

THE WRITING LAB

N E W S L E T T E R

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

April, 1994

...FROM THE EDITOR...

From its inception, the newsletter has focused on being a medium for all of us as a group to share our insights, information, and experience. This month, we continue that focus with articles that address issues of tutoring, diverse student populations, a new book on writing center theory and practice, and space and equipment needs of a lab.

Another function of the newsletter is to keep us all informed of national and regional writing center conferences. Please remember that the newsletter is your vehicle to announce calls for papers and registration information as well as to let the rest of us learn a bit about what happened at your conference. When you plan to send in material, please remember that I need about 45 days lead time before the month of issue in which you want the announcement to appear. That is, for the June issue, I'd need information by April 15; for the September issue, the information has to be in my hands by July 15, and so on.

Yet another purpose of the newsletter is to keep us in touch with the needs of everyone in our group. Are there issues, problems, a subject that you'd like to see addressed in the newsletter? Let me know. Or, if you have a specific question for the rest of us, send that too. For the newsletter to truly be an exchange of voices, we need to hear yours.

• Muriel Harris, editor

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Establishing the role of audience in the writing center tutorial

Except in the rare cases where the student has the same teacher in the classroom and in the writing center, the writing center tutor has not been the one to define and establish the role of audience in the student's writing process. As a result, since the tutor is neither the audience nor the one who has established who the audience might be, the tutor begins most tutorials at a pedagogical and rhetorical disadvantage. Indeed, unless addressed, this disadvantage risks creating a pedagogical and rhetorical impossibility. Herein lies what my experience suggests is the writing center tutor's primary challenge. In this brief piece, I would like to explore the common issues that arise as this challenge is met and argue that audience must be addressed even though such an approach risks intruding on the pedagogy between teacher and student.

In most tutorials, the relationship among student, teacher, and tutor is primarily defined by student and teacher, and assessed as accurately as possible after the fact by the tutor. As a result, the primary role of the tutor is to assess the relation between student and teacher and to ask questions and to work toward suggestions accordingly. This sometimes leads to a

dilemma, with which many experienced tutors are acquainted: a student is being asked to do something by his or her teacher that, by the tutor's standards, is in some way unusual to the point of being negative. For example, I can recall one instance where the primary requirement for all papers in the class was for each paragraph to be shorter than the paragraph before it. Any of us could no doubt contribute similar examples to writing center lore! The student charged with such an assignment was understandably frustrated. As the tutor, I, of course, had no choice but to keep my opinions entirely to myself, even to ignore my opinions, and to work with the student to meet these requirements, so as not to violate the integrity of the relationship between teacher and student.

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Manuscripts: Recommended length for articles is ten to fifteen double-spaced typed pages, three to five pages for reviews, and four pages for the Tutors' Column, though longer and shorter manuscripts are invited. Please enclose a self-addressed envelope with return postage not pasted to the envelope. The deadline for announcements is 45 days prior to the month of issue (e.g. August 15 for October issue).

Please send articles, reviews, announcements, comments, queries, and yearly subscription payments to the editor.

A similar circumstance often arises as student and tutor work together to establish the role of audience in the student's writing. In the tutor's attempts to ascertain an understanding of who the audience for a paper is, the tutor must be prepared to rely largely on two things. First, the student must have a clear understanding of who the audience is. Second, the student must represent this audience in such a way as to allow the tutor a clear understanding, as well. Both of these understandings are difficult to formulate and convey. This difficulty is compounded by the fact that in spite of the attention our profession continues to devote toward audience, for students to offer that the teacher is the audience, or to offer that the concept of audience has not even been addressed by the teacher, is very common. In addition, most tutors are acquainted with a certain amount of unreliability on the part of a student's representations of what has been discussed in class regarding audience or assignments in general. Thus the tutor must be aware that it could be the case that either audience has not been discussed or that the student may or may not have a clear understanding of the teacher's expressed expectations as to audience.

Tutors will in some cases compound the problem by asking the student some variation of the question "what does your teacher want?" Such a question, while understandable, reinforces the notion that the teacher is the audience of the paper. Such a question is especially troublesome in cases where the student has not thought about the issue of audience, thus making the tutor's question appear to be a ready assertion that the teacher is naturally, or should naturally be, the audience. As a result, the student might state that the teacher is the audience when in fact the teacher has not addressed the issue of audience. Such a student is answering the tutor's leading question about audience with what appears to be the readiest and most obvious answer.

In any such case, the question that arises is this: in the reported absence of an understanding of the role of audience, is it acceptable for the tutor to begin by explaining the role of audience and having the student decide to what audience the paper was or should be written? The question is a difficult one, since its

implications seem to risk allowing the tutor's own pedagogy to intrude upon the primary relationship between student and teacher. As stated earlier, the relationship between student and teacher remains the primary one, even in cases where the tutor has to assist the student in accomplishing goals that the tutor finds unproductive.

I propose that to risk intrusion in the name of establishing audience is a necessary and productive risk for the tutor to take. When a student cannot readily state who the audience of his or her paper is, no tutorial can go any further without first addressing this very present "absence" of audience. Whether or not the teacher has explained the role of audience in any terms becomes less of a consideration at this point in the tutorial than the student's lack of audience awareness, which may result in rhetorical chaos both in the writing and in the tutorial.

Though faced with many obstacles in his or her attempt to ascertain who the audience is for a writer's paper, the tutor would do well to get in the habit of trying to reach this rhetorically necessary understanding as the foundation for a strong tutorial. Obviously there is not one single line of questions that will best ascertain audience in every tutorial. I have found it useful to begin every tutorial with questions such as "To whom are you writing this paper?" or simply, "Who is the audience for this paper?" Such questions implicitly complement or even replace other standard questions such as "What does your teacher want?" or "What is the assignment?" Questions as to audience facilitate the tutor's role as a "surrogate" teacher. And at the same time, such questions allow the tutor to establish a valuable future reference for the student that should complement the pedagogy of the teacher while allowing the student a deliberate rhetorical foundation from which to write.

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'Thirty-something' students: Concerning transitions in the writing center

It would not be exaggerating to say that there has been an enormous growth in the *industry* of composition instruction; yet, until recently, we often defined our field in terms of static theories and practical pedagogies rather than across the fertile chaos that this industry has spawned. Ironically, the effects of dynamism and flux in composition theory have produced a backlash of centrism, or the nostalgia for a stable "center." In contrast, the realities of writing instruction, and writing centers in particular, cry out for affirmation of change, of drifting in and out of stable centers. In their collection of essays, editors Ray Wallace and Jeanne Simpson note the common thread that "writing centers are dynamic, not static, that change and adjustment to new problems come with the territory" (xiii). I am interested in isolating this notion of change in terms of the effect on the writing center of one particular subculture within the composition field, the growing population of older college students—people who are living models for the process of change.

One of the most extreme effects of this process of change is the feeling of displacement, whether physical or conceptual. For example, in the past twenty years, due to the advent of corporate mergers, lay offs, hiring freezes, staff contractions and realignments, consolidations, and attrition, we have seen a rapid growth in career transitions. When these forced displacements occur, many people return to college, or choose to begin their post-secondary education for the first time. As these individuals enter college, the demographics of our student populations change drastically. While this growing diversity in age creates the need for new strategies in the classroom, it also represents an immediate challenge for the writing center.

An important first step in addressing the needs of older students in the writing center could be to recruit tutors from all age groups. Not only is it important to hire or appoint tutors with diverse disciplinary backgrounds

and good writing skills, it is equally important to mirror the ethnic, gender, and age differences of the general student population of any institution. There are, however, other models for consideration. For example, Susan Kleimann and G. Douglas Meyers created a unique program in their writing center in which senior citizens volunteered to work as writing tutors. According to Kleimann and Meyers, these tutors bring their experience in the non-academic world to bear on the students' writing. Many of them were retired professionals such as former librarians, professors, engineers, etc. Their practical experience introduced a level of maturity and authenticity that traditional-aged "peer tutors" often do not yet possess. If we look at the reverse of this situation, we must also ask how traditional-aged peer tutors and older student writers work together. The answer lies in redefining the "peer" relationship.

The concept of peer tutoring has recently come under scrutiny, most notably in John Trimbur's essay, "Peer Tutoring: A Contradiction in Terms?" Trimbur's concerns center on the tutor training process which he claims can often send contradictory signals to tutors who are being trained as "little teachers" while also being encouraged to identify themselves as "peers" of other student writers. Trimbur argues that "if peer tutoring programs are efforts by educators to tap the identification of student with student as a potentially powerful source of learning, peer tutoring can also lead to the further identification of peer tutors with the system that has rewarded them, underscoring the tutors' personal stake in the hierarchical values of higher education" (24). Trimbur suggests that the conflict between the "apprentice" model and the "co-learner" model of tutor training reproduces the contradictory experience of "peer" and "tutor" that students "experience at a gut level" (26). His solution is a "sequence of tutor training that treats tutors differently depending on their tutoring experience—in short, that treats tutors developmentally" (26).

I agree with Trimbur in principle, that "peer tutoring" is a contradiction in terms; but, the contradiction goes deeper than this when tutors face older student writers. Rather than introduce new terminology to describe the "peer tutor," I suggest that we need to ask ourselves whether, given these dynamics, peer tutoring as a concept is capable of properly characterizing what it is that goes on in the writing center; and, more importantly, we need to redefine the relationship between tutor and writer across different bases. The issue of tutor training, like any pedagogical contact, immediately introduces theoretical disputes, socialization concerns, and pragmatic challenges. Writing center practitioners have struggled with these issues in great detail. I am suggesting that we also need to define the role of the writing center tutor in terms of transitional concerns.

In his recent book, *Transitions*, William Bridges reminds us that "every transition begins with an ending" (11). When people go back to school there is an anxiety associated with "starting over" so late in life. Bridges argues that this is part of a mentality that says the earlier part of our life was a mistake or that now it is time to catch up to everyone else. In addition, Bridges claims that it is harder to teach older adults "process" because the world is so mechanistic, so product-oriented. We see ourselves as something not-yet-finished. In the writing center this is often why older students perceive their writing errors as "malfunctions." Against this, Bridges encourages us to view transitions as a time of readjustment and renewed commitment, rather than as "the confusing nowhere of in-betweenness" (5). He sees life as "unfolding," as a series of alternating periods of stability and change. According to Bridges, transitions in career signal a change from being motivated by the chance to demonstrate competence to being motivated by the chance to find meaning.

One manifestation of this difference in motivation is the difficulty that older stu-

dents experience when faced with the "freedom" to choose their own topic for writing assignments. The problem is that in addition to its positive effects, *freedom is also something we fear*. Yet, in the writing center, freedom is often a banner under which we march to justify and tout our non-directive tutoring philosophies. We must be aware that the effect of unexpected freedom is sometimes the loss of structure, whether it is the structure of a job or a piece of writing. The implication of this for tutor training is to maintain a delicate balance between freedom and structure for both tutors and writers. The experiences of older students teach us that the involuntary loss of structure is a lesson we all need to heed in order to qualify our writing center theories and pedagogies.

Some of my older students tell me that when they enter the writing center, they do so with additional motives and different assumptions about what writing and tutoring can accomplish. Often returning students come to the writing center asking advice about which freshman writing courses to take to help them "brush up" on their grammar. They explain that it has been ten, fifteen, or twenty years since their last English course, and they are no longer confident of their grammar and style skills. In some cases, they appear in a panic and highly insecure about their chances for a successful re-entry into college. It is not difficult to imagine visions of red-ink in their memories of freshman composition or diagramming sentences in a code they no longer remember. I do not discourage these students from taking such courses now. I do, however, encourage them to consider their options. For example, I explain that most freshman composition programs actually integrate reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. They will be reading essays in order to respond with an expository or argumentative essay of their own. I explain how their writing will be evaluated in terms of organization, support for their ideas, and clear and cohesive prose rather than strictly on the basis of grammar and style. I suggest alternative courses that focus on grammar and style, but these often do not count toward their degree. The best alternative, and the one they choose most often, is to establish a solid relationship with the writing center. I assign a specific tutor to work with them on a regular basis. Sometimes the student and tutor work together on specific writing projects, sometimes the tutor creates an assignment for them, and sometimes they just talk. The result is that stu-

dents gain the confidence in writing that matches the confidence they possess in other areas, like jobs or families.

In some ways these students are no different from traditional-aged students. That is, they face identical assignments and harbor similar anxieties about writing and grades that a large dose of confidence will often help to resolve. On the other hand, they face these anxieties with a different set of experiences and expectations. For example, many of them are more organized in their approach to assignments, yet they are less confident of their ability to convey their thoughts. In these instances, it is simply a matter of showing them how to channel the confidence they possess in other areas of their life and apply it to writing problems.

One returning student, I'll call him Steve, came to the writing center because he was having trouble understanding his teacher's assignment to write an interpretative paper on a poem the class was studying. Steve had received a "C" on his paper. His teacher claimed he had not supported his conclusions. Steve did not understand his instructor's expectations, and he simply could not see what he was doing wrong. Prior to coming to the writing center, he had made an appointment elsewhere to test for learning disability, thinking that he had some dysfunction. Steve had convinced himself that he was impaired because he did not understand his assignment. In addition, Steve seemed embarrassed to ask for help; yet, Steve's reluctance to seek help is typical of adult learners who have shifted from dependency to independency. Unlike most traditional-aged students, older students are no longer dependent upon their parents for support and encouragement. In fact, many of these students are working parents who balance multiple roles in their family and at work. I encouraged Steve often to keep this in mind when his lack of confidence in writing seemed overwhelming.

After Steve and I worked together for an entire semester we both learned some valuable lessons about writing and learning. I learned that older students have unique needs and have a great deal of experience to bring to their writing and to the tutoring session itself. Each time Steve came in the door, I threw caution to the wind and looked for ways to encourage the elements of transition and change I witnessed in his writing, as well as the confidence I could see gradually

emerging. Steve did not improve his grade on the "C" paper, but he worked hard on subsequent papers and eventually improved to his own satisfaction. The following semester Steve became President of *Encore*, our university organization for older and returning non-traditional students over the age of twenty-one.

Since my first session with Steve, I have worked with many older student writers, hired several older "writing assistants," and set up an office for *Encore* in the Writing Center, and I am working on a proposal for a major grant to develop an organized writing center program to meet the needs of older non-traditional students. With the defense spending cut-back, many military support personnel will soon be displaced. These events are also part of a general trend in local business to "downsize" companies through staff "realignments." In light of these alarming trends in job elimination in the United States, all American universities and community colleges face new challenges as these displaced individuals re-enter the education process. I believe writing centers can move to the front line of responding to the needs of older students. Christina Murphy puts it best: "if writing centers are to become true 'centers' of outreach amongst disciplines," they must also become true centers of outreach for communities and whole regions" (284).

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Behavioral characteristics of Oriental ESL students in the writing center

Introduction

Anthropologists, sociologists and educators have long observed significant differences between perceptions, attitudes, and interpersonal relationships of Western and Eastern cultures (Northrop, Granet, Tung-sun, Steward). Northrop, for example, characterizes Eastern cultures as holistic, intuitive and concrete, as opposed to what he terms the analytic, objective, and abstract nature of Western cultures. Such cross-cultural differences are also reflected in the writing center as more and more Oriental students are entering American universities and other academic institutions. As a matter of fact, some of the behavioral characteristics of Oriental ESL students often produce misunderstandings between the tutor and the tutee and lead to ineffectual activity in face-to-face communications. To enhance effectiveness, the tutor must be aware of those cross-cultural differences. This essay is aimed at addressing this issue with special reference to the Oriental ESL tutees who have sought help in the Writing Center of the English Department, Texas A & M University. In particular, I will consider four major behavioral characteristics of Oriental ESL tutees who came to our Writing Center for assistance: the strong sense of "nonself," the value of facesaving, the desire for a warm and informal relationship with the tutor, and the style of comparative dependence.

The Sense of "Nonself"

Westerners, especially Americans, have a strong sense of "self." Stewart states that the concept of the individual self is an integral assumption of American culture. Americans assume that each person has his or her own separate identity which should be recognized and stressed. In other words, Americans make a strong and clear distinction between the self and the other. This tendency is also reflected in the English language: the capital "I," the distinction between subjective and objective, the redundant use of possessive case such as in "I drink MY coffee." The distinction between self and the other is strongly emphasized in writing. Americans have an almost extreme sense of ownership of the ideas presented. Any ideas other than

the writer's must be cited and documented. Otherwise, the writer has committed plagiarism, which is considered a serious academic crime in the West.

However, the Oriental culture possesses a strong sense of "nonself." The "self" is deeply rooted in human relationships. The group interest goes first. The individual comes second. Sometimes, achievement is not personal but considered to be the result of cooperative effort. There is constant denial of individual ability. Most Indians, for instance, do not distinguish between the self of others and one's own self. Nakamura wrote that "in India, the tendency is not to regard another's self as an independent subject of action opposed to one's self" (930).

In terms of writing, although it is erroneous to claim that Orientals do not cite or document, it is true that they do not cite as strictly and precisely as Americans. Some Oriental ESL students have little, or no idea of documentation. Take In Kim, a Korean student, as an example. He was writing a research paper. Before he came to the writing center, he had done some research and written his draft. However, he did not cite sources. He mixed his own ideas with those from his readings. When the tutor told him the importance of documentation, he could not tell which ideas were his own and which ideas were taken from his readings. Besides, he was not convinced at first. Only after the tutor emphasized the point several times did he finally realize the importance of citation. Herein lies a cultural difference of which the tutor needs to be aware. The tutor should not think the student is cheating. He or she needs to explain the importance of citation in American culture.

The Value of Facesaving

Facesaving is another aspect of Oriental culture. Americans are characterized by their directness. As Stewart pointed out, "When faced with a problem, Americans like to get to its source. This means facing the facts, meeting the problem head on, putting the cards on the table" (52). However, Ori-

entals are characterized by their indirectness. Orientals seldom confront or challenge others to their face when they disagree unless they are enemies. Sometimes, disagreement is solved through a third party in order to save face. For instance, in Thailand, business may be conducted by means of an emissary and not directly in face-to-face communication. This allows both sides to negotiate or to withdraw without losing face. The indirectness in social relations is usually difficult for Americans to fathom.

The tendency to save face is also reflected in the writing center. On the one hand, the student might say "yes" or nod his head when he actually disagrees with the tutor. He might never challenge the tutor for the sake of "face." On the other hand, the student might pretend to understand in order to save face. In Kim might serve as a good example here. At first, he said "yes" and nodded his head when the tutor asked him to cite. However, after a while he asked, "Do I really have to cite?" In other words, "yes" does not always mean agreement with Oriental students. So tutors have to constantly perform reality checks to make sure that their tutees really agree or understand.

The Desire for a Warm and Informal Tutor/Tutee Relationship

Another aspect of Oriental culture lies in its emphasis on human relationships. Americans are usually task-oriented while some Orientals are person-oriented. For instance, an American business person is always impatient to get the job done. He or she might never want to see a business partner until the next deal. However, the Japanese business person always tries to make friends before getting down to business. After they come to a deal, the Japanese will call and send cards to keep the relationship for future benefit. Herein lies a fundamental cultural difference. Americans will think this process a waste of time.

Likewise, American students are often task-oriented. The teacher/student relationship is generally formal. Students seldom

visit their teachers unless they have a task on hand, or a problem to solve. A teacher might even feel insulted if the student visits him just for a chat because the student is wasting his time.

The opposite is true of Oriental students. They are person-oriented. They promote a warm, personal relationship with the teacher. They like to initiate social conversation, ask personal questions, tease and generally enjoy laughing and joking with the teacher. In other words, they need to like the teacher and need to be liked by the teacher. The same is true of Oriental teachers who expect their students to be informal with them. If the student never visits the teacher unless he has a problem, the teacher might feel insulted and think the student does not respect him because the student never thinks of his teacher unless he is in trouble. As the Chinese proverb goes, "He never goes to see the king without a problem." This proverb has strong negative connotations in Chinese.

So in the writing center, the tutor should try to build up a warm relationship with the tutee before they start working. Otherwise, learning is difficult for the tutee. He might feel very uncomfortable, stressed and afraid to express his ideas. So collaborative learning is a must for Oriental ESL students. I once tutored a Chinese student, Xiaojun Li. He was rather nervous when he entered the Writing Center. After I greeted him warmly and asked him to go through the paperwork, he still seemed stressed and uncomfortable. I realized that to start working with him at that moment might not be effective. So we spent five minutes on free talk. I asked him about his background, his major and his impressions of America. He also asked me about my family. Gradually, he relaxed and started to trust me. Then we started the session, which turned out to be very successful. He was more assertive and ready to argue with me. For many Americans, to spend five minutes on informal talk might be a waste of time. But for some Oriental ESL students, it is worthwhile. It is important to establish rapport with continuity. Seeing a familiar face means a lot to some Oriental tutees.

The Style of Comparative Dependence

Last, but not least, most Oriental ESL students are comparatively more dependent than most American students. Witkin, et al., developed the concept of psychological differentiation. One of the aspects of psychological differentiation is the idea of field-in-

dependence and field-dependence. Field-independent people tend to rely on internal referents and thus function more autonomously while field dependent people tend to rely on external sources of information and consequently take greater account of views of others in forming their own opinions. Dawson and Cohen indicate that differences in perceptions are the result of child-rearing practices. Culture groups in which parents are extremely dominant tend to produce more field-dependent children while culture groups in which parents encourage individual freedom, initiative and equality among family members tend to produce field-independent children.

In many Oriental cultures, people are expected to respect authorities and conform to rules. Individuality and freedom are not encouraged. For instance, a typical Oriental family usually consists of three or more generations. There is an authority figure in the family whom all the family members must obey. Besides, there is not equality among the members in the family. For instance, the younger brother must obey the elder brother. Students who are brought up in such families tend to be more dependent. This is true of most Oriental ESL students. As a tutor, I have noticed that some ESL students are not always sure of what they are doing. They might repeatedly ask the tutor for reassurance. So when we tutor Oriental students, we should constantly give approval when the tutee is making some progress. The discussion should be more guided. Instructions should be clear and direct. Give analogies and examples and use context to explain abstract ideas.

Recommendations for Tutors Working With Oriental Students

It is impossible to cover all the aspects of culture in this limited space. The behavioral characteristics addressed above represent general patterns of Oriental ESL students. There are some recommendations to make in terms of working with Oriental students. First, be aware of cultural diversity among Oriental cultures. Many Oriental cultures differ in some respects. Sometimes, even within the same region, there exist differences. For instance, the Chinese student from Mainland China is not the same as the one from Taiwan or Hong Kong who has had more exposure to Western ideas and whose political systems are different from that of Mainland China. Individuals can be different because of backgrounds, education and the length of exposure to American cul-

ture. Second, explain and encourage students to conform to the strengths of American culture. For instance, the tutor must emphasize the importance of documentation and make students aware that if they want to survive in American academic institutions, they must learn to cite and document. Last, avoid hypercultural awareness. As human beings, we have a lot in common. Strictly speaking, the characteristics addressed are only a matter of degree. Some Americans also possess these characteristics. Just as Steward points out, there may be more cultural variation within a culture than between the dominant aspects of two separate cultures. So when working with Oriental students, you should not overemphasize the differences. Otherwise, the tutee might feel insulted. For instance, if you overuse the high-guidance strategy, some tutees might feel that you are treating them as babies rather than learning partners. Theories are only general guidelines. Sometimes there is a gap between theory and practice. Thus, we should always combine theory with practice and try to solve particular problems according to particular situations.

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Book Review

Dynamics of the Writing Conference: Social and Cognitive Interaction. Eds. Thomas Flynn and Mary King. Urbana: NCTE. 127 pages. paperbound. Price: \$16.95; NCTE members, \$12.95. (Order from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.)

The following two reviews offer different perspectives on the same book. Cindy Johaneck reviews this collection of essays from a research point of view. How well, she asks, did the essays contribute something new to writing center theory and pedagogy. Sharon Strand, on the other hand, reviews the same book from a practical point of view. How can this book, she asks, be used in a writing center. For readers short on time, these somewhat different reviews should help them find the essays most relevant to them or can indicate where to dive in first.

• Reviewed by *Cindy Johaneck, Ball State University (Muncie, Indiana)*

According to their preface, Thomas Flynn and Mary King's purpose for gathering the "ten best" essays from the first ten years of the East Central Writing Centers Association Conference is "to show how the social and cognitive interaction between students and teachers in writing conferences can promote the engagement of the higher-order thinking skills that students need to fulfill college writing assignments" (vii). At first glance, then, writing center audiences will expect fruitful explorations of theory and practice that may further justify our work and confirm what we do best. Indeed, some essays in this collection offer just that.

For example, in "A Counseling Approach to Writing Conferences," David Taylor illustrates insightful connections between counseling and conferencing; establishing a helping relationship, listening effectively, and meeting students' goals. In "Conferencing for the 'Learning-Disabled': How We Might Really Help," Cornelius Cosgrove argues convincingly that writing centers can help LD students as we help other writers—not through grammar drills, but through process-oriented dialogue. In a similar argument, Susanna Horn, in "Fostering Spontaneous Dialect Shift in the Writing of African-American Students," illustrates natural dialect shifts when attending to content long before grammar.

However, several essays seem not to "fit" the book's overall purpose, which Flynn articulates in the first section, "Background and Theory," and hinder the effort to contribute something new. In the second section, "Social Strategies: Building a Collaborative Relationship," for example, JoAnn Johnson and David Fletcher in separate essays doubt the time-honored practice of "questioning," basing arguments on examinations of tutorials in which tutors ask primarily fact-seeking questions, ask too many questions at once, and allow little response time. Indeed, these ineffective strategies are well-illustrated in these essays, but examination of different and better questioning techniques may lead us to very different conclusions about the value of questioning overall.

Essays in the third section, "Cognitive Strategies: Engaging Students in the Activities of Expert Writers," attempt to examine, according to Flynn's introduction, "the cognitive processes that are be-

• Reviewed by *Sharon Strand, Bowling Green State University (Bowling Green, Ohio)*

In this collection Thomas Flynn and Mary King attempt, using selections from presentations given during the first decade of the East Central Writing Centers Association conferences, to address both how the conference approach to teaching writing fosters growth in writing skills and how the teacher/tutor can turn control of the conference over to the student to inspire higher-order thinking. The book proposes to provide a historical perspective on and a critique of research concerning writing conferences. It also purports to explore the role of social interaction in human learning, examine ways in which conferencing helps students grow as writers, and discuss the importance of focusing on higher-order thinking skills before surface concerns as a way to foster growth in writing.

If the book had delivered as promised, this would be the most important publication for writing center practitioners recently offered, but it falls short of the promise, possibly because of an audience problem. I was never sure who the book was directed to: writing center personnel or composition teachers. If the audience is new writing center people, some of the articles require a background not presented here. If the audience is experienced writing center people, many will be beyond what the book offers. If the audience is composition teachers, the focus of tutoring as it is carried out in writing centers seems out of place. This problem made the book uneven; some articles seemed to be either out of place in the proposed scheme or too simplistic to carry the argument forward. But in spite of its uneven quality, I found bright spots that I think make the book worth its price.

There are some articles busy writing center staffers might want to skip, unless they are among the lucky few who have time to read everything put in front of them. While I agree with Mary King, in her article on reader response, that students should be taught to respond to "a poem" rather than to what has been written about a poem, these techniques seem more appropriate for writing and literature classes rather than writing centers. Further, I found Marcia Hurlow's piece on non-traditional students limited in scope. Her description of adult returning students does apply to some but certainly not all these students, and

Johanek review (cont.)

ing communicated by the tutor and acquired by the student" (54). However, some of these essays (and the purpose of this section) seem to conflict with the promise on the back cover: "student novices control the content of these cooperative conversations by proposing topics for discussion." Thomas Schmitzer, for example, examines a tutorial in which he encourages a student, in spite of the student's uncertainty, to develop a new essay based on a tangent in the original draft.

Some other essays in this section not only conflict with the promise of "student control" but also vaguely discuss "cognitive strategies" as merely synonymous to "successful strategies," as Mary King seems to do in her essay on using reader-response theory to teach "students to ask the sorts of questions that experts ask themselves when reading literature" (70). In another essay, Marcia Hurlow does not discuss "cognitive strategies" at all, as she correlates non-traditional students' anxiety and T-units, exploring the effects of lessened anxiety on writing development.

While these essays explore valuable questions and strategies, the exact meaning of "cognitive strategies" remains vague. Further, these essays explore successful strategies "experts" *think* students should engage in or, in the case of Hurlow's essay, do not explore "cognitive strategies" at all.

Other critical questions about this collection must be asked. First, if the value of student control and independence is central to this collection, why do Flynn and King describe the teacher/tutor as "expert" and the student as "novice," borrowing these terms from a five-step model in which "teacher-expert" is clearly on top and the "student-novice" is clearly at the bottom? In what ways does the use of the term "expert" chip away at the very foundation of peer tutoring, a foundation upon which several essays in this collection—and many writing centers nationwide—are based?

Further, given the fast pace of cognitive science research, does this collection of essays—all more than five years old—contribute new insight?

While the diversity within the writing center audience requires readers to answer these questions for themselves—and while some individual essays here are well worth reading for their original purposes—I contend that this collection illustrates only how little we currently know about the "social and cognitive interaction" of writing conferences and how uncertain we are about how to gain that knowledge.

The greatest strength of this brave collection, therefore, is that Flynn and King bring to the forefront an historical look at beginning explorations of writing conferences and a new challenge to writing centers for the future. They sound a call for more research—as many intriguing questions remain unanswered—and they offer valuable "seeds" for more comprehensive inquiry in an area that still remains largely unexplored.

Strand review (cont.)

the same difficulties with writing are often seen in traditional-age students as well. Finally, Horn's piece on spontaneous dialect shift was interesting but probably not worth the time of busy writing center staffers, as the information presented is already inherent in center practice.

So what of this book should busy people read when they have the time? One article that I found particularly thought-provoking was Flynn's introduction to the book, in which he explores the relationship of research to pedagogy. He notes that even though conferencing has been recommended for at least twenty years, recent research reveals that "the writing conference is not accepted as a central part of the curriculum for most teachers" (4). He decries the fact that there has been little research comparing conferencing with other modes of instruction and, further, blames this dearth of research and the methodology used by George Hillock for the "poor showing" of conferencing in Hillock's landmark 1986 meta-analysis of composition pedagogy. He reports that Hillock threw out the one study in which writing conferences were extensively used because the great improvement in writing skills shown by the students in that study had the potential to "distort the survey's statistical validity" (5). This commentary on the way research affects pedagogy, sometimes adversely, is alone worth the price of the book.

King's introduction to Section II presents background on theories of the social construction of knowledge as they impact on writing center philosophy and practice. Her commentary on how control is negotiated in a tutorial provides excellent information for forming tutoring techniques and good grounding for the other articles in the section. King's inclusion of the work of Shirley Brice Heath is particularly relevant for practitioners, especially the suggestion that "great care must be taken about how the tool of language is used by those in authority and how its use is managed, rewarded, and forbidden to students. Verbal exchanges among students and teachers can promote exploration and growth—but they can also close students down emotionally and intellectually" (20).

All of the articles in the section on social strategies can be used to raise tutoring techniques to a new level, one that consistently places control of the conference with the writer. As a composition instructor and tutor I have often felt that I needed a course in counseling techniques to do my job effectively. Taylor's article gives helpful background on the goals of counseling and how those goals relate to the aims of tutoring, especially empowering the writer. His two-page "Summary of Counseling Concepts and Skills for Writing Conferences" can be used as a training aid since it gives a succinct description of the stages of a counseling/tutoring session as well as of skills that lead to effective listening in a tutorial. While I have trained tutors to use questioning as integral to tutoring, I have also observed and conducted sessions that "didn't work" even though the techniques suggested by the first generation of writing center theorists and practitioners were being used. Johnson's article may hold an answer for those sessions gone sour. She reports on a study that "indicates that when the tutor asks questions, the tutor controls the conference, deprives the writer of responsibility, and may arouse emotions which divert energy from the work at hand" (22), certainly not the aim of a good tutorial. While the study concentrated on questions which demand "one right answer," her exploration of questioning can make tutors more self-conscious of the types of questions they are asking. Finally, Taylor, in his description of a tutorial gone bad, points out graphically why direct questioning is not the best way to begin a dialogue. He also provides a method to analyze the effectiveness of a conference, which I will incorporate into my work on assessing writing center services.

(cont. on page 13)

TUTORS' COLUMN

Tutoring: Using your noodle by using your major

As a biology major, I was skeptical about being able to help others with their papers. However, the tutor training course offered new opportunities, learning about expectations in other fields of study, for one. Through this, I was able to connect writing in my major area of study, using its expectations and techniques for tutoring.

My first tutorials were with students from a Western Civilization course. The assignment was to write an essay responding to the movie, "The Name of the Rose," a movie I had not seen. I also was not familiar with the class, the professor, or the assignment. Each student had given me a different description of it. Nervous and confused, I nevertheless conjured up some questions, like a magician; I surprised myself that I could even think of anything to ask. I think the students expected me to wave my magic pencil wand and PRESTO, a perfect and passable paper! With all the questions, they probably thought I was babbling in my old age. Consequently, these early tutorials were unsatisfactory for me and, I am sure, for the students. It was not until I was working on a WAC assignment for my tutoring course that the ol' light bulb began to glow: the scientific method of inquiry parallels the writing process.

Rehearsing, drafting, and revising became observing, hypothesizing, and experimenting. The final draft became the conclusion in the scientific approach. In the first stage, observing, I made mental notes, thought of related ideas, and even constructed various outlines of procedure. In the second stage, I formulated an hypothesis, an educated guess, as to what the subject of my paper might be, judging by the ideas I had generated in the observation stage. In the third stage, the experiment, I began with my first assumptions and draft, based on the subject I had chosen in the hypothesis stage. This procedure or cycle continued until I reached my conclusions, based on observable results, and then I was able to complete my final draft.

I soon had an opportunity to test my as-

sumption. I had a tutorial with a student who was doing her paper on fetal alcohol syndrome for her English 101 class. She arrived with a completed draft of her essay. This was her first tutorial, and all she wanted was a proofreader; she was not interested in this "revision stuff," as she called it. She just wanted to get the assignment over with, like a bad headache. I read through the draft. It was obvious she was merely using, probably verbatim, terminology from her library research, but she did not understand documentation, word usage, or the subject matter.

Some of the information did not pertain to her topic. She wrote about the effects of drugs, such as cocaine, on the fetus. I explained to her that if she entitled her paper "Fetal Alcohol Syndrome," then she should have limited the contents of her paper to this. If she wanted to include other drugs, she would have to change her title and adjust her introduction to accommodate the addition. She had sentence fragments everywhere and her focus was, well, unfocused. Zeroing in on terminology and content, I bombarded her with questions, questions which she was obviously uninterested in answering. What emerged from this was what I already knew; she did not want to do the assignment and had picked a topic just to get the work done.

I am particularly sensitive to the exactness of words needed for scientific writing. Throughout her paper, she used the words "fetus," "child," and "baby" interchangeably. This bothered me. She wrote that "alcohol affects the motor control of the muscles and the fetus may have difficulty walking." Two comments here: first, I do not know of any fetus that can walk, do you? Second, I apologize to the author of the article on fetal alcohol syndrome for double-plagiarizing, the student's lifting of text into hers, and my lifting of hers into this paper. I asked her if that sentence meant that as the fetus, after birth, becomes a child and continues to grow and develop, it will experience difficulty in motor control skills, such as walking. She said "Yes," but it was obvious

she was clueless as to the point I was trying to make, that her terminology usage was affecting her meaning. Wanting to salvage the tutorial, I switched tactics, finally focusing on her, her text, and what she wanted to say. I asked her to talk about what she had *observed* about her topic from the research she had done so far. I asked her to elaborate on examples, facts, the behavior of the mother, the health risks to both mother and child, well fetus first, then child. I asked her to formulate *hypothetical* questions, what-if's and situations, and to speculate on answers to why women drink, especially when pregnant, and what was being done medically and socially to inform the public. I asked her to *experiment* with various scenarios. Did she think this was a form of child abuse and could and should and have mothers been prosecuted, and what were the results?

Throughout the rest of this hour-and-a-half tutorial, although the student was unaware she was following a scientific method of inquiry as she answered these questions, this process helped her to acknowledge that this was one subject she was not committed to for further exploration. Once this milestone had been reached, one barrier broken, we were able to have a conversation on topics that did interest her. The tutorial ended with her brainstorming for a new topic.

Other tutors beside myself here at Walsh use strategies from their majors in the tutorial. One student, a senior pre-law major, cross-examines her students, while our resident philosophy major asks thought-provoking questions, testing assumptions the students make. Being aware of the writing strategies and methods of inquiry in your own field of study may not help everyone, but it can enable students to perceive their topic in a new way and make more informed decisions about composing.

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Writing centers: The Hong Kong experience

In Hong Kong, as in the United States, expanded opportunities for post-secondary education have brought a wider range of students to universities, colleges and polytechnics, and have intensified debates about how best to maintain standards. Over the next few years here, the government plans to double the enrollments of post-secondary institutions, and two years ago started giving each institution an on-going yearly grant of up to almost a million U.S. dollars, for "Language Enhancement" programs to supplement existing programs. The generosity of these budgets reflects the intensity of local needs, for even though ninety-eight percent of Hong Kong people are native speakers of Cantonese, education from secondary school onwards depends heavily on English: textbooks, written assignments and examinations, which typically require essay writing, are virtually all in English.

Despite this at least apparently intense immersion in English, a typical Hong Kong student entering a post-secondary institution is nevertheless in for a bit of a shock: perhaps for the first time this student will be taught various subjects by native speakers of English and others who explain things in English only, and who demand high standards for written work, expecting students to be able to organize ideas, present arguments clearly and edit the final product carefully. Courses in "English for Academic Purposes" aim to offer general help, especially to help students meet the specific demands of writing assignments in their major subjects. However, faculty members at Hong Kong Baptist College (a government-funded liberal arts college) proposed two years ago that a third of the "Language Enhancement" grant should be used for a writing center, which I was asked to set up. The center has proven so popular that two of the three universities in Hong Kong have decided to follow suit, one of which invited me to join their faculty to set up a writing center there.

At the outset two years ago, however, writing centers were new both to Hong Kong and to me, and I agreed only with trepidation

to set up one. In fifteen years of teaching writing to EFL students in England, Iran, Italy, China and Hong Kong, I had never come across a writing center, and had only a vague idea of their existence, largely because I am British: writing centers evolved in the States, and to the best of my knowledge have not crossed the Atlantic. Here in Hong Kong, the idea was so new to colleagues and administrators that my initial questions about where the center would be located met with blank looks. It had not occurred to anyone that a "writing center" would actually have a physical existence.

Slowly the problems sorted themselves out. One thing we did have was money, and that enabled us to hire four full-time tutors, three for English and one for Chinese writing. Space almost miraculously appeared in our overcrowded college in the form of an abandoned bookstore attached to the college car-park in the basement. The bookstore had moved to much plusher premises. Given a free hand in the design of the center, I gave each of the four tutors a separate office adjoining an open central area. Informing the faculty of our existence and function took the form mainly of memos to all the faculty and phone calls to heads of departments and those faculty who I knew were especially interested in their students' writing. Students were informed through posters on each departmental notice-board and announcements in student assemblies.

Having been proposed for reasons similar to those guiding the development of writing centers in the U.S., this writing center is perhaps similar to them in many respects. As in the States, the tutors in the center help students through one-on-one tutorials with all aspects of the writing process, from narrowing a topic and writing an outline to checking the final draft for errors. Although some students are referred, it is essentially a voluntary service, aiming to create a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere. Tutors write reports of the tutorials and students evaluate the service through questionnaires.

Perhaps some of the problems and misconceptions that the tutors and I encountered are also similar to those faced by tutors and writing center administrators in the U.S. The first of these misconceptions is that a writing center functions as a proofreading service. At the outset, forty-page theses were showing up in tutors' boxes with notes attached saying, for example, "Please check my project for me. I have to give it in, in three days. Thank you."

Another common misconception, especially among the staff, is that the writing center tilts the formerly level playing field. I had to explain to the tutor for Chinese writing, for example, that he should work with the students on the papers they had already been assigned rather than assign different, extra writing tasks for these already overloaded students. "But that's unfair! Those students will get better grades!" I'm not sure I managed to convince him that students who, on their own initiative, seek help from the writing center and work on their writing genuinely deserve better grades.

A third main misconception we have encountered is that tutors can and should help supply the content of papers. Not surprisingly this belief is especially true with English majors who expect the tutors to help them with literature. One complained on a questionnaire that his writing center tutor was too ignorant of Byron to be of use. We refer such students back to their lecturers.

A final misconception that probably has obvious analogs with misconceptions encountered in the U.S. is that visiting the writing center is an easy option: one visit, and all writing problems will miraculously disappear. Eventually we began to turn away students who prove unwilling to do anything between visits, either to work on their latest drafts or complete the handouts given to them about persistent problems.

Although many students visiting writing centers in the U.S. are ESL students, all Hong Kong students are of course ESL stu-

dents, and this fact helps explain and throw into relief the main differences between the center I set up and those I have learned about in the U.S. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that all our tutors for English are trained ESL teachers. The practice of using peer tutors, common in the U.S., would be impossible in Hong Kong because there are few students whose English would be good enough both to see the problems and help the advisees to solve them. Even students doing their Masters' theses in English Literature and Linguistics make use of the center. Their counterparts in the States would no doubt be employed as tutors. Even if the students' English were good enough for them to be tutors, other factors would not make this desirable. The Chinese cultural emphasis on models, for example, as opposed to an American cultural emphasis on self-expression, would greatly increase the danger of the center's becoming a proofreading service that turns out merely "correct" prose.

Another main difference arises from the fact that the students, like the tutors, are themselves rather specially trained: all have had from ten to twelve years of formal training in English and as a result are familiar and comfortable with discussing writing in grammatical terms. There is no difficulty, for example, with simply telling a student that she has a tendency to use the past perfect when the simple past tense is required. In our writing center, students with problems at the sentence level are sent away with handouts to refresh or enhance their knowledge and worksheets designed to give practice. Since all students speak the same mother tongue and have been taught English in the same ways, they have similar language problems, which makes it relatively easy to develop a set of handouts that will cover most of the basic problems. And since the tutors are so familiar with the students' language background, they can usually point out to the student why the error has arisen, which helps the student to solve it.

In terms of the aims of this writing center in Hong Kong, the most salient peculiarity is perhaps that the center does not help students with papers they are writing for their courses in "English for Academic Purposes," which would be roughly equivalent to basic composition courses offered by colleges in the U.S. Rather, this writing center was designed to help students with assignments in their major

subjects, which cover the full range of the arts and sciences, and business. One reason I stipulated that the writing center should not help with EAP assignments was that I wanted to avoid duplicating existing resources, and to avoid misleading teachers of the EAP courses about the exact nature and extent of their students' weaknesses as users of English.

The special aims of our facility as a writing center in a second language context also brought with them a couple of special misconceptions, one of which is that the writing center deals with all language problems. We have had to be very firm with students who mainly want an hour's conversation with a native speaker or want to improve their listening or reading. All we can do with these students is advise them about how to improve these skills and point them in the direction of other facilities in the college that can offer help.

A related difficulty is a tendency on the part of many students to treat the writing center as a kind of course. When those of us working in the center are not fully booked, we are in fact very willing to help students who come in search of general writing practice and want to be set topics or who have set topics for themselves. For the most part, however, the writing center aims to focus on specific assignments set by the faculty; and despite handouts and posters explaining the nature of the writing center, a common question at the end of many tutorials is "What will we do next week?" Students will often turn up to see a tutor, despite not having booked a tutorial, solely because they had seen that tutor at that time the previous week.

Both the special problems of writing centers in a second-language context and the things they may have in common with writing centers in the U.S. suggest to me an open question for persons interested in writing centers in general, and a tentative assertion about how writing centers could better serve the needs of ESL students. The question is simply whether the needs of ESL students and those of native speakers of English—no matter how "basic"—are as similar as many academics apparently assume. Some of the problems that both groups encounter in their writing tasks, like organizing ideas and knowing how to quote from sources, are obviously the same. But many are not. How

many native speakers, for example, have problems with the use of articles?

And this leads me to a tentative assertion, which is that perhaps more tutors in writing centers, generally, need to be trained to address the basic needs of second-language students. Rules governing the use of articles, to stay with this example, are definite but complex and are not easily articulated by untrained people, even if those people would themselves never make a mistake in the use of them. In my situation, and from my own point of view as an EFL teacher, I cannot imagine a writing center in Hong Kong succeeding without tutors trained in EFL and simply wonder if the situation in the United States nowadays is so very different.

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New from NCTE

Evaluating Teachers of Writing. Ed.

Christine A. Hult. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994. 189 pages, paperbound. Price: \$19.95; NCTE members: \$14.95 (Stock no. 16213-0015). Order from NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

The essays in this collection address the theory and practice of teaching evaluations. Included are a variety of methods for evaluating teachers, including peer reviews, student evaluations, classroom observations, and videotaped microteaching. Several essays focus on the evaluation of specific faculty groups that teach in writing programs, such as teaching assistants, adjunct faculty, and writing-across-the-curriculum instructors.

1994 SCWCA Meeting

The South Carolina Writing Center Association (SCWCA) held its fifth annual meeting in Columbia, SC, on February 4, 1994. Representing eighteen schools from across the state, approximately fifty writing center directors and peer tutors came together at Midlands Technical College to hear Christina Murphy who presented the keynote address and conducted a session at the conference. She spoke about one of "the most pressing issues confronting writing centers...the evaluation of writing centers." Murphy noted that directors need to do more than collect numbers on how many clients their labs have assisted; nor can directors rely exclusively on anecdotal evidence about successful tutorials. Instead, labs should relate what they accomplish to the stated missions of their colleges or universities so that the labs demonstrate how they "transform" their schools. As a result, writing labs can show that "they are windows to the whole academic community." Murphy also spoke on "Critical Thinking and Your Students," explaining how writing center consultants as well as English teachers foster vital thinking skills when they work with students.

In addition, the conference offered a special session for peer tutors. Meeting in peer groups, tutors discussed "The Thinking-Writing Connection: Helping Writing Lab Clients Develop Thinking Strategies to Improve Their Writing" and "The Effect of the Right-left Brain Split on Clients." Other sessions focused on technological concerns fac-

ing writing labs, such as "Turning Workshops into Videos" and the impact of computers on labs, as in the session, "No One Would Even Try Papyrus: History of Writing Technology in the Writing Center." Also discussed were the needs of special students or programs, all of which labs handle each day: "The Writing Lab and WAC: Helping Professors Formulate Writing Assignments," "Expanding the Writing Center Repertoire to Meet Student Needs: Resumes, Cover Letters, etc.," "Empowering Non-Traditional Students through Encouragement," and the upbeat session entitled "Your Students Will ALL Become Writers." And, finally, the hallmark of the SCWCA: the panel "What Works for Me" had five writing lab directors explain their most successful techniques for handling difficult clients, providing computer-assisted instruction, becoming a writing center coordinator, training peer tutors, and working with students who have learning disabilities.

The SCWCA will meet next year in Greenville, SC, under the guidance of the 1994-5 President Ghussan Greene (SC State University). For further information on the 1995 meeting, contact Jeannie Dobson, Conference Director, Greenville Technical College, P.O. Box 5616, Greenville, SC 29606.

*Bonnie Devet
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Calendar for Writing Centers Associations (WCAs)

April 13-16: National Writing Centers Association, in New Orleans, LA
Contact: Ray Wallace, Dept. of Language and Communications; Northwestern State University, Natchitoches, LA 71457 (318-357-6272) or Byron Stay, Dept. of Rhetoric and Writing, Mount St. Mary's College, Emmitsburg, MD 21727 (301-447-5367)

May 6-7: East Central Writing Centers Association, in Toledo, OH
Contact: Joan Mullin, Writing Center, U. of Toledo, 2801 W. Bancroft, Toledo, Ohio 43606-3390 (419-537-4939).

October 27-29: Rocky Mountain Writing Centers Association, in Colorado Springs, CO
Contact: Anne E. Mullin, ISU Writing Lab, Campus Box 8010, Idaho State University, Pocatello, ID 83209 (208-236-3662)

National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing

Call for Papers
November 11-13, 1994
Birmingham, Alabama
"Building Life Skills Through Collaboration"

Proposals could address a broad range of interests: connecting with faculty, tutor training in communication skills, how the experiences of writing center tutors and their clients have affected their lives after graduation, or how writing center staff can serve the community as consultants to business and industry. Request a proposal form from Twila Yates Papay/Rapp-Young, Director, Writing Across the Curriculum, Rollins College, Winter Park, FL 32789. Deadline for submissions: May 15, 1994.

Strand review (cont. from p. 8)

Mary King, in the introduction to Section IV, sketches out nicely the theories behind a tacit understanding that the role of tutors should be to "work our way out of a job," to help students to become independent writers. Again, this would be a good basis for tutor training. I would want to couple the article with Paula Oye's narrative of her work with "Diane." Her account mirrors both the joy and frustration of tutoring as she traces the growth of one student from an unsure young woman who felt she couldn't write to a confident writer with a writer's vocabulary and an understanding of her own best writing process. Oye's conclusion, that the increased confidence we help to engender in students "is sometimes translated into better grades, but it is always translated into a feeling of personal accomplishment" (119), is what keeps many staffers at this job.

A few other articles may prove worthwhile for some. Developmental characteristics of the students who use writing center services appear in Dreyfus and Dreyfus' outline of the stages between novice and expert (54-55) and in Scardamalia and Bereiter's traits of "knowledge telling" (55-56), presented in Flynn's introduction to Section III. Schmitzer's essay gives us a look at how nudging a student to a new level of thinking is possible in a tutoring session in a way not possible in the regular classroom. For those who accept intellectual development theory, Slattery's piece on helping students to write multiple source papers provides a better understanding of the thinking processes of students who are having difficulty "analyzing divergent viewpoints and with staking out and justifying their own positions" (80). Additionally, since in our lab we work often

with students who have been labeled as "learning-disabled," I found the information in the Cosgrove article very useful. His critique of the mystique of the learning disabled was refreshing, and I felt reassured that the techniques my tutors and I have been using with both LD and non-LD students were on the right track.

While this book is not as powerful as promised, it does provide some good insights that can be incorporated into writing center practices. I agree with Cindy Johaneck that the editors may not have looked in the right place for the articles to support their argument. I can only hope that some writing center specialist will actually carry out the research or develop the theory which will fulfill the promise of this book.

Conferencing tips

Conferencing is a one-on-one conversation between a tutor and a student about a student's writing. Research shows that individual instruction in writing is more effective than group instruction and oral communication between tutor and student allows for better understanding (Carnicelli 1980). Still, while many recognize conferencing as the most effective and efficient way to learn about writing, some still hesitate to try it. They are not quite sure how to proceed and feel uncertain of the tutor's role. Here are five conference tips to keep in mind when helping students learn to **WRITE**:

WATCH for the most important things first. Address content, ideas and information as priorities. Then zero in on point of view, organization, style and finally mechanics (Garrison 1974). Keep conferences short and to the point. A student's paper may be filled with challenges. But focus on the most important ones first and only deal with one or two at any given time.

RESPECT the student and the student's writing. Sit side by side rather than in the more powerful desk position. When possible, have the student read his own writing to you. Listen carefully and with interest. Help the student retain ownership of his work by not marking on it. Even if the student's structure or transcription leave a lot to be desired, every student has something to say and that must be valued.

INVOLVE the student in the conference. Help the student take responsibility for learning by asking questions. Begin with, "How can I help you?" Specific questions such as, "What is your favorite part?" are better than general ones like, "What do you think of your paper?" Students appreciate and retain more of what they learn if they have been allowed to take an active part in the learning.

TEACH the student to write better. Make specific suggestions for improving the paper. Without such feedback, students can begin to feel like they are only involved in an elaborate self-analysis and that they are not getting any help beyond that. However, make sure that all evaluations at this point are formative and not summative. The conference is not a time for grading. Rather, it is a time for helping. See the mistakes of today as only the possibilities of tomorrow. Think of yourself as a consultant rather than a manager, a coach rather than a critic. Look at improving the writing in front of you as only a means to improving the writer by your side.

ENCOURAGE the student. Many students come to a conference expecting the tutor to rip their work to shreds. Instead, focus on strengths rather than on weaknesses. Find things that you can honestly praise and then praise liberally. Superlatives like "great" and "excellent" may run a little ahead of reality, but expectations expressed are often the seed bed of dreams fulfilled.

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Laramie, WY

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Getting the biggest bang for the buck in the writing center

In today's tough economic climate, getting the biggest bang for the buck is a top priority for higher education spending. Consequently, writing center directors need a systematic means of making spending decisions for furnishings, equipment, and interiors that will give full value for every dollar budgeted. The problem is that too many variables exist to make pat answers workable: Past errors and oversights in planning may have to be factored in; funds available may fluctuate drastically from year to year. Moreover, the services offered by writing centers differ widely from one campus to another, so a single formula for planning and spending cannot fit every situation. In fact, this is true in almost every higher education setting, and research shows that an effective planning model must be flexible, responsive to the needs of the particular setting, its clientele and employees (Fullan 745). As a result, authorities on planned change urge administrators to develop a systematic *process* for discovering the right answers to planning issues, rather than attempting to set a single, unalterable blueprint for decision making (Fullan 750; Lindquist 47; Nordvall 119). This type of planning evolved at Oklahoma State University (OSU) in the course of determining how to use space, select equipment, and furnish a new location for the Writing Center. Our step-by-step process, which is detailed below, offers a flexible framework that other writing centers can adapt and/or expand to develop clear guidelines for their own spending decisions.

Step 1: Determine Your Needs

Wise spending decisions on spatial arrangements, equipment and furnishings for a writing center requires some study of what the options are and what has worked for others. In the OSU experience, the best information came from physically touring other facilities and interviewing their directors. Site visits often illustrated and answered a broad array of questions:

1. Is the size of this facility ideal for the number of clients using it?
2. Is the division of space ideal for the activities that take place?

3. Are the furnishings appropriately designed for the clientele?
4. Is the location a good one?
5. What would the director and/or staff change about the location and physical layout of the facility, if possible?

The answers to this preliminary list and the follow-up questions that develop through discussion should give the investigator a clearer understanding of what works well and what to avoid in spending money on the physical layout of a writing center tailored to a specific clientele.

Step 2: Plan the Conference Area

Specific spatial guidelines exist for interiors designed for group use, developed through ergonomics, the study of ways "to adapt work or working conditions to suit the worker" (Webster 475). Using criteria from the field of ergonomics, OSU began its planning with the conference area because one-on-one conferences remain our primary tool for improving writing.

According to Rick Bartholomew, OSU Interior Design Program Coordinator, to design a conference area where staff and clients will be working together over papers, you should consider the following:

1. A 36-inch round table is a generous size for one-on-one conferencing; OSU eventually decided on 30 X 24-inch rectangular tables that could be placed flush against a wall to save space.
2. Allow up to six feet of circulation space around each conference station for two-way traffic flow.

With these measurements, a generous conference area would contain 45 square-feet per work station, or up to 500 square-feet for a room containing five tables for two. As these calculations suggest, space configurations can hardly be separated from decisions on furnishings and their placement. For instance, conference tables should not be

placed where conversations can break the concentration of other clients working at computers; and furnishings should not prevent client concentration because of their discomfort. To assure client comfort, Bartholomew advises the following:

1. A conference table should stand 29- or 30-inches from the floor, depending on whether the chairs used have padded seats.
2. Adjustable chairs are essential to adapt to the wide variety in the heights of clients using writing centers.
3. If adjustable chairs cannot be obtained, Bartholomew says that a typical chair seat rises 18 inches from the floor, but clients with long legs will prefer a chair seat 20 inches from the floor.

Following these guidelines in choosing furniture for the writing center will ensure that tables and chairs enhance, rather than detract from, the client's ability to concentrate on the work at hand.

Client concentration and working space can also be affected by other environmental factors. Colors, for example, "contribute to the overall environment in a profound way," according to interior design experts, such as Jessica Stowell, who notes that "certain colors have a decided influence on people" (9):

Warm colors—red, yellow, orange—create activity. That is why so many warm colors are used in fast food restaurants; the idea is to move people quickly in and out and make room for more. Cool colors—green and blue—have a soothing effect and are good for bedrooms and study rooms. (9)

Stowell says that cool colors and low-intensity illumination in a room offer "less distraction," and she concludes that using cool colors creates "an appropriate setting for sedentary activities requiring use of the eyes and/or brain" (9). These facts are worth remembering, since virtually everyone who enters a writing center will be engaged in sedentary activities that exercise their eyes and brains, either at a conference table or at a

computer station. However, it is also important to remember that the activities going on at conference tables and computer stations call for separate criteria, which brings up the next step in the process.

Step 3: Plan the Computer Area

Computer-assisted instruction augments some conference critiques at OSU; in addition, many students use our computer lab to compose and print out research papers, sometimes working several hours at a stretch. It is common knowledge that people working on computers for lengthy periods frequently develop physical ailments attributable to this source, and work station criteria will be a recurring concern as more and more businesses and universities computerize. Clearly, universities should design all computer work stations with one eye on meeting possible legal requirements, as well as to provide a client-centered workplace. To furnish a computer lab appropriately, Bartholomew points out that

1. The correct height for a computer station is "typing height," i.e., 27 inches from the floor. This is an important point to remember, as OSU found that many lab tables and desks sit several inches *above* this height. Check carefully to make sure you are getting typing-height surfaces for computer use to prevent severe joint and muscle strain on users.
2. Each station should be about 36-inches wide and 24- to 30-inches deep.
3. Add to that depth another four feet for seating and circulation, for a total depth of about six or seven feet. This area should extend from the outside edge of one work station to the beginning edge of the station located immediately behind it.

The depth guideline above works particularly well in configuring a computer lab area in the most efficient shape, which is a letter "E," according to advice from staff members at a large OSU computer lab. If space permits, using the "E" configuration avoids two problems common to layouts such as the "U" shape or the "L" shape. The two latter designs either leave large amounts of dead space in the center of the room or fill that space with conference tables, which can create serious distractions for computer users forced to hear multiple, simultaneous conversations between conferees. OSU Writing

Center staff members who formerly worked in a setting that shared conference and computer areas strongly recommended separating these functions, so a top priority here became physical separation of conference and computer areas.

A fourth alternative, clusters of computer work stations, has been used with some success, according to Cynthia Selfe. Selfe states that the cluster arrangement worked well for "participation in collaborative writing activities," encouraging an "intellectual dialectic" between student clients (157). However, no description of the physical layout of the clusters appeared in the article to help others design a similar area. Nevertheless, this is another option to consider when selecting the configuration best suited for the available space and activities planned in the center.

Step #4: Choose Equipment

We recommend setting short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals for computer use before selecting equipment. Looking at your needs from all three perspectives helps you determine how to plan effectively for next week and for the more distant future. We also spent some time looking over the promotional claims for computers, printers, and instructional programs, comparing these claims with others' experience, before determining which best suited our needs. We then discussed our priorities with the University Computer Center staff and asked them to rank and price the equipment they believed we should purchase. Our resulting criteria for making equipment decisions were these:

1. *Ease of operation*—Clients should be able to concentrate on writing well, rather than on learning to operate an unfamiliar system. (short-term goal)
2. *Access to widely used software*—Clients should have access to the software they need for coursework in their major, such as word-processing, spreadsheets, file conversion, graphics, mathematical equations, and desk-top publishing. (short-term goal)
3. *Access to tutorial programs*—Clients should have access to grammar-checking programs. (short-term goal)
4. *Networking capability*—A single center staff member should be able to work with several students electronically. (intermediate goal)

5. *Remote-site networking capability*—Clients at remote locations should have electronic access to the writing center. (long-term goal)

As a result of staff and UCC discussions using these criteria, the following equipment purchases were recommended:

1. 8-10 Apple Macintosh Classics with 40 megabyte capacity
2. One Macintosh with 80 megabyte capacity to act as file server
3. 8-10 IBM-style 386 computers
4. Ink-jet printers, one for every four computer stations

Recommendations 1 and 3 mean that clients who already know how to use one system or the other are not forced to learn a new system in order to use our computer lab. In addition, having both types of machinery on hand allows clients who want to learn to operate both systems to do so.

Recommendation 2, including one unit that can act as file server for the others, significantly reduces the need for storage capacity in individual units; and recommendation 4 allows us to provide laser-quality printing at a fraction of the cost of a laser printer.

As for software decisions, select word-processing programs to create continuity across campus; that is, if the business college requires students to use Word Perfect 5.1, then the writing center should have this program; if mechanical engineering students need Expressionist, a program that allows the writer to import complex equations into a document, then the Center should have it, too. Technical writers who need to be able to put together a brochure should have access to desk-top publishing software, such as Page-Maker, and so on.

In addition, we purchased a DOS conversion program, Software Bridge, so that clients could change their documents from one format to another. This is a somewhat labored process, but we have on many occasions successfully "translated" a client's Macintosh file into DOS, using Apple File Exchange, then used Software Bridge to convert the DOS file into Pro-Write or Word Perfect, and vice versa.

Finally, we focused on tutorial programs. An article on educational software in the

Writing Lab Newsletter (Brown 14) provides a checklist for assessing the usefulness of tutorials before ordering them. Our selections included Grammatik III, Right Writer, and Blue Pencil. In practice, all three programs have received favorable comments from clients. However, Grammatik III and Right Writer have proven to be virtually interchangeable for our clientele, although Right Writer was billed as having a business-writing focus. As a result, we recommend purchasing either—but not necessarily both—of these two programs. As for Blue Pencil, it has the advantage of being a simpler program than the other two; it is a little more user-friendly. But it does not cover as many areas as Grammatik and Right Writer.

Step 5: Figure Costs and Set Up a Budget

It almost goes without saying that effective planning requires carefully targeted spending, and equipping a writing center is certainly no exception to this rule. We have learned to check a variety of sources for prices and to question, question, *question*, why prices vary.

Step 6: Write a Concise Report

In our experience, it also pays to write up all findings, priorities, and the proposed budget in a concise report. This will allow you to refresh your memory a year from now, when the provost or the department head asks why you made one decision or another. You can also distribute the report to higher-level administrators whose support you will need to accomplish writing center goals. If the report is concise and clear, this final piece of planning can illustrate the sound reasoning behind every funding request, equipment decision, and furniture choice emanating from the writing center. Even if some of those who receive the report never do more than glance through it, they will at least see, rather literally, that you have done your homework, forming judgments based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Working through the five steps we have outlined should help other universities get the biggest bang for the bucks invested in the writing center.

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THE WRITING LAB

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