initiated from the top down. I would like to report that the majority of high school teachers are actively seeking out new and exciting methods and aggressively pushing for implementation. Too often this is not the case. In fact, when teachers try to take an assertive role and have influence over important decisions of curriculum and instruction, they are routinely gelded through task forces and committees. Mary Anne Raywid refers to this as "pseudo-reform" and suggests that it has a certain value for reestablishing the

credibility of an institution. However, it is not effective in bringing about change within the institution. According to Raywid:

It sometimes seems that convening the task force *is* the reform. Cynics might even suggest that such efforts can be restricted from the start to symbolic reforms, depending on the way task forces are constituted. To include on a task force all interest groups with a stake in an issue virtually insures the continuation of the status quo. (140)

I can honestly say that of all the committees and task forces on which I have served, I cannot think of a single example of substantive change that has resulted from the existence of those groups. Usually I get the feeling that the whole process is about making patrons or teachers or board members or anyone who has expressed "concerns" feel better by getting to participate on an important task force. Unfortunately, what this means is that change does not come about from this kind of structure. Change still comes about from decisions made by administrators independent of staff and patrons. The committees and task forces are convened either to validate those decisions or to deal with fallout from unpopular decisions. Particularly with regard to writing centers, I would very much like to see the initiative originate in the trenches and work its way up, because a writing center needs the active and whole-hearted support of staff in order to succeed.

Lesson Number Two: Teachers must want to participate with the writing center.

It is more difficult, I think, to get teachers to be excited about a writing center if it has been imposed from the top-down management orientation. Most teachers today are so reconciled to this management practice that they simply wait to be told what to do and then try to document the fact that they have done it. Along with this comes a certain paranoia. "Teaching" becomes staying out of trouble and covering vulnerable areas. This environment can be detrimental to a fledgling writing center. A paranoid English teacher retreats into the classroom and, with back firmly against something solid, fights off all comers. A writing center will be seen as a threat, because a paranoid English teacher will not want other staff to have an opportunity to see the assign-

ments being made and the grading procedures. The paranoid English teacher will not refer or encourage students to visit a center. The paranoid English teacher might even subtly imply to students that the writing center is not a good place, and students, quick to take cues from the teacher, will avoid the center. Conversely, an English department that shares openly and has a group of talented and dynamic teachers willing to work together will be less likely to feel threatened by a writing center. In fact, the writing center can become a tremendous vehicle through which department members can learn from each other by seeing the work of their peers through the students.

One of the greatest benefits I have experienced this year as a result of my involvement with the center is the extent to which I have been forced to reevaluate my practices as a teacher of English. I think that for a writing center to take off and fly, the teachers must be excited and involved and see it as an opportunity to help students and grow professionally—not as an opportunity to knife each other's blind side. It would be much easier to get this kind of enthusiasm and sense of ownership if the teachers had developed the proposal for a center themselves, rather than being told to do it. Still, a good idea is a good idea, and writing centers are a good idea. Teachers can become excited, even in the most feudal of working environments. Perhaps the most important thing to stress with department members as a center develops is a non-threatening atmosphere—that the writing center staff is in the business of helping students, not evaluating fellow English teachers.

Finally, I looked through several issues of *The Writing Center Journal*, and I felt like a primordial inventor face to face with a stealth fighter. I knew that "Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy" was, for me, a distant concern. I was concerned with how to handle the logistics of passes from study hall teachers. This was my next lesson. The logistical nuts and bolts of the high school writing center—bureaucracy and paper work—are at once the most important and least important matters of concern. If those things do not work, the writing center will fail unequivocally. Administrators will need certain kinds of records. These usually involve simple numbers of students coming through. In addition to this, we will also want information about the kinds of work we are doing with students so we

can improve services and be constantly evaluating ourselves. Do it in the quickest way possible and do not spend one second more with it than you absolutely must.

Lesson Number Three: The bureaucratic nonsense must work so smoothly that it seems not to exist.

Students and other teachers will be put off by too much complexity. Resist the desire for triplicate. Resist the need for "special forms." This stuff drives up costs and makes life more complicated than it was meant to be. Some teachers are born organizers, and I love those people, especially when I need a special schedule or announcement I threw away three weeks ago. I always know who will have kept it in a folder or a basket, carefully ordered with its kin. Such organization is a work of art. Still, I do not believe a writing center should be over-organized. The writing process, for me at least, is not neat and pretty and perfectly ordered. The process is usually (if the writing is of any degree of complexity) sloppy, repetitious, awkward, fumbling. A writing center that is a well-oiled machine might look nice on Back-to-School Night when we all render unto Public Relations its due, but I want a writing center that is a place where people work, where we can wrestle together with confusion and struggle to create meaning.

Now well into the school year, I have learned more about writing centers than I ever could have from a graduate course or article or book. In fact, I have learned so much that the articles and books and courses are beginning to make sense. I have enough of a primitive set of "Goals and Philosophies" that I am ready to, if not tackle, at least begin to think about the more complex issues. If there is a final lesson here, it is that opening a writing center is like the writing process itself. We do not begin with a finished product, and any product can always be improved.

F. Todd Goodson
Blue Valley North High School
Overland Park, KS

Works Cited

Clark, Irene Lurkis. "Collaboration and Ethics in Writing Center Pedagogy." *The Writing Center Journal* 9.1 (1988): 3-12.

Farrell, Pamela B., ed. *The High School Writing Center*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989.

Levin, Amy K. "Goals and Philosophies of High School Writing Centers." *The High School Writing Center*. Ed. Pamela B. Farrell. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1989. 23-29.

Raywid, Mary Anne. "The Evolving Effort to Improve Schools: Pseudo-Reform, Incremental Reform, and Restructuring." *Phi Delta Kappan* 72 (1990): 139-143.

more importantly
or
more important?

Experts differ on whether *more importantly* is an allowable usage. Purists choose *more important* because it substitutes for "what is more important." Liberals argue that the adverbial form, *more importantly*, is permissible because we use *more specifically* instead of *more specific* and *more realistically* instead of *more realistic*.

The term is so controversial that the usage panel set up by the *American Heritage Dictionary* split 50:50 on this question. But the dictionary notes that most grammarians prescribe *more important*.

-from the *Glossary of Misused Words & Phrases* (communication briefings, 140 S. Broadway, Pitman, NJ 08071.)

Message from the President of the National Writing Centers Association

It was good to see so many NWCA people at our Thursday and Saturday meetings at CCCC in Boston. For those of you who were unable to get away for the meeting, we missed your input and hope this message continues to keep you involved in the work we are trying to do. At our special interest group session, Pat Dyer chaired two informative presentations by Lea Masiello and Carmen Schmersahl. We thanked Joyce Kinkead for her service as Executive Secretary, and Joyce and Jeanette Harris for their work as editors of the *Writing Center Journal*. After introducing Nancy Grimm, our new Executive Secretary, and the team of Grimm, Diana George and Ed Lotto, new editors of *The Writing Center Journal*, we presented the outstanding scholarship awards to Ray Wallace and Jeanne Simpson (book) and Lex Runciman (article). Jeanette Harris received the prestigious NWCA service award.

At CCCC you missed some of the finest presentations on writing centers that have ever been assembled in one place at one time for a national conference. Roundtables and panels discussed "The Writing Center as Research Center," "Meeting Diverse Student Needs for the Writing Center Tutorial," "Reorienting Writing Centers: Reconsidering the Generation, Application, and Testing of Theory Through Research," "Diversity at the Writing Center," "Assignments from Hell: Writing Center Solutions," "Reexamining the Nature of Writing Center Tutoring vs. Classroom Teaching," "Reexamining the Writing Center's Philosophy and Pedagogy," "Sustaining the Ecology of Writing Centers," "Examining and Improving the Status of the Writing Center," and "Collaboration and Authority in Writing Center Conferences." Other sessions as well included mention of writing centers. Attendance indicates that these issues are all major concerns of writing center people. Speaking of presentations, I hope many of you will get together and write some proposals for the NCTE Spring Conference in Washington, DC. Many of our members attend that conference instead of CCCC.

This diversity of concerns led the Executive Board to form committees to involve more of our membership in the research,

practice, and application focusing on specific concerns to share with the entire membership. Board members have volunteered to chair committees; I hope that you will contact chairs to volunteer to work on these committees. The intent of the committees is to research, share information through periodicals and meetings, propose and conduct workshops/presentations at national conventions, and further the study of that particular concern to increase our understanding and application of successful writing center practices. I hope each committee will get far enough along in its network of activity to present at least a plan of action at the November meeting in Seattle. The committees and chairs with their addresses are listed below. Please help the entire organization by contacting the person in charge of the committee you wish to join.

Pamela B. Farrell
NWCA President

NWCA Special Interest Committee Chairs

English as a Second Language

Chair: Lady Falls Brown
Dept. of English
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, TX 79409
Office: 806-742-2531
English Dept.: 806-742-2501

Special Student Populations

Chair: Julie Neff
U. of Puget Sound
Tacoma, WA 98416
work: 206-756-3395
home: 206-323-1731

Computers in Writing Centers

Chair: M. Clare Sweeney
0302 English
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85287-0302
602-965-4272

Peer Tutors

Chair: Ellen Mohr
12345 College Blvd. at Quivira
Johnson County Community
College

Overland Park, KS 66210-1299
work: 913-469-8500, ext. 3497

Starting a Writing Center

Chair: Rosemary O'Donoghue
Western New England College
1215 Wilbraham Road
Springfield, MA 01119
work: 413-782-1526
home: 413-596-6108

Research in Writing Centers

Chair: Pat Dyer
Widener University
Chester, PA 19013
work: 215-499-4332
home: 302-764-3196

Evaluation and Assessment

Chair: Sally Crisp
University of Arkansas at Little
Rock
2801 S. University
Little Rock, AR 72204
501-569-3160
501-569-8343

Political Issues

Chair: Teri Haas
Dept. of Academic Skills
Hunter College
695 Park Ave.
New York, NY 10021
work: 212-772-5844

Writing Across the Curriculum

Chair: Ray Wallace
English Dept.
301 McClung Tower
University of Tennessee
Knoxville, TN 37996
office: 615-974-6957
writing center: 615-974-2611
(moving soon to Kennesaw State
College, Georgia)

Some Thoughts on Collaboration

(cont. from page 3)

be said that she acknowledges her ownership of a text. When I say that the final paper is the responsibility of the writer, I mean that it must be a reflection of a series of choices she has made. It has little to do with the uniqueness of the ideas, and very little to do with who first put certain words together in a particular way. In reading this you are reading very little that you have not read before, and you know how

heavily my language has been influenced by conversations going on now in the field of composition. What makes this text mine is that it is the product of a series of choices I have made—to adopt certain ideas and reject or ignore others, to synthesize what is common property in such a way that I can give it my assent. The act of giving my assent is what makes these ideas mine, even though they may be equally shared by others.

It is precisely here—in the act of choosing that to which one can give his or her assent—that I locate responsibility for and ownership of one's writing. The greatest obstacle novice writers face in their development as writers is their own passivity, whether it grows out of a Romantic notion of inspiration or their own defeatism. Thus my major concern as a teacher of writing in a writing center is not that different from that of my colleagues in other departments. Recognizing the black-and-white, right-or-wrong dualism that characterizes the thinking of the typical adolescent, I want to open up for students worlds of options—intellectual, rhetorical, syntactic, semantic. But if these students are indeed going to make their own choices, they will be influenced by their perceptions of the social environment in which and for which a paper is being prepared. In several important ways, however, the communicative environment of a classroom is different from the communicative environment of the center. The writing center can act as a neutral territory in which the student and tutor can consider the impact that the student's words will have on the audience in question, and the types of reactions that can be anticipated to the ideas she proposes. Because the tutor is not assigning grades, because the student perceives the tutor as an ally, the writing center provides a unique environment in which the student can test out the act of giving her assent to a point of view, where the student can focus on and fully experience the power that comes from saying "This is what I mean," "This is what I think."

Susan M. Hubbuch
Lewis and Clark College
Portland, OR

Work Cited

Elbow, Peter. "Closing My Eyes as I Speak: An Argument for Ignoring Audience." *College English* 49 (1987): 50-69.

Tutors' Column

Getting to know You...Building Relationships as a Tutor

Get to know your student before you begin any work. It will be easier for you, they said. Okay. So here I sit across from my first tutee. We have conversed now for seven minutes. I know that her name is Leanne and that she is an economics major. Her family is in New York where she has spent the last several years of her life. Leanne wants to pass 1A, take 1B next semester, and then never set foot in another English class. She says she does not "care for" the subject. I've exhausted all the getting-to-know-you questions in seven minutes. We are still perfect strangers. I don't know what to say, and yet I feel sure that we have not reached a level of familiarity that will be comfortable for the tutoring situation. What is that level and why is it important to tutoring?

Writing is a primarily personal activity; it can be difficult, at times painfully embarrassing to speak without inhibitions to a complete stranger. (Even a complete stranger who may help you significantly improve your grade!) 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. A tutor and tutee who have built up a relationship of trust will be friends. They will be friends in the sense that the tutor cares about the tutee as a person. He will recognize that the tutee has needs and concerns beyond the paper in front of her. The tutor must view his student as a person. It would be easy to gain a misconception of this kind of friendship. The tutoring relationship has not failed if the pair do not end up going out to pizza and a movie every weekend. This is not the kind of friendship necessary to tutoring. In fact this extreme will also make tutoring less effective. Our best "buddies" rarely feel comfortable giving us honest opinions about a piece of writing. The tutor needs to fall into a category somewhere in

the middle—someone with whom the tutee can comfortably share her ideas and who is reciprocally comfortable enough to give constructive help.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact steps to building a trusting, working relationship. By looking at the evolution of my relationship with Leanne I can suggest a few ideas. My first day with Leanne, I felt I did all that I was supposed to. I asked her what her major was and where she was from. I asked her about her background in English and her expectations for 1A. She, in turn, asked me some pertinent questions which seemed more related to my qualifications as a tutor than any curiosity on her part about me particularly. This cursory exchange did not make me feel very comfortable with Leanne on our first day. I wanted to be this great resource for my freshman tutees to seek out whenever they were struggling with anything related to their new college life. Leanne wanted someone to proofread her papers. I wanted to discuss challenging questions with her and help her express herself with literary prowess. Leanne wanted a proofreader. I wanted to be a friend. Leanne didn't need a friend. Our agendas were different—probably equally skewed—and we needed to discover a happy medium.

The second time Leanne and I met, she had received an assignment and had a rough draft completed. The paper asked her to write about an episode in her childhood which affected her significantly and to discuss its implications for her adult life. When Leanne showed me the assignment, I smiled inside, wondering what this session would be like. The topic was somewhat personal, and Leanne and I were not on a personal basis. Besides that, she seemed very reluctant to show me her draft.

"I'm not a good writer. You probably will not understand this paper," she told me.

"Maybe I need to explain myself a little. I came to this country from Taiwan when I was eight. English was a new language for me. Even now, ten years later, I still make many mistakes. This paper talks about my first year. I was teased a lot for my accent and my looks—I just didn't fit in." She slid the paper in front of me and leaned back in her chair. I slid it back.

"Why don't you read it to me," I prompted. Leanne's eyes grew wide, and she just stared at me. After a moment, when she had convinced herself that I was serious about this sadistic suggestion, she began to read.

I listened to Leanne's soft voice as I read over her shoulder. The story that was unfolding was a surprise. Not only was it written in a charming voice with a broad vocabulary, but the message was touching. I wanted Leanne to know that I truly liked her paper. She kept giggling nervously when she reached emotionally charged passages or stumbled over words. I knew she didn't like sharing it with me.

"This is a terrific paper," I said. "I like the voice you use to tell the story, and you allow your feelings to be transparent. What is your favorite part, something you would like to include in another paper, some technique that you feel works well?" Leanne gave me a blank stare. Clearly she did not see tutoring as a collaborative effort. In fact, she hadn't planned on talking much at all.

"I don't know. It's got some problems. What do you think," she asked me with a shrug.

At this point I perceived that Leanne misunderstood the object of tutoring. She didn't want to get into a personal discussion with me. In fact, she didn't want to discuss anything period. Leanne had hoped that I would take this paper, make any necessary changes, and give it back. I decided I would have to model this kind of exchange for her, so I chose one passage that I found a bit cryptic.

"Here, Leanne, I just don't quite understand you. I feel like you need to explain more what you are thinking because this is essentially a story, and the reader needs to have more details to follow it." I pushed the paper over to Leanne and pointed to the paragraph I was talking about. She made no move.

"Well, how could you change it to make the idea more clear?"

"Hmm, I'm not sure. What don't you understand about it," Leanne asked. At least she had asked an interactional question. I continued to probe her to get at the main idea of the paragraph. We eventually got into something that resembled a dialogue, but Leanne was noticeably uncomfortable. I assumed that this was going to be a long semester.

I was wrong. Leanne's instructor had structured her whole course around the question, "Who are we, and how do we define our identity once we have discovered it?" Every author and work had been chosen to deal with this issue. Leanne admitted to me that she had never really pondered the problem before. At first the readings were very difficult for her.

One day very early on when we had been going over the essay topics, Leanne put the reader down in frustration and said, "I just don't understand it at all. Can you please help me?" This frankness was new for her. She had traditionally sat quietly during our sessions, only answering my direct questions. I told her that when I'm reading difficult books, I find it helpful to sit down with other students and toss around ideas. So she asked me to read the book. Well, I really don't have the time to read everything my tutees are assigned, although I wish I did. I made an alternative suggestion that Leanne try to explain as much as she could, and I would read one hopefully representative chapter. This worked well for us. I found that Leanne had many good ideas and that she felt insecure discussing them because of her language barrier. She always felt that she must have missed some crucial angle because of her limited English. The truth was Leanne lacked confidence. When we got into conversations together, she often had insights that I hadn't even considered.

Leanne recognized that I was dedicated to her success, and she began to feel more relaxed during our sessions. Several weeks into the semester she wanted to start meeting twice a week instead of once. She began to see our times together as a chance to clarify her thinking and bounce off her ideas. She grew less afraid of telling me her thoughts. The transition from story-telling (her first paper) to

critical analysis was made easier because Leanne trusted me to genuinely care about her work. She felt safe telling me when she was confused or discouraged. I knew the idea of tutoring had gotten across when Leanne started doing all her writing and revising at home so we could spend all our time discussing the larger concepts and helping her to clarify her thinking.

Leanne just turned in her final paper yesterday. She chose to write an extra credit assignment summarizing all the authors in the course and discussing her own method of defining the self in reference to their methods (!). Her last five papers have all received very high marks. I feel that in fifteen weeks Leanne has made me obsolete, but in the right way. She has made me obsolete as a Mr. Fix-It. Leanne doesn't want a proofreader anymore. She has asked me to be her tutor next semester for 1B. Leanne understands that tutoring is for everybody, not only those struggling with writing. She says it would be good for us to meet together again because "we already know how to talk about this kind of stuff together." Leanne also understands that a relationship built on trust makes the writing experience better. Today I found a card in my box from Leanne. She wanted to wish me a Merry Christmas and thank me for all my help. What help? Leanne learned this semester that tutoring is just guided talking—and that she already knew how to write.

When I look back on my semester with Leanne, I'm not sure exactly what made us click. I tried to show Leanne that I cared about her and saw her as a fellow student. I asked her about other classes, her boyfriend, her family. I took note of her assignments so I knew what we should be working on and when. All these elements assisted in communicating that I was interested in helping. But Leanne learned to actually trust me through our exchanges about literature and her writing. She learned to trust my opinions, suggestions, and questions, not because I am some expert in the field. Some of the essays Leanne produced were admittedly better than most of my work. Leanne learned to trust me because we are both students. She is writing to communicate her ideas to an audience like me. I can show her where I understand clearly and where I do not. Together we can make her writing clear. Leanne knows that I do not want to judge, evaluate, or grade her work. I only want

to help her make it better. And now that she's had a successful semester and has discovered that she really can write, that's what Leanne wants too.

Karen Castellucci
Peer Tutor
University of California-Berkeley

Ed. note: This essay also appears in *When Tutor Meets Student: Experiences in Collaborative Learning*, selected by Martha Maxwell, published in 1990 by MM Associates, Box 2857, Kensington, MD 20891. (Used by permission of Martha Maxwell.)

Call for Proposals

4th Miami University Conference on the Teaching of Writing

"New Directions in Portfolio Assessment"

Oct. 2-4, 1992
Oxford, Ohio

Proposals are invited on all topics related to college portfolio assessment, including its impact on secondary education. Selected papers will be published by Heinemann-Boynnton/Cook as a volume of conference essays. Proposal deadline is April 1, 1992. Contact Donald A. Daiker, Dept. of English, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio 45056 (513-529-7110 or 5221).

Learning a Lesson in the Writing Lab

She was a plump, breezy blonde and she knew just what she wanted. "You're going to get me an A," she said. Wendy (a pseudonym) confided that her journalism class was giving her some trouble. She knew she needed help and hoped that the Writing Lab was the place to get it. Well, that's what I was there for. Her apparent lack of interest in working on her writing for any reason other than getting an A didn't bother me. After all, I was a student once myself.

Wendy came to me at the lab several times that semester. In the course of our visits I learned that although her major was journalism, she aspired to a career in real estate. I didn't say anything to discourage her. The quality of the articles she showed me suggested that real estate would be a better choice than journalism. I was reminded of a student James Thurber wrote about—an agriculture major who took a journalism course so he'd have something to fall back on in case things didn't work out on the farm. Thurber observed that falling back on journalism would be about like sprawling full length on a set of carpenter tools.

Wendy and I worked on drafts of stories, trying to polish them for that all-important A. The semester progressed faster, I fear, than did Wendy. She got better at catching her spelling errors and seemed to be paying more attention to organization. But her stories lacked the verve good journalism requires. Factual it was, exciting it was not. I couldn't seem to get across the idea that a journalist must produce something out of the ordinary to catch and hold a reader's attention.

For a grand finale, Wendy's professor directed the students to write multipart, in-depth articles. Wendy told me she had chosen to write about abortion. What, I wondered, could she say about that topic that hadn't already been said a million times? Is there an editor in the land who isn't neck-deep in abortion manuscripts? Is there a reader who isn't sick of reading about abortion?

I pointed out the difficulty of finding a fresh approach to the topic, but Wendy plunged ahead. She did a fine job of locating sources and interviewing them. I never dreamed our campus and community harbored so many informed and opinionated folk. Wendy gathered notes by the bushel. But as semester-end drew near she hadn't yet found the unifying idea that would give a fresh slant to her series.

I wish now that I had just continued to work with her at the level we had established. We would have concentrated on dividing the material into coherent and manageable chunks. We would have come up with a reasonably bright lead for each segment and would have provided a smooth transition from each part to the next. In short, Wendy would have written a series on abortion that—while short on originality and cleverness—would have been no worse than similar pieces that have appeared in most campus and many commercial newspapers around the country. That would have been the safe thing to do. If Wendy's professor could have plowed through the series without falling asleep, it might have merited an A.

But safe wasn't good enough. I suggested to Wendy a risky but occasionally effective strategy I've used once or twice myself as a reporter. "How about," I said, "trying a fictionalized account to introduce your series?"

Fiction, of course, is ordinarily taboo in any newspaper. The writer uses it at his peril. Readers don't like to be fooled. The hoax must be exposed promptly. Hook the reader—then gently lead him from fiction to fact and hope he doesn't loath you for tricking him.

The gimmick in this case was, I thought, fairly simple. Wendy would introduce her abortion series with vignettes about two young women, both faced with unwanted pregnancies. Call them, say, Laura and Jane. Laura would opt for an abortion; Jane would not. After each woman made the crucial

decision, her story would leap ahead several years to show how the choice had affected her. The writer would smoothly let the reader in on the deception and proceed with facts and quotations from experts on both sides of the issue. To help give coherence to the narrative, the writer would sprinkle it with phrases such as, "Like the fictional Laura, many women who have had abortions find that they...."

Wendy greeted my suggestion enthusiastically. She could hardly wait to get at her word processor.

But when she brought in her draft the following week, I could see at once an enormous gap between concept and execution. I'd given Wendy a ticket to A country, but the plane took off without her.

The problem was that I had suggested a strategy that would have been difficult for a polished writer to pull off successfully. For an inexperienced writer like Wendy, it was simply impossible.

By now it was too late to suggest an alternative. About all that could be done was to try to improve what was on the paper in front of us. So we went over the whole thing sentence by sentence—I offering suggestions, Wendy scribbling notes.

I never saw Wendy at the Writing Lab after that. She never came back to tell me whether she got that A. But I think I know. I did see Wendy once more on campus. She was cordial and bubbly as usual, but she made no mention of grades. Neither did I.

Charles J. Leslie
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN

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.

Model of Collaboration: The Peer Tutor

My esteem for peer tutors has increasingly grown over the past nine years as I have observed them at work in our Writing Center at Johnson County Community College (JCCC). Granted, it would be nice to have graduate assistants or English majors who are upper-classmen to assist students with their writing problems, but I still wouldn't give up my upper-class peer tutors. Contrary to other professionals or paraprofessionals who teach and are expected to do so, peer tutors do not teach; they collaborate. Once tutors and clients understand their roles in the session, great exchanges can and do take place. Smulyan and Bolton, in "Classroom and Writing Center Collaborations: Peers as Authorities," note that the major differences between collaboration in the classroom and in the writing center are "social context" and "knowledgeable peers" (44). The "knowledge" is simply that these tutors have already experienced the assignments or course work and they have been trained more extensively in the tutoring process. Thus they are what we might call "model collaborators." At our college peer tutors have often been recommended by instructors more for their leadership in collaborative sessions than for their excellence in writing.

If students help one another, we call the act "collaboration." If a tutor helps a student and both gain from the experience, the process is collaboration. "Collaboration" suggests sharing; "peer" suggests equality. Collaboration does not require professional training; peer tutors are not voices of authority. Collaboration does imply participation; thus both student and tutor are providing input to the session. Tutors bring to the writing center their classroom experience and their writing skills. If chosen carefully, they also bring social skills, such as friendliness, poise, open-mindedness, and honesty. In addition, they possess good interpersonal communication skills, such as being good listeners.

As role models for classroom collaboration, writing center peer tutors follow specific guidelines. First of all, both the tutor and the student must participate in the session. In other words, tutors expect their clients to pull their own weight. Reigstad and McAndrew label this model for tutoring "student-cen-

tered." "Students do most of the talking and most of the work on their papers; they also determine the direction of the conference. Tutors ask open-ended as well as probe-and-prompt questions and listen as students describe their composing processes, the problems they encountered, and their opinions of their drafts *before* offering reactions and suggestions. The tutor-student relationship is consistently conversant-conversant, and the most frequently adopted tutor roles are listener, partner in writing, and interested reader" (5). Tutors follow a hierarchy of concerns as Donald Murray suggests in his many articles on collaborative learning. These concerns do not include mechanics but instead lead the student/client to analyze organization, development and style. We use the following list:

1. *Assignment and goals:*
What is the assignment? Define the rhetorical problem.
2. *Clear focus:*
What do you want to say about....?
3. *Audience and aim:*
To whom is this essay or writing addressed and why are you writing it? (expressive, expository, persuasive)
4. *Organization:*
Descriptive, Narrative, Classification, Evaluation.
5. *Paragraphs:*
Transitions and reminder signs, coherence.
6. *Sentences:*
Variety, Structure, Completeness.
7. *Words or word choice:*
Appropriateness, diction, voice.
8. *Style:*
Clarity

Note that grammar and mechanics are not discussed in early draft stages. Most of our tutors deal primarily with the first four concerns and rarely touch on the others, mainly because of time factors. These latter problems, along with the proofreading skills, can be dealt

with on graded essays which we encourage students to bring to the Center early in the semester. This strategy not only helps the student view the graded paper as another step in the process of improving writing, it also keeps the responsibility of the total essay and its correctness where it belongs—on the student writer.

Tutors learn early in their training and through observation of instructors or professional tutors that they must lead the client. By questioning whatever has been produced by the student writer, tutors show that they are not satisfied with the obvious. By gently leading students but not answering for them, tutors know when to pull back so that their ideas do not become the students' written words. Several strategies to enhance this questioning skill are listed below:

- 1) Having tutors practice questioning one another in mock sessions
- 2) Encouraging and sharpening listening skills by sitting in on one another's sessions with students
- 3) Getting student clients to read aloud their writing

In any collaborative setting, both participants should gain from or share in the learning. We have seen how the writing center client gains by having a well trained audience, a reader who has learned how to question, but we sometimes overlook the gain of the tutor. Tutors heighten their awareness of the diversity yet commonality of all writing and the writing process. Furthermore, they develop a better understanding of collaborative learning, and they increase or sharpen their interpersonal skills, especially listening. They, also, are opened to a vast range of personal experiences and knowledge.

To ensure the quality of learning and avoid "teaching," tutors are taught how to ask open-ended questions based on the hierarchy of concerns mentioned earlier. They practice by role-modeling during staff training. They meet monthly to share tutor experiences, and tutor/student sessions are regularly monitored with discretion. Tutors are further enlightened by having instructional materials made available to them. New computer software programs are first tried by tutors, giving them an

opportunity to experiment with new writing strategies which are presented in programs like *Writer's Helper II*, the *Writer's Resource Kit*, *Persuasive Aim*, and *Grammatik 3*. New text books and workbooks are consistently being added to the Writing Center library, and tutors pick up on new terms and new ways of enhancing the writing process. *The Writing Lab Newsletter* and the *Writing Center Journal*, along with other newsletters and articles, are also made available to the peer tutors. It's important that the tutors remain open to instruction from a variety of sources. Once tutors believe they "know all," they cross the line into "voice of authority" and the collaboration ends.

When collaborative learning is practiced in the writing center, it is enhanced in the classroom. When collaborative learning is encouraged in the classroom, the writing center benefits. The writing center provides a natural setting for a number of collaborative efforts. The writing center is a less intimidating environment than the classroom. Social exchanges promote a freedom of expression and a casual attitude. Collaboration takes place not only between clients and tutors, but also among the tutors and instructors employed in the center. Instructors serve as models for collaboration by sharing their own writing with the center's staff. Instructors often read rough drafts for conference papers or reports to colleagues or to tutors, asking for suggestions or additions. Another collaborative effort is the Writing Center newsletter, published quarterly by our tutors. They plan what will go in the issue, they write the articles, and they collaborate with each other about what they have written. Clients visiting the Center witness the exchanges among the tutors and may pattern the example in the classroom.

In conclusion, several theories have been substantiated through my observation of our Writing Center's peer tutors these past nine years. Students who do well in collaborative learning environments make excellent peer tutors. There is a connection between classroom strategies and writing center strategies in that collaborative learning enhances both settings. Students who write together and share their writing give each other immediate feedback which can strengthen writing skills. The student who tutors learns information in a new and possibly better way. Thus, information is retained longer. Simply put, employing peer tutors as model collaborators in writing/

learning promotes collaboration as a means to better writing and as an important step in the process of writing.

Ellen Mohr
Johnson County Community
College
Overland Park, KS

Works Cited

Reigstad, Thomas J., and Donald McAndrew.
Training Tutors for Writing Conferences.
Urbana: NCTE, 1984.

Smulyan, Lisa and Kristin Bolton, "Classroom
and Writing Center Collaborations:
Peers as Authorities." *The Writing Center
Journal* 9.2 (1989): 43-49.

NWCA Writing Center Directory Available

Through the truly heroic efforts of the National Writing Centers Association president, Pamela Farrell, we now have a directory of over 300 writing centers. In the midst of moving from one job to another, along with a few dozen other such all-consuming projects, Pam created a questionnaire form (that appeared last winter in the newsletter) and entered over 300 of your responses into a directory that is now compiled and being printed.

The cost of \$15 includes postage, and since there are no billing or invoice procedures, anyone interested in obtaining a copy should send prepayment (in a check made payable to the National Writing Centers Association) to:

Pamela Farrell
The McCallie School
2850 McCallie Avenue
Chattanooga, TN 37404

If you have any questions, call Pam at 615-622-2163.

WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

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

Address correction requested

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Lafayette, Indiana
Permit No. 221