WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER

....from the editor....

I've always liked the phrase, "that person has a keen sense of the obvious." Well, the obvious is not always so obvious to me, though it suddenly was a few days ago. On my way back from an errand, I walked down a long corridor of classrooms,most with open doors. I saw one teacher writing on a blackboard, another leaning casually on a lectern as he spoke to his class, and another sitting silently while the class wrote. It was a quiet walk down a quiet hall. But when I entered our Writing Lab, I couldn't help not noticing the contrast—the uproar of talk and more talk. Voices came from every tutoring table. The room was alive with voices. Talk certainly defines our enterprise, both in our centers and in the newsletter articles we write. Talk as the core of what we do reverberates through many of this month's articles. Even the column on electronic mail is "*Voices* from the Net." Well, all this may not be a revelation to you, but the next time I catch myself in our lab longing for a moment of quiet, I'll remind myself that the noise of voices all around me means something very, very right is happening.
•Muriel Harris, editor

Bending the "Rules": Diversifying the Model Conference for the ESL Writer

Although the writing center faculty at my school, University of Wyoming, differ in conferencing strategies and occasionally disagree about techniques, we have a reasonable consensus about what a successful conference is and how to create an environment where such a conference may occur. We have recently discovered, however, that the model conference, as we envision it, does not necessarily work for some kinds of writers we see frequently. One important area where we feel its limitations is in working with ESL writers. Often, we find we must modify our conferencing strategies if we wish to be of any real assistance to those struggling with second-language writing problems.

The Model Conference

Key to understanding our vision of the model conference is the perception of our collaborative role as "instructors" or "consultants." (Our difficulty in

naming the role, in itself, reflects its atypical nature.) We are neither teachers in the traditional sense, nor editors, nor proofreaders. Our goal is, rather, through questioning and exchanging information to lead writers to discoveries about their writing tasks—their purpose, material, audience, organization—that will enable *them* to raise questions about and solve whatever writing problems they bring to us.

These Socratic rather than didactic methods imply certain cardinal principles that we attempt to uphold in our conferencing. Central among these principles is our insistence that the writers we see retain possession of their own writing, that we do not appropriate their work. Some techniques we use to achieve this goal are purely procedural. We make sure writers remain in physical possession of their drafts; we ask them to read their own work aloud and listen to it; we let them mark up their own pieces and keep pencils out of our hands when we feel prone to interfere. Other techniques are more clearly pedagogical. We avoid giving writers "answers" to the questions they might raise—or even the impression that there is *an* answer. Instead, we try to lead them to an awareness of writing as a process with alternatives from which they can learn to choose with some self-confidence.

Generally, these basic principles serve the writing center clientele and faculty well. In fact, when we describe conferences that go wrong or fail in some way, we almost always find ourselves measuring successes against these goals—the writer refused to take responsibility for the writing and became frustrated, or the writer unconsciously (but cleverly) trapped the faculty member into taking the initiative in editing the piece. Whatever the specific situation, we as writing center faculty tend to consider unsuccessful conferences those that violate one of the principles of the model conference discussed above.

ESL Writers and the Model Writing Center Conference

Our firm belief in the procedures we follow has led to some uneasiness about what happens in the increasingly large number of conferences that involve ESL writers. In many of these conferences, we find ourselves rethinking some of our most basic assumptions about conferencing in order to provide the assistance second-language writers need.

Most significantly, we find ourselves questioning the accuracy of the central assumption that our roles as writing center instructors should be basically collaborative. The Socratic approach in which we lead writers to discover what *they* want to say and how to say it is, in fact, seldom effective in working with ESL writers because they so often come from cultures with very different rhetorical forms than ours. Ethnocentrically, logic may seem to be logic, but that "truth" is less than self-evident when we deal with the international students we see most often in our writing center today. Their academic traditions, the linguistic and structural aspects of their discourse, are often quite different from ours.

As a result, these writers need something different from us than native speakers do. They do not need to be encouraged in independent thinking and self-discovery—they need to learn the forms of our discourse. Furthermore, if we use the model conference approach of encouraging them to "discover" the rhetorical structure inherent in what they wish to say, they will probably produce something in a form inappropriate to the English task they are undertaking. To these second-language writers, English is an academic pursuit, and what they want and need to know are the rules and forms.

What this means is that we, as writing center faculty, are more likely to adopt a didactic role with ESL writers than with native-speaking writers because we are basically teaching them an "academic" subject. Those of us steeped in the "model conference" approach may, as a result, feel that something has gone badly awry during these conferences. We may, for example, be horrified to find ourselves responding to a question about thesis by saying, "Yes, your thesis must be in the first paragraph." Yet, the student asking this question is probably not asking the same question that a native speaker would be. Whereas the native speaker often wants absolute "rules" to follow in writing (and needs to learn that form should follow function), the ESL writer raising this questions is likely to be searching for an unfamiliar principle: in academic writing in English, does the overall point typically appear at the beginning—rather than at the end, in the middle, or by implication?

One illustration from my early experiences with ESL conferencing points up the dramatic change in my thinking that occurred when I began working with second-language writers on the rhetorical aspects of their writing. While tutoring an Asian student who was completely befuddled about the organization of his paper, I suddenly found myself sketching the five-paragraph essay format. Since I had only recently referred to the five-paragraph "death" paper in my Freshman English class and discouraged my native-speaking writers from forcing their ideas into arbitrary forms, I was understandably dismayed at my "lapse." Later, however, some reading in contrastive rhetoric led me to reassess my action as a reasonable response to the problems of a student whose learned structures of discourse are confusingly different from ours.

Another significant evolution in my conferencing strategy with second-language writers relates to that seemingly undebatable practice of asking writers to read their own drafts aloud. I and most of my colleagues on the writing center faculty routinely follow this practice for various good reasons—to encourage writers to self-edit, to assess voice, to assume ownership, to hear punctuation. Thus, without even thinking about the context, I originally adopted this same approach to working with the drafts of ESL writers. I quickly discovered, however, that reading aloud does not serve the same functions for second-language writers that

it does for native-speaking writers. In fact, it seldom works for them in any of the ways that it does for native speakers.

This is not to say that reading aloud has no place in working with ESL writers. It is very useful, for example, in an editing group, where writers share drafts and talk about them with other people in the group, increasing not only the members' writing, but also their oral/listening skills. It is relatively useless, however, in assisting students who come into the writing center for help with the editing of idiom, syntax, grammar, punctuation—self-editing, in general. The basic reason is that ESL writers cannot use their ears to edit; they do not hear the language "correctly" as a native speaker does. If the Asians we see in the writing center could hear the articles in their prose, they would undoubtedly include them in the first place. (Seldom does a native speaker who comes in for help with editing techniques suffer from omitted articles.) Similarly, if ESL writers in general could hear the correct idiom or structure, they could probably write it. In other words, ESL writers typically misphrase for different reasons than native speakers do.

Moreover, reading aloud at the editing stage of the writing process may make it more difficult for the ESL writer to correct problems. For many non-native speakers, reading the language aloud takes so much concentration in itself that the writers cannot really "listen" to what they are reading at all. When asked to clarify what a sentence intends to say, they must go back and read it to themselves before they can identify the content.

My solution to the problem of sharing the text with the ESL writer in writing center conferences has been to read the draft aloud to the writer, pausing if there is a problem to encourage the writer to correct, fill in, or explain. Since editing by ear is of little use to the non-native speaker, however, this procedure may be more helpful to me than to the writers with whom I am working. It does have the advantage that writers eventually hear the English "correctly"—I argue that forcing writers to edit and then repeating the correction aloud to them perhaps helps ESL writers begin to hear the language correctly. This technique raises some serious questions, however, in relation to the perennial writing center problem of distinguishing between teaching editing/

VOICES FROM THE NET
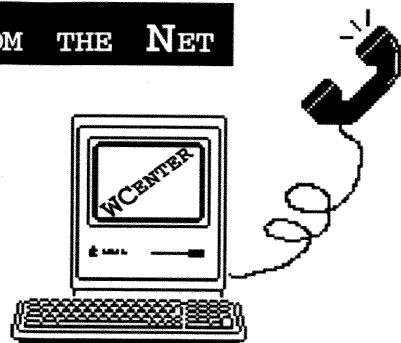
---ERIC CRUMP

Shaping Writing Center Computer Labs

Many writing centers, in an effort to take advantage of new writing technologies, are adding computers as fast as they can. Finding money to invest in computers is difficult enough, but writing center directors also have made decisions about which machines and what arrangements are the most appropriate, and these matters affect how useful writers and writing assistants will find the machines. Poorly designed labs can render these expensive and (almost) magical machines nearly useless.

The subject of how to set up a computer lab came up recently on WCENTER.* Dave Healy, University of Minnesota, posed several questions about what kinds of equipment and configurations were good for writing centers. This column is an excerpt from the conversation that followed his note.

Not included here (because of space considerations) but worth mentioning: Michael Spooner and Dickie Selfe recommended Cynthia Selfe's book, *Creating a Computer-Supported Writing Facility: A Blue-Print for Action* (1989); Cindy Johanek mentioned that the computer labs attached to the writing center and learning center at Ball State University should be available for tours during the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference in March; and Irene Clark invited Dave's colleague (and, presumably, anyone else who is interested) to tour the computer lab in the Writing Center at the U. of Southern California.

For those without access to WCenter, this discussion may be useful, not necessarily as a

revelation of answers, but as a starting point in explorations of how to put computer technology to its best and highest use.

From: Dave Healy; Wed, 11 Nov 1992
Subject: WC/Computer Labs

A colleague of mine may have the opportunity soon to set up her own computer writing lab. She's wondering what the ideal room would look like. Where would computer stations be situated? What would they look like? What mix of technology would be ideal—computers, printers, video projection, etc. In other words, if you could design your own room from the ground up, what would it look like? Does anyone have diagrams, floor plans, photographs, etc. to share? Do you know of articles that have addressed the physical layout of a room? Or does anyone have suggestions on sites to visit?

From: Jeanne H. Simpson; Wed, 11 Nov 1992
Subject: WC/Computer Labs

Dave,
Oh to be so fortunate! I can offer advice about what to avoid and some suggestions based on some not-so-pleasant experience.

1. Computer equipment breaks down under heavy traffic; plan for at least a couple of stations to be "down" on any given day.

2. Printers are noisy. Plan for noise control by careful placement of printers and use of sound-proofing materials.

3. Computers are HOT. Air conditioning is unreliable at universities (this is Simpson's corollary to Murphy's law). Plan for good ventilation.

4. Most computer stations are designed so that students MUST work alone. No provision is made for a tutor or other friendly character sitting next to students. Lined-up carrels or rows of monitors are the worst configuration for this problem. I always wanted "islands" with maybe four or five computers arranged in an X or a circle (printer in middle?), so there is room for a stool on rollers to be placed beside a computer station.

Every computer lab I've been in (none of them even close to state of the art!) has been

overcrowded, with equipment jammed into every nook and cranny and no room for human beings to move around easily. My most heartfelt wish would be for SPACE. Most of this is obvious, but it's also basic. It comes before choosing any equipment.

From: Eric Crump; Thu, 12 Nov 92
Subject: WCs and computer day dreams

. . . we now have a machine for nearly every tabletop in our teeny lab. So far, no problem with noise. Space is the big problem and we've done got the smallest machines we could afford.

And that's one reason I imagine folks have so far made it a point to acknowledge that their labs are not ideal: computers tend to get added on, squeezed into spaces that were never designed to be decent tutorial environments much less adequate for the new writing technology. It's difficult for me to even conceive of what the ideal would be, so I'll be interested to see what suggestions spring forth.

From: Mickey Harris; Thu, 12 Nov 1992
Subject: WCs and computer day dreams

Eric,
Why. . . laptops? I have a feeling that they'd be more congenial in the tutoring set-up and have been writing endless (unsuccessful) requests and proposals for a few. What's the rationale, or why did you want laptops in general? Are they, as I assume (not being the owner of one) less intrusive in the tutorial? I envision laptops as just there when needed, unlike the normal computers, even compact ones, which dominate the space in front of tutor and student. True?

From: Eric Crump; Thu, 12 Nov 92
Subject: WCs and computer day dreams

Yes, less bulk is one reason, but I'd make a distinction between the physical space the machine takes up and the interactive "space" of a tutorial. I do prefer not to have the machine hogging table space, but I'm not so worried that it might elbow its way into the tutor/writer relationship. In fact, I'm hoping it does.

Two other reasons we went with some laptops: They can be where students need to write, especially students with special needs. We were mightily impressed when a colleague

of ours managed to arrange a loaner laptop a year or so ago to a law student with a learning disability. The student went from struggling to dean's list in record time.

They seem to be the direction the technology is taking. All the big hardware companies are trying to squeeze more power into smaller machines. Inasmuch as we can, I think we should introduce students to the kind of stuff they will likely encounter when they leave college. Even though the laptops don't perform better or work much differently than the desktop models, it may be worth helping writers get used to the feel of the things. Perhaps that's too inconsequential for words, the difference between desktop and laptop, but it's a hunch we went with.

From: Michael Spooner; Thu, 12 Nov 1992
Subject: WCs and computer day dreams

Eric C,
I think you must be right that technology is moving toward the laptop in a hurry. I was at an electronic publishing conference last week, and that was the firm opinion of both the electronic types and the publisher types. The day is coming, they told us, when we will activate a hand-held computer by voice command, and it will offer us simultaneous word processing, number crunching, online communication, high res video, symphonic quality sound, and a built-in library of Great Books, reference works, music, and a dozen interactive bells and whistles.

I can't wait.

But what will it do to composition research if we "word process" by voice command?

From: Eric Hobson; Fri, 13 Nov 1992
Subject: WCs and computer day dreams

Much to the surprise of many of my colleagues, I've included a hefty budget request to purchase laptop computers for use in the WC consulting sessions. I too firmly believe the laptop is useful in the session because of its flexibility (it can go to where the writer is comfortable working and talking about her writing), its power (why not get a 386/486 that'll fit in the briefcase?), and price (my, how that has come down from the stratosphere since I bought my first laptop seven years ago). More and more students come to the center

from across campus with their writing on disk. Desktops take up too much room, and they are intrusive when we try to talk to the writer (that screen is just so bright and big and inviting to stare at, especially when the neat screen saver comes on), and you can't take a desktop across the room to hook it up to the mainframe outlet or to the laser printer when you have the whim. Nor can you take the desktop down the hall with you/or the student when a teacher needs to be consulted about a writing project. The notebook gives you all this and more. At night you can lock them up in a safe and small place where janitors, paint crews, etc. can't inadvertently damage them.

Oh how I hope that money comes through. If it does, Eric is going Christmas shopping and insuring some computer rep. her Christmas bonus for good sales.

Starting to salivate all over my shirt. Dreaming in Southwest Missouri...

From: Kenneth J. Walker; Fri, 13 Nov 1992
Subject: WC/Computer Labs

I'd like to respond to a couple of Jeanne's comments on computer-supported writing labs. As far as printers, I would not put together a writing lab without using laser printers. We used to support eight dot-matrix printers in our center of 40 Macs, and we were all losing our minds. The stress factor in a writing center can be high enough without that continual ZING-ZING, paper jam, ZING-ZING. Spend the money on a good laser printer and you change the atmosphere of your lab. Granted laser printers give a polished look to rough drafts, which can make student writers believe that a good-looking paper is a finished paper, but the benefits here outweigh the drawbacks. Faculty will love you for it also.

As for writing station configuration, we like the lined-up carrels here in our center because students in a line with another line behind them tend to talk about what they are writing. This collaboration adds to the writing center environment and helps keep the discourse alive among the community of writers. What we did, because space allowed it, was to build carrels large enough to have two people sitting at a computer if they wanted. Sometimes even three to cram together—which is cozy. I personally don't like the idea of x cubicles because they seem to isolate the writer.

What I also like about our lined-up carrels is that they point to the tutor tables. So students sitting at computers can see and even hear some of the discussions going on in a tutorial. I believe this again makes students understand that talking about works-in-progress is a good thing, a natural activity in a writing center. I think it also invites students to go and talk to the tutors about drafts and vice versa. Look and listen for subtle invitations into the composing process as students turn to their neighbors and ask questions about what they are writing.

WCenter@TTUVM1 is an electronic forum for writing center directors, writing assistants, and student writers. It is managed by Fred Kemp, Texas Tech University director of composition.

(Editor's note: For all you newsletter authors who regularly fill these pages with your insightful, thought-provoking, useful essays, this one's for you:)

A Reader Comments

I just received my December issue of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* and wanted to let you know how impressed I am with this issue and with the publication in general. It's one of the most intelligent and informative newsletters I have seen, and it offers a genuine forum for community exchange. AND, it actually comes out on time (unlike a few other academic newsletters I've been involved in publishing).

Barbara Shwom
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL

Coming In Out of the Silence

This is an unabashed endorsement for WCenter (the computer-based discussion group dedicated to issues related to the writing center community), and it comes in response to Eric Crump's October 1992 *Writing Lab Newsletter* article, "Online Communities: Writing Centers Join the Network World." In addition to encouraging (enticing, even) more members of the writing center community to join in the ongoing discussions on WCenter, I want to reinforce several of Eric's statements by demonstrating the extent to which 1) he hit the nail squarely on the head in his discussions of WCenter, and 2) WCenter can be used by the writing center community in its research into and articulation of its theory and practice.

From July 1992 to September 1992 I was isolated, sitting effectively in silence, cut off from WCenter, a valuable source of information, assistance, support, goodwill, and community for me within the writing center community. I knew that I would go off-line for a time while I moved from Tennessee to Missouri to direct the Writing Center at Southwest Missouri State University. But, I didn't get to say, "Goodbye folks. Talk to you again in a few weeks." Instead, my mainframe account was closed three days before I had been told it would be, and that action left me at my keyboard in stunned silence: there was no closure.

The interminably slow arrival of my office computer and the even slower process of getting it connected to the school's mainframe computer heightened the situation's tension and my frustration level. Offline, I was missing exciting (even important) discussions on WCenter, conversations that unless I remained immersed in their ebb and flow, I would be unaware of this one rhythm within the writing center community's collective intellectual, critical, and communal pulse; sure, I had the community's print sources of information available, but, by the time much of the information contained there gets to me it is a little less than fresh news. I like nothing better than fresh-out-of-the-oven bread (or cookies), and as such, I like to get new questions to think about between my issues of *Writing Lab Newsletter* and *The Writing Center Journal*. Disconnected from WCenter, I sat and asked myself questions like these: What sage advice was Jeanne Simpson giving? What intriguing questions was Eric Crump asking, and how was Jim McDonald responding? What instructions was Bob Child posting to get us e-mail novices out of the electronic messes we invariably create trying to use WCenter? Was Lady Falls Brown maintaining her unending streak of good cheer, taking time to welcome all new WCenter members individually? What were my friends doing? These questions masked the question that really haunted me: "Would I regain my membership in that community after being out of its peculiar environment? Could I go home again?"

I found Eric's description of the sense of community that pervades WCenter especially accurate. He writes, "Because members of the group are at sometimes great distances from each other and, to a degree, anonymous, a list becomes home to a new kind of community" (4). Often writing center professionals are the only people at their institutions to understand what writing centers do and thus, what writing centers mean; there is a great deal of isolation—physical and intellectual—experienced in this community. It was as an antidote to this isolation and the frequent resulting frustrations that I joined WCenter and disciplined myself to take time each day to log on and participate in its ongoing conversation, an activity I encourage all interested parties (writing center directors, tutors, staff, friends, etc.) to consider trying. I agree with Eric:

> Each network community develops its own characteristics (an aggregate of its members' personalities, I suppose, but I sometimes think communities may be more than the sum of their parts), and the writing center list has become a place where people are able to talk freely and informally about whatever issues interest them, practical or theoretical or somewhere between. (4-5)

And this range within WCenter's discussion leads me to my other reason for endorsing WCenter: WCenter offers the writing center community a unique, fast-and-flexible, and wide-ranging research and information network.

Without WCenter, I would have written a dissertation in isolation. Having a dissertation committee that was unaware of developments in writing center theory and practice, ancient or recent, I relied on the conversation on WCenter to augment the research I did in the literature and by visiting writing centers around the country. In doing so, I experienced first hand Eric's assertion that "as valuable as they are, publications and conferences do not necessarily satisfy our desire to be connected to our colleagues" (3). WCenter provided the continuous connection to the writing center community—those real, hard working, generous, fun loving folk who work in writing centers across the country—I needed to complete that project. WCenter allowed me to do many of the following things that my colleagues working in the immediate communities that surround most literary studies take for granted: test ideas on a knowledgeable audience; get assistance locating print sources; double-check information gathered during site visits; continue interviews with writing center directors long after I return home. (Ideally) These are the types of support most writers get from their dissertation committee during the process of planning, researching, and writing the dissertation. For those of us who work in the area of writing center theory and practice, however, that traditional avenue of support and resources is frequently unavailable close at hand. Ours is a community that somehow manages to maintain its sense of "community" over vast distances, and WCenter allowed me the luxury of remaining actively immersed in that community while separated physically from most of its members.

In many ways, I benefitted from the combination of having committee members who (most of the time) didn't really know what I was writing about and from the availability of the writing center community via WCenter. On WCenter my work was "not shadowed by power relationships the way interaction with local colleagues almost inevitably is" (5), and I could present my work to my committee having tested much of it on WCenter where I benefitted from a conversation whose tone, as Eric rightly notes, "is governed primarily by common courtesy, not fear of reprisal" (5). Because of this situation, I encourage anyone directing a writing center-based dissertation or thesis, writing about writing centers, and/or wanting to enter into the *daily* conversation of the writing center community to join WCenter. The

benefits are numerous. Besides, in the future of the writing center movement, I am convinced WCenter will soon stand as a resource of equal importance to our journals and conferences.

Toward the end of his article, Eric writes, "In this collegial environment, students and administrators come together to talk openly about the various aspects of their centers and their schools, good and bad, and have the luxury of learning from each other" (5). I certainly did, and I thank both the WCenter community, and the larger writing center community it reflects, for this continuing experience.

Eric Hobson
Southwest Missouri State U.

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Bending the "Rules"

proofing strategies and editing/proofing for writers. It appears to provide a kind of assistance to the ESL writer that the writing center will not afford the native-speaking writer.

Modifying conferencing strategies for ESL writers thus becomes a broader, more substantive concern than simply "what works." Our assumption that the model conference leaves responsibility for writing in the hands of the writer, in a sense, describes the kinds of legitimate assistance the writing center can provide. In the case of the ESL writer, whether we respond directly to questions about structure or style, it clearly becomes difficult to avoid taking ownership of the writer's work. Perhaps such changes in the model conference format are justified by the differences in the cultural/rhetorical backgrounds of ESL writers and the nature of second-language learning. If so, the writing center needs to formulate some idea of a "model" ESL conference that will help writing center faculty work meaningfully with second-language writers within the parameters of our mission.

Judith K. Powers
University of Wyoming
Laramie, WY

Tutors' Column

When Writing Is Not the Issue

Christina walked into the room and anxiously looked around. The nervous energy that surrounded her seemed to feed off itself and grow, threatening to completely engulf her. We started to talk about her reasons for coming to the Writing Center and my head began to spin from trying to make sense of her words as she flitted from topic to topic. She was talking about writing, or was she? I learned that she was flunking out of law school and felt she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Clearly, she was making an effort to focus on the mound of paper scraps in her folder, and yet was continually distracted by her internal struggles. More than any specific help with writing, she seemed to want someone to listen and to care about her as an individual, not just a law school statistic. I froze when I heard her say that she couldn't handle the pressures of her life and felt like just ending it all. I found myself confronted with the dilemma of deciding how to respond to a tutorial that had turned into a counseling session. Certainly, the obvious answer is to refer the student to professional counselors and, in a case like the one described above, it would be dangerous to do anything less. But, a deeper look at a student's personal revelations might also uncover an academic need which can best be addressed in a writing center. Students who have slipped through the cracks of the educational system sometimes need an "accomplice" to help them reclaim their part of the exclusive, academic higher ground and a writing center tutor is uniquely qualified for that role.

In many ways, a tutoring session seems designed to evoke telling, personal revelations. The student finds himself in a private room, talking to a tutor about an extremely personal and revealing activity, namely, writing. James McCrimmon argues that writing is a powerful tool for self-understanding (3). His thesis suggests that writing, by nature, elicits self-revelation. Because there is a sense in which this self-revelation evades free choice, sharing a piece of writing inescapably breaks down some of the natural boundaries between tutor and

tutee, leaving the writer vulnerable to her audience. A writing tutorial, then, is inevitably more personal than a purely "academic" tutorial (i.e., one on a "safe" subject such as biology or algebra). Part of learning to write beyond the impersonal "objective" essay involves unleashing powerful personal emotion. So, accepting and encouraging honest writing includes a responsibility to deal with the personal emotions that are released in the sessions.

It would be easy to label all personal issues that emerge in tutorials as inappropriate for a writing center. And, generally, students with emotional challenges or learning disabilities should be referred to counseling services. In such cases, writing is not the only issue involved, and the tutor has an affirmative obligation to refer the student to professional counseling. These are situations where the writing center and the campus counseling services can work together to meet the different needs of a student. The writing center tutor should view the counseling center as a complementary service and utilize their expertise. If a tutor who has not been trained in counseling techniques assumes the role of counselor by giving advice, that tutor risks harming the student much more than he could ever hope to help. Even though a writing center tutor is certainly capable of providing personal support and encouragement, the most well-meaning advice could have implications in a student's life beyond those the tutor, untrained in psychology, can predict. The tutor can, however, play an active role and demonstrate true concern by making the counseling appointment for the student, physically walking an upset student to the counseling center or following through with the referral by calling the center later to make sure the appointment was kept.

A student's revelations might uncover not only a personal need but also an academic need which is ideally confronted in a writing center environment. As Mike Rose discusses in *Lives on the Boundary*, some students need to

gain access to the school system. This need goes beyond an increase in vocabulary or greater skills in writing; these students need to be included in the educational system through the teacher's acceptance and individual concern. In his studies, Rose found that students respond to human connection and real concern more than any specific pedagogical program.

A session in which one of my tutees expressed this need to gain access to the educational system began with the student, Victoria, describing her attempts to function in a dysfunctional family and to cope with a cognitive learning disability. Without waiting for me to respond to these personal revelations, however, she turned the dialogue around to her feelings about writing. She expressed a desire for regular meetings with a tutor and, more generally, for consistent concern about her writing. This student clearly was not turning to the Writing Center for counseling. Although she wanted me to be aware of her special situation, some personal "walls" were left standing between us so that the focus of the session could be on writing. Her struggle, however, seemed to go beyond simple writing issues of syntax and paragraph development. As I attempted to analyze Victoria's needs, the discussion turned to her specific writing techniques and, interestingly, took on a confessional nature. She "confessed" to me that, because of her special learning disability, she was dependent on her mother to write her papers for her. Even though she attempted to write drafts, her mother would always insist on rewriting them. In fact, she had come to the Writing Center without her mother's knowledge to enlist my support in her attempts to gain some independence. The underlying request seemed to be, "Will you commit to me and my academic pursuits on more than a superficial level and join in my crusade for independence?" Although Victoria still needed counseling to confront the interference she experienced from her family, she also needed tutorials to confront her academic need for an "invitation" into a previously exclusive world.

As Victoria's tutor, I am uniquely qualified to meet her need for an academic "accomplice." First of all, the intimacy of our sessions and the regularity of our meetings make it possible to establish an ongoing relationship and commitment. Since I'm not fully connected to the academic authority structure, it's easier for Victoria to view me as a colleague or

equal, yet the professional aspect of our relationship allows me to maintain some distance and not threaten her with too much control. Secondly, as a tutor, I am in a position to unlock the "secrets" of academia, and thereby empower Victoria to act as an individual.

In our follow-up sessions, writing has been important primarily as a tool useful in acclimating her to the school environment as an independent participant. Our work with her papers has opened up opportunities for me to discuss various ways of thinking and responding (i.e., analytical, descriptive and comparative). My acceptance and concern for her as an individual writer, have given her access to herself (namely, to her own strengths and weaknesses) which in turn has given her access to the system.

Tutorials which evolve into counseling sessions could be revealing a dimension beyond the obvious personal need for professional counseling, namely, an academic need for a tutor's assistance in the student's struggle to gain access to the educational system. It is crucial that we as tutors learn to evaluate the various dimensions of student needs and, if necessary, allow our role to expand beyond grammarian, proofreader or even "teacher of process" to a more personal, "human" role of accomplice. We must take advantage of our unique opportunities as tutors to serve as a bridge between an alienated student and the academic world.

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George Mason University
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Writers Writing

When I first started working in the Writing Lab at the University of Iowa, I was startled by how different the Lab was from the writing center models with which I was familiar. It wasn't a drop-in center, it certainly wasn't a skill and drill center, nor was it a peer tutoring center. Surprisingly, the staff didn't talk in terms of "tutors tutoring, " but of "writers writing" and "teachers teaching." And the teachers teaching one-on-one seemed to fit the British tutorial/independent study model (in which a student "reads" history with Mr. Brown) because those who enroll in the Writing Lab work with the *same teacher*, a graduate student in one of Iowa's writing, literature, or education programs, each time they attend— two times a week, fifty minutes each time for a semester, almost like a course. During that fifty-minute period, the teacher will work individually with a maximum of four students, made possible by the fact that students spend approximately three-quarters of that period engaged in actual writing and up to one-third of the period talking about writing.

Parallel to the British model of reading with the same teacher and then discussing their reading, students are writing with the same teacher and then discussing their writing. Because of the frequency and intensity of this discussion, teacher and student build a kind of mentor—mentored relationship that may not develop as often at a drop-in center, where the particular tutor a student works with usually depends on who is available when she arrives. Because pairs of writers are writing and talking about writing, the lab staff does not think of the lab as a place for remediation according to a medical model of diagnosing problems and then curing them. Most of the problems encountered in the lab, as I'll explain, are problems faced by all writers, experienced and inexperienced, due to the nature of writing/ thinking processes themselves. Approximately one quarter of the students who use the lab enroll of their own volition; they have not been "sent" by a teacher or a counselor. At least 20% of the lab students are graduate students themselves. They come not because they have to, but because they are interested in writing and becoming better writers.

What goals do lab teachers have for their students? What is supposed to happen to student writers and their writing during this time? In other words, what is the pedagogy of the lab? The goals are long-term rather than short-term, as Stephen North says, to improve *writers* rather than to improve individual pieces of writing. The lab's goal is to improve students' attitudes toward writing in order to develop life-long writers who realize the benefits of discovery and learning that come through writing. To these ends, fluency, development, and meaning are valued much more than grammar, mechanics, and spelling. Meaning also has priority over surface errors in the first year courses in the Rhetoric Department which funds the lab. Response to writing is consistent; what happens in Rhetoric class is supported by what happens in the lab.

The first few weeks in the lab, students write in response to "invitations to write"—a sequence of related writing assignments carefully crafted by Lou Kelly, who directed the lab for thirty years. Accustomed to a drop-in system in which students bring their own course work, I regarded the idea of lab assignments as strange, especially assignments called "invitations"—as if they were parties that could be easily turned down. But after working with several students on the opening sequence of six invitations, I found them extremely helpful; not only do they enable the teacher to get to know the students, their literacy backgrounds, and their strengths and weaknesses in writing, they also provide students opportunities to articulate their perceptions and find meaning in their past experiences. In the first invitation, students are invited to "talk on paper" about what's on their minds, especially why they came to the lab, using their oral resources without worrying about backtracking, repetition, or error. The second invitation in the sequence—"Self-as-writer"—asks students to discuss their previous formal and informal writing experiences and how these have shaped their self-images as writers. Here is a sampling of questions from this "invitation":

•How do you feel; what thoughts fill your head when you sit down to write?

•What a teacher has asked you to write?

•A letter you want to write? A letter you don't feel like writing?

•Do you ever write simply because you feel a creative impulse? If so, what form does that writing take?

•What do you like about all, or some, of your writings?

•What do you see as occasional or recurring problems?

•Do you remember any specific writing experiences that left you feeling like a success—or a failure?

Graduate students (the new lab teachers) also respond to the "Self-as-writer" invitation during the first class session of the seminar/practicum they must take to teach in the lab. I was surprised to discover that in their respective "Self-as-writer" essays, lab students and lab teachers raise common concerns, problems that arise because of the demands of writing processes themselves. One problem that both students and teachers observe is that writing can be a risky business; engaged writing in any genre, especially in academic settings, involves the risks of self-disclosure to and evaluation by an audience of peers and instructor. Some students and teachers comment that they are comfortable with some forms of discourse—for example, more expressive kinds, but uncomfortable with more argumentative/academic forms or vice versa. One student, for example, dreaded personal writing. "Who are these people who turn their insides out?" she wrote. Among lab teachers, some graduate students in literature programs fear losing touch with personal writing while some of those in fiction and literary non-fiction writing programs are anxious about the scholarly essay.

Of course, some of the teachers' concerns differ from those of the students because of the diversity in their respective cultural, literacy, and literary backgrounds. While most of the lab teachers are North Americans, 40% of lab students are international students from Taiwan, China, Japan, Malaysia, Europe; they find themselves with complex thoughts yet unable to express them with a limited repertoire of structures and vocabulary. These ESL students find themselves writing in unfamiliar social, cultural and rhetorical situations in the classroom. Another difference in background between students and teachers is that most of the lab students are below the age of 25, the

majority being 18-20 years old, while most of the lab teachers are over 25; hence, teachers have had a greater variety of writing and reading experiences than the lab students. Yet they're still plagued, although perhaps to a lesser degree, by writing blocks and writing apprehension—fear and dread of the blank page, the deadline, or the revision—having to change or cut passages that represent extensive work, thought, and feeling. The difficulty of organizing on the page when one's mind is flooded with ideas is another common concern. One of the teachers wrote:

My most frequent writing problems have to do with control. Issues or subjects that I'm writing about always seem to be made up of so many interlocking parts that I'm constantly "spiraling" mentally, trying to sort things out clearly without inadvertently separating things into false categories.

Like the spiraling writer above, another teacher says that she finds herself "spinning with details...wondering how to tame them or celebrate them without being trite......" Classroom environment and the style of the instructor often determine one's attitude toward "self-as-writer." Another lab teacher wrote:

This past semester I took two writing courses. One of the courses drew me back to that old feeling of my undergraduate years. I was panicked with the assignments which were due weekly. I felt threatened when my paper was photocopied for class analysis. The instructor made me feel inadequate and I wallowed in low self-esteem for hours.... My other writing class...was marvelous. Weekly assignments were invitations to explore techniques in writing portraits. Each of the weekly pieces led to deeper insights into myself as a writer and as a person in a personal relationship.

Both teachers' and students' "Self-as-writer" essays describe these agonies and ecstasies inherent in writing, the extreme lows and highs. It seems that like a difficult spouse or lover, you can love writing and hate it at the same time.

After the "Self-as-writer" essay, students in the next few weeks respond to other "invitations"—among them, "Self-as-reader" and "Where do you come from?" In the lab as

well as in the Rhetoric courses, for both students and teachers, writing and reading what the students have written are purposeful, rhetorical acts of making meaning. Students write, not as exercises or performances, but to communicate ideas, experiences, and emotions to their lab teachers, and for themselves, to discover and articulate these ideas and to make sense of these experiences. Teachers read, not to correct and grade, but to get to know the student, her background and culture, her strengths and weaknesses. Teachers respond to their students' writing not so much in the persona of teachers as in the persona of the writers they themselves are; as writers of essays, stories, letters, and poems, they have the same goals as their students—the most important being to choose and use details that enable readers to see what they see. The initial student essays provide material the teachers ask students to clarify, expand, or analyze. Teachers elicit further elaboration of specific passages in the students' essays by writing "tell-me-more-questions" in the margins. For example, when a Malaysian student writes that she is having trouble getting used to the U. S. school system, the teacher asks in the margin in order to bring out the hidden reasoning and help the student develop the paper, "What are the differences between the school system here and the one in Malaysia?"

Because, in terms of Winifred Horner's text-act theory, the teacher really *needs to know* these differences and how the student perceives them, the "tell-me-more-question" is a genuine rhetorical act. And because the teacher doesn't know the answers, she will be less likely to respond to the essay in terms of an "ideal compare/contrast text" that she has in mind. For the student then, writing is truly an act of communication. In their next meeting, the student and teacher may jointly decide that this next piece of writing will contrast Malaysian and American education. Likewise, if in the course of writing about the Malaysian system, the student mentions how grueling the college entrance exams were, the teacher might write "tell-me-more" questions that elicit a longer, detailed story of the rigors of preparing for and taking the exams and then anxiously anticipating the results. Hence, subsequent writing assignments grow out of previous ones and are individualized and tailored for students according to their interests and experiences and what topics the teachers and students think will be beneficial to pursue.

After students have made progress in fluency and development (an indicator of this is producing at least two pages in fifty minutes), and after they have learned to internalize and anticipate the teachers' tell-me-more questions, teachers design other individualized activities according to particular students' needs and interests. If, for example, a student is falling behind or experiencing difficulty in a Rhetoric course, the pair may work on writings assigned by the Rhetoric teacher. Or they may work on writing about sequences of short readings on file in the lab, or readings the lab teacher chooses for them that coincide with their interests. The same principles of development and personal engagement the student learned from the opening sequence of more experiential writing carry over into more academic writing about reading. Often students read and write about a theme that is vital and timely at that point in their lives. One Rhetoric student from a working class background, for example, wrote all semester on the theme of meaningful work, responding to readings by W.H. Auden, Bertrand Russell, and Studs Terkel, among others. Asian women often read and write about the themes of culture and gender conflict in excerpts from Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*. Because the reading/writing assignments are individualized and collaboratively negotiated like independent study experiments, we call our site a writing lab—a place for writing experiments and innovations.

If students have phrasing, grammar, and mechanical problems, often the case with inexperienced writers and non-native speakers of English, they will work on editing and proofreading, but systematically so they are not overwhelmed by their mistakes and so they themselves participate in the process of identifying and correcting these problems. Teachers and students look for error patterns in the students' work and then create individualized proofreading guides with examples of the correct pattern. The next time the student proofreads her paper, she checks the guide first and reads over her paper looking for the common patterns, for example, errors in tense, agreement or spelling. Often the student reads the paper aloud, pen-in-hand.

The seminar/practicum for graduate students who are first time Writing Lab teachers mirrors the writing experience their own lab students have. Teachers keep a reading/teaching journal to which the Writing Lab

Director responds weekly with marginal comments and questions similar to those they as lab teachers write on the students' papers. Because both students and first-year staff do the "Self-as-writer" essay followed by an intensive writing experience, last year's Lab Director, Allison York, and I decided at the end of the course to give both groups the same evaluation questionnaire. We asked them to look again at their "Self-as-writer" portrait composed at the beginning of the course and assess whether it was still accurate or whether the portrait needed to be revised in light of the experience of working in the Writing Lab.

We expected to see some changes in both the teachers' and students' perceptions of writing and their perceptions of themselves as writers. Some changes were more frequently mentioned by students, some by teachers. Students commented that the lab experience had built their confidence and reduced their anxiety about writing. Because the lab encourages fluency and development, students said they were proud of how much writing of different kinds they had produced. Another common student theme was that the lab experience had taught them the importance of audience and readers; in the one-on-one situation, a student knows when a passage is sketchy or confusing because she can see the puzzled look on her teacher's face.

However, just as in their original "Self-as-writer" essays which contained common themes, students and teachers mention similar changes in their end-of-the-semester evaluations. Both teachers and students remark that they have become aware of their former unconscious definition of the word "writer" and then because of their lab experience, changed this definition. Working in the lab democratizes both students' and teachers' ideas of what writers are and do. They realize that writing is not just a unique or elitist talent bestowed on the fortunate few, that writing is not only the heady poetry and philosophy produced by published intellectuals. As one student stated, "I have found that writing is not something only talented people can do, but everybody can do and enjoy doing." As one lab teacher observed:

Because of working in the lab, I was further persuaded that writing is not the domain of the gifted, the tortured souls, the "A" students. Working in the Writing Lab definitely provided me with evidence for a

position that I had merely taken on faith, and even, yes, doubted at times—that everyone is capable of good writing.

In short, the University of Iowa Writing Lab invites students to participate in an individualized reading/writing program free of charge, with a mentor, in a safe environment where they'll be among writers writing.

Carol Severino
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4th Semiannual Conference Quill—the Collegiate Writing and Learning Centers of New Jersey

April 2, 1993
Lincroft, NJ

"Building Bridges: Writing/Learning Centers and Diverse Student Populations"

Contact Kathy Vasile, Writing Lab, Brookdale Community College, Newman Springs Road, Lincroft, NJ 07738 (908-842-1900 ext. 3496).

Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association Conference

March 13, 1993
Villanova, PA

"Conversations about Writing: Faculty, Peer Tutors and Students"

Keynote speaker: Elaine Maimon

For information, contact Dr. Karyn Hollis, English Department, Villanova University, Villanova, PA 19085 (215-645-7872).

4th Annual Conference on Teaching Academic Survival Skills
May 6-7, 1993
Cincinnati, Ohio

This conference, for those engaged in helping underprepared students, will be a forum for exchanging information on what can be done to teach students how to learn to learn. For information, contact Harry Prats, Mail Location 0206, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio 45221-0206.

Writing Lab Newsletter
Back Issues—Half-Price Sale

Complete volumes of the *Writing Lab Newsletter* are on half-price sale, at $10/volume, until May 31, 1993. After May 31, the price returns to the regular $20/volume of whatever we have left. (We won't be re-stocking as we're trying to clear out some badly needed storage space in our Writing Lab and hope you have room instead to provide a home for some of these back issues.) For sale are volume 2 (1977-78) through volume 16 (1991-92). As usual, to save costs, we have no billing procedures and can't respond to purchase orders, so **PREPAYMENT IS REQUIRED.** Send checks, made payable to Purdue University, to the *Writing Lab Newsletter,* Dept. of English, 1356 Heavilon Hall, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907-1356.

Calendar for Writing Center Associations (WCAs)

March 12-13: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Muncie, IN
    Contact: Cindy Johanek, English Department, and Laura Helms, Learning Center, University College, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306

March 13: Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association, in Villanova, PA
    Contact: Karyn Hollis, English Department, Villanova University, Villanova, PA 19085

April 15-17: South Central Writing Centers Association, in Stillwater, OK
    Contact: Sharon Wright, 114 Thatcher Hall, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078

April 17: New England Writing Centers Association, in Burlington, VT
    Contact: Jean Kiedaisch, Living/Learning Center, University of Vermont, Burlington, VT 05405

October 14-16: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Denver, CO
    Contact: M. Clare Sweeney, English Department, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287

New from NCTE

(The following books can be ordered from the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801)

Beyond the "SP" Label: Improving the Spelling of Learning Disabled and Basic Writers, by Patricia J. McAlexander, Ann B. Dobie, and Noel Gregg. NCTE: Urbana, IL, 1992. 90 pages. NCTE members' price: $8.95; Non-members' price: $11.95. Stock number: 02891-0015.

This book briefs teachers on how to analyze students' spelling errors and coaches them on strategies to overcome misspellings. The authors cover key points about English spelling and offer a detailed discussion of basic writers' problems as well as an explanation of learning disabilities as they relate to spelling. In addition to explaining how to analyze student writing for error patterns, the book offers spelling rules, comments on problem areas in spelling, dictionary use, proofreading techniques, computerized spelling aids, and activities to strengthen visual and auditory skills.

Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises 20, by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford. NCTE: Urbana, IL, 1992. 203 pages. NCTE members' price: $11.95; Non-members' price: $15.95. Stock number: 18488-0015.

The authors, two award-winning poets "speak to those who want to write poems but aren't sure how to start" or how to "keep poem-writing going." The book offers a series of exercises "designed to ease ordinary mortals out of their businesslike attitudes toward language and their self-consciousness about it." Each exercise is illustrated with a mini-anthology of poems, and exercises range from snipping and re-arranging words from newspapers to imitating other poets and "milking dreams for interesting essences that can evolve into poems."

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Address correction requested